

# ADDRESS TO THE OPENING MEETING

## Global Symposium for Regulators

### Geneva, 3-5 December 2001

Mr Secretary-General,  
Distinguished Director of the Telecommunication Development Bureau (BDT),  
Honourable Participants in the Symposium,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Following on from the first symposium for regulators held last November, the success of which can be gauged by the tremendous number of participants at the present gathering, once again organized by the ITU Telecommunication Development Bureau, our meeting over the next few days promises to be filled with exchanges of experience and knowledge.

The importance of regulation in the telecommunication sector, characterized as it is by privatization and liberalization and the rapid change to which this gives rise, needs no further illustration. Indeed, can there be anyone attending this symposium who is unaware that a football match without rules of the game and a referee to ensure that they are followed by both teams would be impossible?

In the same way that the rules of football are drawn up in an impartial manner by a body away from the pitch, regulation of the telecommunication sector is likewise effected in an objective and deliberately progressive manner.

The equivalent, in our world, of the football referee is the regulator, who, like his counterpart, must ensure strict compliance with the regulatory texts and must be prepared to apply sanctions, where necessary preceded by a warning. This telecommunication referee must, as in football, be independent, honest, incorruptible and fully conversant with the regulatory texts.

As in our analogy, therefore, regulation remains equally important regardless of the country or continent concerned: the fact that we are all governed by the same constraints of global competition makes it altogether realistic that the notion of regulation should be a global one.

Regulation, then, is a matter of importance for all countries and all continents, but that importance is heightened still further in the developing countries.

Indeed, the ITU-sponsored study which gave rise to the Maitland Report and its references to the "missing link" pointed to the disparity between telecommunication development and the means for accompanying that development and to the consequent imperative need for developing countries to privatize their telecommunication sectors in the interests of levelling up the development of infrastructure and services among all the Member States of the Union.

An inevitable consequence of this privatization process, which began some ten years ago, is the establishment of a regulatory body whose functions include:

- fostering investment in the telecommunication sector in a healthy and stable environment;
- encouraging the rapid modernization of networks and services, with particular emphasis on full digitization and the new services that that permits;
- the creation of hundreds of new jobs, both direct and indirect, through the encouragement of competition;
- making telecommunications more accessible through increased service availability and regular reductions in call costs as a result of competition;
- boosting sector development in the interests of achieving a higher penetration rate. The example of my country, Côte d'Ivoire, is instructive in the latter regard: in 1997, when privatization was introduced, there were 120 000 telephone subscribers, whereas today, after four years of competition, the country has one fixed and three mobile operators, almost one million subscribers and several hundred new jobs.

Since last year's symposium for regulators, the main resolutions have been put into effect by ITU-BDT, in particular those relating to the perpetuation of the symposium and its perceived role as a catalyst for the activation of a dedicated network of regulators and encouragement of a symbiosis with the private sector in exchanges of experience and outlooks; and to BDT's new GREX initiative designed to promote dialogue between regulators the world over through, among other things, an on-line interactive forum and a direct "hotline" by means of which regulators can obtain an immediate response to their concerns.

Everyone knows that eating whets the appetite, and such eminently praiseworthy initiatives inevitably lead us to expect still more from global encounters such as this one, at which we are looking to derive considerable benefit from our discussions on such important topics as **the independence and effectiveness of the regulatory body**.

The independence of regulatory bodies must be understood *orbi et urbi*; in other words, independence at the country level, but also vis-à-vis the structures and organs of the Union.

Through BDT, ITU currently plays an extremely positive role as a catalyst of energies, forum for encounters, centre for exchanges of experience and facilitator of synergy between the private sector and regulatory bodies. However, its role should stop short of regulating the regulators, and ITU should itself be a standard-bearer for the principle of **regulator independence**.

What I now have to say is directed towards the private sector.

Last year, the private sector demonstrated the value of its participation in events of this kind, constituting, as it clearly does in its role as the driving force of a liberalized telecommunication sector, the number one partner of the regulator.

The succession of global regulatory symposiums gives us cause to look forward to greater participation by our partners in the telecommunication development sphere. However, not wishing to put quantity before quality, we are happy to have with us today the heavyweights of the private sector, and call upon them to give voice to their presence, thereby enriching both the discussions and flow of ideas, and to make the kind of financial contributions that will permit the continued holding of a symposium that has already become an essential event and which will help them to convey their main concern of reducing regulatory barriers to the greatest extent possible.

There can be no doubt that the present symposium, just like last year's event, will help us to identify the key issues facing both the private sector and the regulators, thereby globalizing the sector's concerns.

Finally, Ladies and Gentlemen, it is my hope that the role of facilitator of meetings and exchanges that ITU currently plays through BDT will ultimately enable us to address such crucial issues as:

- *the publication of a specialized journal devoted to telecommunication sector regulation;*
- *problems inherent in the policy of network interconnection;*
- *the introduction of structures to assist with or promote the provision of additional training for legal specialists and economists in matters pertaining to the world of telecommunications;*
- *the organization, upstream of the global symposium, of regional meetings for the exchange of experiences and ideas;*
- *the introduction or fostering of regional private expert structures to assist regulatory bodies, with a view to offsetting the lack of specialized and experienced human resources in the sector.*

In expressing the hope that ITU, through BDT, will continue to pursue its innovative work in the regulatory sector, I should like to conclude by wishing all of you a very successful three-day meeting.

Thank you.

GNON Lesan Basile/Director-General, Agence des Télécommunications de Côte d'Ivoire