

Mr. Sami Al Basheer **Al Morshid**
Director, ITU BDT
Opening Speech
7th Annual Global Symposium for Regulators
Dubai 5 -7 February 2007

Your Excellency Sultan Bin Saeed Al Mansouri, UAE Minister of Governmental Sector Development and Chairman of the Supreme Committee for the Supervision of the Telecommunications Sector.,

Our gracious host, Mr. Mohamed Al Ghanim, Director-General, Telecommunications Regulatory Authority, United Arab Emirates,

Distinguished Chairmen, Directors General and Presidents of the Regulatory Authorities,

Members of the private sector, invited guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my greatest pleasure to welcome you to the 7th annual Global Symposium for Regulators as the newly elected Director of the ITU Telecommunication Development Bureau. I would like to echo Dr. Touré's special thanks to our host, Mr. Al Ghanim, for inviting us to hold the GSR in the United Arab Emirates, and for his kind acceptance to chair this year's GSR. He and his entire staff have worked closely with my staff in the preparation of this very important meeting, and have demonstrated true Emirates' hospitality to all of us.

Having previously been a regulator, I am especially delighted that the first major event for BDT under my leadership is the Global Symposium for Regulators. I am delighted that the 7th GSR has attracted regulators from every region of the world. The world now has 145 regulatory bodies and the majority of them are here today, including some of the most recently established regulators. I would like to extend a special welcome to the newest regulators from Lebanon and Samoa. The 7th GSR has attracted over 400 participants, hailing from 100 countries, and the heads of 62 regulatory authorities join us here today. I look forward to meeting with as many of you as possible over the coming days.

One of the major outcomes of the World Telecommunication Development Conference in Doha last year was the agreement of **25 regional initiatives**, five for each of the five BDT regions. A number of these are regulatory initiatives. For example, Africa, Asia and the Arab States have agreed to work on regulatory harmonization. This issue was discussed yesterday in the meeting of regional regulatory associations. The chiefs of the ITU regional offices in Africa, Asia and the Arab States are here this week and at your disposal to begin discussing how we can move these from plans to implementation.

As you know, **the focus of the GSR is dialogue**. We have very few formal presentations, primarily those by the authors of the GSR Discussion Papers. The GSR Discussion Paper authors will make presentations at the beginning of each session to kick-start your discussions. We then count on the moderators and panelists to ensure that everyone gets an opportunity to talk and share their views.

For your information, we commissioned a series of discussion papers for the GSR to correspond with the themes of the different sessions. We have posted these **GSR Discussion Papers on the GSR website**, and invite you to read and comment on them. They will be **open for comment until 1 March**, when we will finalize them as the next edition of ITU Trends in Telecommunication Reform.

As you know, **today the GSR is open to ITU-D sector members – today's sessions have also been opened to the press—and the remaining two days are reserved to regulators and policy makers** to foster a frank exchange of regulatory best practices. We thank our private sector members and the press for respecting this framework. But this does not mean that we won't still see the private sector and the press! Many members of the private sector are participating in a special technology exhibit. During coffee breaks, you are encouraged to **visit the technology exhibit**. Several companies will be exhibiting to showcase the latest NGN technological developments to the regulators, policy makers and attendees alike.

As many of you know, Dr. Touré, in his former role as BDT Director, launched a **consultation to identify best practices on NGN regulation**. Some 25 countries have contributed to this consultation. Mr. Al Ghanim has consolidated these contributions into a draft set of best practice guidelines which we have posted on the GSR website. We invite all regulators and policy makers to review the draft guidelines today and tomorrow with the goal of reaching agreement on a **final set of best practice guidelines on Wednesday in the Way Forward Session**. Please talk to members of my staff if you have any further comments to provide.

As the ITU Secretary-General also mentioned, we will be asking regulators and policy makers to **share with us their most pressing concerns in the Way Forward Session on Wednesday**. We will ask you to recommend the issues you would wish us to focus on next year. Your recommendations will decide the theme of the next GSR as well as the theme of the next edition of Trends in Telecommunication Reform. This is your chance to direct our work to best meet your concerns. Last year you asked us to look far into the future to NGN regulation. Perhaps this time, you would prefer to focus on more immediate concerns. I would like to invite you to give this some thought and discuss it with each other over the next few days so we can reach consensus on Wednesday.

On the third day of the GSR we will also try something new, **speed exchanges**. We will organize a series of informal roundtable discussions in which you can meet a very small group of your fellow regulators and policy makers to discuss the issues of concern to you. My staff will explain more about the speed exchanges tomorrow.

Like you, I recognize the importance of regulatory reform to the growth of the ICT sector. I look forward to ensuring that BDT provides the kinds of regulatory products and services our membership demands. The GSR may be central, but is not the only product and service we offer. My staff will share with you the many products and services offered by the Regulatory Reform Unit, the RRU later today.

This GSR is an opportunity to frame our discussions for several years ahead. NGNs are a very hot topic. Some predict they will change the ICT sector. Others believe that NGN deployment will be uneven, or may never be deployed in some countries. Certainly, to the extent that NGN deployment takes place, the migration to NGN will not occur overnight. And the paths to NGNs will be many. Some will use the migration to NGN for their own advantage. Others will use it to expand

opportunities to bridge the digital divide. As the Secretary-General has just said, now is the time for the global community of regulators and policy makers to discuss and develop an enabling regulatory framework to ensure that the best of NGNs are available to all of the world's people and that any challenges are fully understood and addressed. We must commit to develop a framework for the good of end users, while at the same time balancing the interests of all players.

We have many questions before us. Primary among these is how to encourage investment and innovations to better meet our goals of connecting all of the world's villages to ICTs by 2015 and promote affordable access to ICTs. In an NGN world, the choice of technology used for infrastructure no longer has an impact on the kinds and variety of services that are delivered over the infrastructure.

But what does this mean for regulators? Regulators have many choices to make. Some view NGNs as intersection of the telecom and Internet worlds. If so, which regulatory regime should apply? The current heavily-regulated telecom regulatory model? The lightly-regulated Internet model? Or some new hybrid model? Is NGN an opportunity to lighten the regulatory burdens that were placed on PSTN operators, while at the same time cautiously moving toward *some* regulation of the Internet to protect the network and its users? NGNs afford an opportunity for regulators to analyze current practices and revise them in light of what makes sense going forward.

This GSR represents the first opportunity for regulators around the world to discuss the many challenges and opportunities and exchange best practices. I look forward to listening and learning from you.

Before I conclude, I would like once again thank on your behalf, our host, the TRA of the UAE for their excellent organization and warm welcome, making us all feel at home.

I wish you all the success in your deliberations, and a fruitful symposium.