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| Contribution from the People's Republic of China | |
| NEW TRENDS AND ISSUES EMERGING IN THE GLOBAL TELECOMMUNICATION/ICT ENVIRONMENT WITH POTENTIAL EFFECTS ON THE INTERNATIONAL TELECOMMUNICATION REGULATIONS | |
| **Purpose**  This contribution discusses new trends in international telecommunication/ICT development relevant to the review of the International Telecommunication Regulations (ITRs), and issues emerging in the international telecommunication/ICT environment which may have effects on the ITRs.  **Action required**  The Expert Group on the International Telecommunication Regulations is invited to **consider** this contribution and **take appropriate action**.  \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  **References**  [*Council document C24/87*](https://www.itu.int/md/S24-CL-C-0087/en) | |

Summary

The development of the new generation of information and communication technologies and their integration with the industry have brought great opportunities to global telecommunications /ICT, as well as many new international issues and challenges such as the digital divide, privacy and data protection, and network security. The review and revision of the ITR should take into account new trends and issues, respond to the issues above, effectively address the difficulties faced by developing countries, and maintain the stability of the ITR international legal framework. The Council has agreed to submit this contribution to the Expert Group for further consideration and discussion.

# 1 Background

In accordance with Resolution 146 (Rev. Bucharest, 2022) of the Plenipotentiary Conference (PP-22), the ITU Council 2023 revised Resolution 1379 on the periodic review of the ITRs, resolving to reconvene the Expert Group on the International Telecommunication Regulations (EG-ITRs), which is open to ITU Member States and Sector Members, to continue considering issues relevant to the ITRs and its review, and to include a revised terms of reference of EG-ITRs in the annex to the resolution, authorizing the expert group to consider new trends and issues emerging in the international telecommunication/ICT environment that may affect the applicability of the ITRs.

Given the indisputable fact that there are new trends and new issues emerging in the international telecommunication/ICT field, it is important to thoroughly discuss these new trends and issues that may have effects on the ITRs, in order to identify the work for reviewing and revising the ITRs, *inter alia*, the direction of the review and revision, to better assist the EG-ITRs in fulfilling its duties and keeping the ITRs up to date.

# 2 New trends and issues emerging in the international telecommunication/ICT environment

The rapid development of next-generation ICTs, such as big data, cloud computing, 5G, the Internet of Things (IoT) and artificial intelligence (AI) is driving the accelerated integration of global telecommunication/ICTs with traditional industries. The digitalization of industries and the industrialization of digital technologies are speeding up, and the digital economy is gaining strong momentum. While it brings significant opportunities for the growth of global telecommunication/ICTs, the development of next generation ICTs and their integration with industries also generate new issues and pose challenges in the global environment, such as the digital divide, data and privacy protection, and cybersecurity. The evolving telecommunication/ICT environment and the associated issues have a substantial impact on the ITU membership, in particular the developing countries. The lack of international regulations to govern and address such issues could destabilize the ITU membership and the international legal framework regulating the new trends and issues.

## 2.1 The digital divide

The rapid development of next-generation ICTs and their in-depth integration with various sectors have significantly changed people's way of work, life, learning and innovating. In many countries and regions worldwide, users are expecting faster, more reliable and secure telecommunication/ICT services, including easy network access, high-speed transmission and a variety of applications. Therefore, the traditional ICT infrastructure and services need to be adjusted to align with the new trends in international telecommunication/ICTs, and to meet the demands of the new development.

Meanwhile, with the new trends in international telecommunication/ICT development, the digital divide among countries and regions is widening. ITU statistics show that gaps in Internet and ICT access persist across countries, and bridging the digital divide remains a pressing global task. Technology should be used as a tool to narrow rather than deepen the digital divide. Countries should strive to address the challenges posed by the digital economy to vulnerable groups and ensure that all sectors and groups benefit equitably from international telecommunication/ICT development and share the development dividends. Some developing and less developed countries have a shortage of advanced ICT and new telecommunication infrastructures, as well as ICT talents, hence the widening digital divide with the developed countries. There is an urgent need for "up-to-date" ITRs that reflect the new trends in international telecommunication/ICTs, to assist and drive the development of the telecommunication/ICT industry in the less developed countries, and to further enhance the equity, efficiency, and inclusiveness of international telecommunication networks, infrastructure and services.

