

## **Regional Preparatory Meeting for Asia and the Pacific (RPM-ASP)**

### **Opening Remarks**

**Doreen Bogdan-Martin, Director,  
ITU Telecommunication Development Bureau**

**9 March, 2021, 11:00 ICT / 05:00 CET**

Excellencies Distinguished delegates, ladies & gentlemen,

A warm welcome to our ITU Regional Preparatory Meeting for Asia and the Pacific.

Let me begin by thanking you all for your unwavering commitment to ITU's Development Sector, and your support for the many activities that are advancing digital transformation across the 38 countries of the Asia and Pacific region, at a time when connectivity has never been more critical.

Our next World Telecommunication Development Conference comes at a defining moment for the world, and for ITU's place in it.

The pandemic has brought home the stark reality that in today's societies, connectivity is not just important – it is crucial.

It is increasingly clear that digital solutions will be our key to success in this final Decade of Action to achieve the SDGs, and this makes ITU's mandate to 'connect the world' more important than ever before.

In recognition of the 'digital inflection point' at which the world now finds itself, we have been revisiting the WTDC preparatory process to ensure that this crucially important conference delivers on its promise.

I believe the next WTDC has the potential to be hailed as a landmark conference in rewriting the global connectivity agenda, and our enhanced preparatory process has been developed to support this ambitious vision.

By bringing together Member States, the private sector, financial institutions like regional development banks, and key civil society organizations, WTDC-21 offers us a unique opportunity to harness a swelling tide of political will around connectivity, and build long-lasting partnerships that advance our digital transformation agenda.

With the signing of the WTDC Host Country Agreement late last year, we lost no time in kicking off our Road to Addis discussion series, which is one new element of this enhanced preparatory process.

The Road to Addis conversations aim to build awareness and excitement among ICT stakeholders, and to reach out to bring in important new constituencies.

The next stop on the Road to Addis will focus on the role of inclusion, and I hope many of you will join us on the 18<sup>th</sup> of March and be a part of these important discussions.

We have also augmented the WTDC preparatory process through the establishment of three inter-regional meetings to complement our six regional RPMs.

This RPM for Asia and the Pacific is the second of our important regional preparatory meetings, following our RPM for Europe on the 18-19 January.

Our first IRM will be held later this week, on the Thursday 11<sup>th</sup> of March.

I know that many of you have been actively involved in our TDAG working groups focused on WTDC preparations – both the group on Resolutions, Declarations and Thematic Priorities led by Dr Sharafat that met last week, and also the group on the Development Sector's contribution to the ITU's Strategic and Operational Plans, led by Blanca Gonzalez.

Your invaluable contributions to this work will help ensure our conference structure and processes deliver on the great expectations we all have for this milestone event.

Indeed, the work of TDAG and its subgroups via online meetings and web dialogues has already resulted in a number of refinements to make our next WTDC more inclusive, and more impactful.

I would like to take a brief moment to recognize Santiago Reyes Borda, who has so ably led our work to advance these improvements, and to highlight in particular two important new features.

The first is a new Development and Partnerships track, running within the main body of the conference, and comprising high-level panels and thematic discussions with experts from a broad range of stakeholders, including international financial institutions, regional development banks, our UN sister agencies, private sector players, and civil society.

The second is our inaugural WTDC Youth Summit, to be held just prior to the start of the conference, as part of ITU's 'Generation Connect' initiative.

*Young people are natural and enthusiastic adopters of digital technology, and a new generation of young digital natives is already defining and developing the digital platforms and services that are reshaping our world.*

It is my hope that this first Youth Summit, and our Generation Connect initiative, represent merely the start of a much more proactive engagement by ITU with young people right around the world.

The Generation Connect Asia and the Pacific Youth Action Plan is currently being developed by our Generation Connect Asia and Pacific Youth Group (which met this morning and will meet again tomorrow), and the outline of this plan will be presented during this RPM.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Yesterday was International Women's Day, and in recognition of the importance of the WTDC in shaping digital development strategies at both the national and international level, we continue to strive to encourage the equal participation of women in leading roles in the WTDC conference and process.

