Address for the ITU-APT Workshop on NGN Planning

Malcolm Johnson, Director of the Telecommunication Standardization Bureau, ITU

16 March 2007, Bangkok, Thailand

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a pleasure for me to be with you here today. It has always been a pleasure for me to visit this region, and since I have always encouraged greater collaboration between ITU regional offices and the regional organizations, I wanted this to be my first mission as an elected official since it is an excellent example of close collaboration between the two offices. I would like to congratulate Mr Narayan and Dr Kim for the excellent partnership they have developed here. I had the pleasure of visiting the two offices this week and was very impressed with the facilities and the close proximity of the offices. We are very grateful to the government of Thailand for its support. It is a pleasure for me to return to Bangkok after a long time, especially during this year of celebration of the 80th anniversary of the King.

As many of you will be aware, the subject of this workshop has dominated ITU-T work over the last few years and will continue to dominate the work for 2007.

The shift from the traditional PSTN to a fundamentally different infrastructure is a massive challenge for the telecoms industry. I have heard it described as like replacing an aeroplane's engine, while it is still in flight! Certainly, it is one of the most complex transitions ever to have occurred in telecoms.

ITU will play a vital part in this transition, as it did in the past, when shifting from telegraphy to telephony, introduction of satellite communications, and more recently fibre optic networks, and IMT-2000. ITU-T will play a central and critical role in ushering in this new converged environment, coordinating global efforts, promoting technical excellence and impartiality in standards development, and building the consensus needed to ensure new technologies and equipment are embraced worldwide.

Given the breadth of work related to NGN in ITU-T, one Study Group, SG 13, coordinates the work across seven others under the banner of the NGN Global Standards Initiative (NGN-GSI). In fact, the scope of the work is being continually expanded to include new developments, for example, RFID and IPTV. In April 2006, a Focus Group on IPTV was launched and has seen considerable interest. The January 2007 meeting of the Focus Group on IPTV, hosted by Microsoft, saw significant progress on documents relating to IPTV architecture and requirements, two fundamentally important areas in standards work.

Wherever appropriate, ITU-T will reference the deliverables of other standards bodies rather than duplicating their work. Good cooperation and collaboration is essential between ITU-T and those other bodies. We have various mechanisms in place to facilitate this, but we must further elaborate these, and this is something I believe the Global Standards Collaboration (GSC) must do more.

Regulatory issues are also important as we move towards NGN. With the convergence of services on NGN, companies that used to be in separate industries: telephone operators; Internet-service providers; and cable-TV firms etc. are now all competing for the same business. Most countries have separate regulators for telecommunications, spectrum, broadcasting, and content. Different rules apply to each, but as the distinction between them starts to blur that will have to be addressed.

The distinction between carrier and enterprise in NGNs is less an issue of role, and more a question of who owns what network component and where it is located. Regulatory policies must consider the freedoms in 'who does what' and 'where' inherent in NGN architectures. Regardless of who provides a service, the server hosting it can be located in the same or another country. It is

important to ensure that unnecessary requirements to locate functionality within national borders do not lead to inefficient network structures and hence increased costs to end users.

Regulation will therefore need to be harmonized to the greatest extent possible. Such harmonization will result in economies of scale throughout the supply chain. The deployment of NGNs provides an excellent opportunity to agree improved interfaces in ITU-T to enable service providers to interconnect and cooperate on the delivery of applications and services. Agreement on such interfaces, based on ITU-T defined global standards, opens the door to the provision of an unlimited range of applications and services available to all.

In terms of the impact of NGN in developing countries, I believe NGN has the potential to accelerate the deployment of telecommunication networks and services. There are two drivers: cost and revenue. The capital cost of deploying NGN technology, both in the core of the network, and the operating costs, are significantly lower than circuit switched technologies. This will enable a more rapid expansion of network capabilities. NGN will also enable a range of multimedia services to be provided easier with less cost, and so increase potential revenues. It offers the opportunity for developing countries to jump several generations of technology.

The ubiquitous network that will seamlessly connect anyone, anytime, anywhere, by anything, requires global standards, and a global standards body like ITU-T clearly has an increasing role to play. But, ITU-T must also meet the unique requirements of each local market, and to do this it is essential to collaborate with regional organisations such as APT, as well as with other standards development bodies. NGN must ensure end-to-end security and deliver value to all stakeholders. Citizens, enterprises, service providers, government and civil society must all benefit. Global standards developed in ITU-T will make this possible.

ITU-T standards can avoid costly market battles over alternate technologies, and for companies from emerging markets, they create a level playing field which provides low-cost, assured access to new markets. For manufacturers, they facilitate access to global markets and allow for economies of scale in production and distribution, safe in the knowledge that ITU-T-compliant systems will work anywhere in the world, they provide the assurance that equipment will integrate effortlessly with other installed systems. They are an essential aid to developing countries in building their infrastructure and encouraging economic development.

This workshop has brought together leading experts to speak to these very timely topics. I wish you all an enjoyable, productive and informative meeting.

Thank you for your attention.