## 2.2 Privacy and data protection

With the rapid development of global telecommunication/ICTs, especially the widespread application of 5G, IoT, cloud computing, and AI technologies, there is an unprecedented increase of data generation, collection, storage and analysis activities. The explosive growth and massive aggregation of data are driving innovations and reshaping our life. The new trends promote economic growth and social progress, but they also pose new challenges and requirements for privacy and data protection. While benefiting from the ease of telecommunication/ICTs, it is essential to pay attention to issues of privacy and data protection, which are crucial to boosting user confidence, protecting data security, and promoting the development of the global telecommunication industry.

Privacy and data protection are real issues that have emerged and persist in the development of global telecommunication/ICTs. Although privacy and data protection laws and regulations are in force or under development in many countries and regions around the world, they vary in terms of their strictness, level of protection and compatibility. There are no harmonized regulations and standards at the international level. The current two versions of the ITRs have not addressed these issues, and such issues are unavoidable in any future review and revision of the ITRs.

## 2.3 Cybersecurity

The rapid development and innovative application of telecommunication/ICTs bring with them evolving security measures and emerging security threats, such as the increased risks and vulnerabilities of critical information infrastructure, a substantial increase in cyberattacks and cybercrimes, the proliferation of false information on the Internet, and a rise in fraud over the telecommunication network. It is therefore important to strengthen cybersecurity by constantly updating security policies, regulations, and protection measures to cope with the complex and ever-changing cybersecurity environment. The global nature of cyberspace calls for the cooperation of the international community to jointly address cybersecurity threats. The development of international telecommunication/ICTs requires a unified and coordinated framework for cybersecurity governance. ITU, as the UN specialized agency for ICTs, should play a key role in addressing cybersecurity threats.

The ITRs are a set of global principles and norms developed by ITU to ensure the interconnection and effective operation of international telecommunication networks. Cybersecurity, as a key component in the modern telecommunication/ICT environment, should be properly included in the discussion and formulation of the ITRs. The current ITRs do not have any provisions which are universally effective for the protection of global cybersecurity - a typical example indicating that the ITRs are lagging behind and not flexible. PP Resolution 71 (Rev. Bucharest, 2022) identifies "to enable and foster universal access to affordable, high-quality and secure telecommunication/ICTs" as one of the two strategic goals, and sets the target of "improved cybersecurity preparedness of countries". The Resolution also stresses the importance of building confidence and security in telecommunication/ICTs for their widespread adoption and use. To this end, ITU should work to promote the development of inclusive and secure telecommunication/ICT infrastructure and services. Therefore, the issue of cybersecurity should be included in the discussion of the review and revision of the ITRs.

# 3 Proposals

Against the backdrop of new trends and issues in the international telecommunication arena, Member States are facing a significant choice of either enabling the ITRs to proactively address new trends and challenges or evading the issues without any action. The decision to be made by the Member States will have a major impact on the future growth of ITU. The issues emerging in international telecommunications/ICTs cannot be resolved by one single country or a few countries on their own. It is essential to mobilize the efforts of all Member States, and utilize ITU's international platform to enhance communication, increase consensus and deepen cooperation. Together, we could build an international telecommunication/ICT community with a shared future. The ITRs should be revised and improved to keep pace with the times, and to be able to deal with the issues, challenges and threats posed by new trends in global telecommunications/ICTs.

1 Considering that the ITRs play a key role in promoting regulatory consistency and building confidence in the international telecommunication/ICT arena, it is important to take into account the new trends and issues when reviewing and revising the ITRs so as to build a global telecommunication/ICT network environment featuring security, reliability, fairness and efficiency.

2 The review and revision of the ITRs should focus on maintaining their leading role in the future development of telecommunications/ICTs globally, and bridging the digital divide in the telecommunication/ICT sector among countries, regions and groups, enabling them to be included in the digital society equitably and extensively and to benefit from the dividends of the digital era.

3 Considering that privacy and data protection are the practical issues that have existed or are emerging in the process of global telecommunication/ICT development, and that there is a lack of harmonized regulations and standards at the international level, it is proposed to respond to the issues of privacy and data protection when discussing the review and revision of the ITRs.

4 We propose to include the issue of cybersecurity in the review and revision of the ITRs, in particular, to address the growing cybersecurity challenges posed by the OTT transformation of the global telecommunication industry (Internetization). We also propose to strengthen international cooperation on cybersecurity and protection of the critical information infrastructure, curb the misuse of ICTs, and establish an inclusive and sustained cybersecurity process under the ITU framework involving all stakeholders.

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