Building on the success of the Network of Women initiative pioneered by ITU's Radiocommunication Sector, I am delighted to announce the establishment of a Network of Women – or NoW – for the Development Sector.

And noting the increasing importance our Member States are according to digital innovation, ITU has partnered with the UAE to launch an i-CoDI International Center of Digital Innovation, as well as working internally to broaden our ITU Innovation Challenge events.

If you are interested in learning more, this RPM will feature a side event led by India, where we will introduce i-CoDI in more detail, as well as discuss new Regional Innovation efforts.

Dear colleagues,

The latest ITU figures from our *Digital Trends* report show that since the last World Telecommunication Development Conference in 2017, the Asia and Pacific region has progressed well. But challenges remain, particularly in areas like: affordability, gender equality, digital literacy, and cybersecurity.

The COVID pandemic will continue to accelerate the region's digital transformation process. But it is also highlighting gaps and areas where greater regional and international cooperation will be essential, and where national support and technical assistance can play a critical role.

It is clearer than ever that in today's complex and challenging environment, solving the many challenges we face cannot be done alone.

Real progress will depend on broad, multistakeholder digital cooperation.

Every actor will have an important role to play.

Building broad multi-stakeholder consensus around concrete ways forward, and finding new and effective ways to work together to achieve the impact we need, is what we hope to achieve at WTDC-21.

Let me commend the progress achieved so far, including fruitful new collaboration and partnerships with UNDCO, UNESCAP, UNICEF, FAO, WHO, UNESCO, UN WOMEN, ILO, the World Bank, the European Commission, and others.

I am also greatly encouraged by the strong commitment shown by the countries in Asia and the Pacific to ramping up support for digital development efforts in other regions around the world. I want to

recognize Japan for their efforts to help create our Connect2Recover programme.

We look forward to finding many new ways to join forces, and rapidly amplify results.

Ladies and gentlemen,

As you all know, the five Regional Initiatives adopted by the World Telecommunication Development Conference in 2017 remain our roadmap for delivering on the priorities of the region.

I am pleased to report that we have advanced well on a number of concrete projects over the period, to respond to these priorities.

To give just a few examples:

The Government of Australia has been working with us on the implementation of all Asia-Pacific Regional Initiatives, with specific projects in emergency telecommunications, security, policy and regulation, child online protection, and harnessing ICTs to support the digital economy and digital infrastructure.

We are advancing well with support to Rural Entrepreneurship, Investment and Trade in Papua New Guinea, with funding from the European Union and implementation assistance from the FAO, UNDP, ILO and UNCDF

We have supported nine Pacific Island countries in improving connectivity through a satellite connectivity project, in partnership with the International Telecommunications Satellite Organization and Kacific.

We delivered a training programme in 2018 and 2019 on 5G, AI, blockchain and competition in partnership with the Thailand National Broadcasting and Telecommunication Commission.

We are making steady progress on our FIGI-China implementation, funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and which we are implementing alongside the China Academy for Information and Communications Technology.

And we are working with the Ministry of Science and ICT of the Republic of Korea on Master Plans for Spectrum Management, and Country Assistance in Spectrum Management.

Let me take a moment to warmly thank our many partners, including our regional telecommunication organization, the APT; ASEAN; the Pacific Islands Telecommunication Association; the Asian Development Bank; APNIC; the Australian Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Communication; Japanese Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, the European Commission; the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, NBTC Thailand, and many others, for their collaboration and contribution to ITU's Regional Initiatives, and the Asia and the Pacific digital development agenda.

Ladies and gentlemen,

In our BDT end-of-year review, we spoke of the need to pool our resources and work to build forward better together.

Our Regional Preparatory Meetings are a vital element of that collaborative effort, and will be critical to the success of this year's WTDC.

In November, we have an outstanding and unmissable opportunity to leverage the power of digital to truly change the world.

I know you all share that vision and enthusiasm for what we might achieve, and I look forward to very fruitful, creative and insightful discussions.

Thank you.