

Keynote address

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Bridging the ICT standardization gap in developing countries for the Africa Region
26 – 28 May 2008**

The ITU Africa region WTSA-08 Preparatory Meeting, 29 – 30 May 2008

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen

It is a great pleasure for me to be back in Accra again after some years, and to welcome you on behalf of the ITU to this regional development forum on bridging the standardization gap, to be followed by the World Telecommunication Standardization Assembly (WTSA) preparatory meeting for the Africa region. I hope this will result in some significant common proposals from Africa, especially addressing the very important standardization gap. My sincere thanks go to H.E. Dr Benjamin Aggrey Ntim, the Minister of Communications, Ghana, for hosting this event, and to his staff who have worked very hard to make it happen. I also thank Mr Akossi Akossi, Secretary General of the African Telecommunications Union (ATU) for his collaboration, and the staff of the ITU Regional Office for their support in organizing the event.

This is my second visit to the region since being elected, having had the pleasure of attending the ITU's first ever global Forum on Bridging the ICT standardization and development gaps in Kigali, Rwanda, last October. One of the major objectives of ITU is to extend the benefits of our standardization work to a wider audience. We have defined the standardization gap as the disparity in the ability of representatives of developing countries, relative to representatives of developed countries, to access, implement, contribute to, and influence international ICT standards, specifically ITU Recommendations.

The Kigali Forum was very well attended, and there was a lot of interest in participating in our standardisation work. It set the model for what we plan to be a series of Forums in each region each year. I am sure that the Kigali event, together with this week's meetings will serve to prepare Africa well for the WTSA in Johannesburg in October. I believe it will be a very significant event for a number of reasons and I am very happy that it will be the first in the African region. We are of course all looking forward to coming to Johannesburg, and I thank very much South Africa for hosting the event at short notice.

Standardization is a complex business, and it is getting more complex by the day. But as you here will know, standards are essential for international communications and global trade. Globalisation requires global standards, and a global standards body like ITU clearly has an increasing role to play. Global standards avoid costly market battles over preferred technologies, and for companies from emerging markets, they create a level playing field which provides access to new markets. They are an essential aid to developing countries in building their infrastructure and encouraging economic development. They can reduce costs for all: manufacturers, operators and consumers, through economies of scale. The World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) recognized ITU's core competence in standards development as being crucial in building the Information Society. WSIS gave ITU specific responsibility as facilitator for its Action Line C2: Information and Communication Infrastructure; and Action Line C5: Building confidence and security in the use of ICTs; as well as a role in many other action lines. Much of ITU's activity is related to WSIS follow up, as is explained on our website.

The Kigali Forum showed the extent of interest in Africa in participating in our standardization work. The main problem identified is the cost: the cost of attending meetings in Geneva; and the cost of membership. We are making a lot of effort to overcome these difficulties, but clearly more needs to be done at the upcoming WTSA.

For example, I have been encouraging members to host meetings in the regions, and I have established a fund to assist hosts with the cost of doing so, as well as for providing fellowships to attend our meetings.

Over the last few months we have also been trialing new collaboration tools which will allow remote participation in our meetings. The intention is to organize meetings in the regions which can be linked to the main meetings, in Geneva (or elsewhere). I am encouraged by the success of these trials. They clearly have the potential to significantly increase participation from the regions.

There are many of our activities in which participation is free even for non-members. For example focus groups. We are now using focus groups more and more to initiate and drive our standards work. We had two very successful focus groups conclude their work last year – on identity management and on IPTV. We are also holding many workshops throughout the year, which are open to anyone interested free of charge. These events are now webcast live and archived on the ITU website. Our recent symposium on ICTs and Climate Change in Kyoto had 260 participants but another 160 followed it on the webcast. The follow-up symposium on the subject will be held in London 17-18 June and will also be webcast. The Kyoto symposium recommended that I establish a focus group to standardize the methodology for determining the impact of ICTs on greenhouse gas emissions, both directly and in terms of the reduction they could make in other industry sectors. I will consult the next meeting of the Telecommunication Standardization Advisory Group (TSAG) on this, but I hope we will be able to hold an event on climate change in this region in the near future.

We have also taken an initiative to encourage greater participation of universities and research establishments in our work. Two weeks ago we held what we called a Kaleidoscope conference with universities and research establishments. This was the first of its kind and proved very successful with over 140 papers submitted for peer review, with the best 50 papers presented in parallel sessions over the two days. We had 220 participants and around 50 universities participating. The authors of the winning three papers received prizes totaling \$10,000 and their papers will be published in the IEEE proceedings, and will be considered as the basis for new standardization activities, including a possible focus group looking beyond NGN. Details of all these events and access to the webcast archive is available free of charge on our website.

I am also encouraging the establishment of regional groups. These are groups in the regions following the work of a particular study group. I am pleased to say Study Group 12 (dealing with QoS) recently established a regional group for Africa and I hope we will see good participation in the that group.

I would also like to see an increase in study group leaders from Africa. The number of Study Group chairmen and vice-chairmen from developing countries has increased from just 10 in 1996 to 36 in 2004. From Africa we have Study Group officials from Morocco, Egypt, Kenya and Uganda. I hope this number will increase at the next WTSA. There will be a need for many new chairmen and vice-chairmen due to the application of the term limit for the first time.

A significant development in closing the standardization gap was the agreement of last year's Council to my recommendation to make available ITU-T Recommendations for downloading free of charge. In 2006 we sold just 5000 copies of ITU-T Recommendations. In 2007 almost 3 million copies were downloaded free of charge. We have found a notable increase in access from developing countries, both in terms of total number of downloads and the percentage that were downloaded, which has risen from 10 per cent of sales in 2006 to 16 per cent of downloads in 2007. Clearly this makes a significant contribution to bridging the standardization gap.

As for implementation of the Recommendations, a complaint I often hear, especially from developing countries is that there is no way of being sure that a vendor's equipment follows an ITU Recommendation. This is because we do not have any testing or certification for our standards. I believe this is something we should address at the WTSA. ITU was founded to ensure interoperability of international telecommunications. But this can only be ensured if we reintroduce a form of testing and certification and the issuing of an ITU Mark. I intend therefore to make a

proposal at the next TSAG. I have a draft document available and would be grateful for your comments.

This WTSA will be the first to be preceded by a Global Standardization Symposium, on 20 October 2008. This will have a number of high level speakers (including ministers, ambassadors, and CTOs) addressing the standardization gap, as well as concerns about the proliferation of ICT standards bodies (now estimated at over 300), climate change and accessibility. The afternoon session will be devoted to improvements in global standards collaboration to meet these objectives and future challenges.

It will also be the first WTSA to have a small exhibition to allow members to showcase their latest products. Again all the details are available on our website.

I am very much looking forward to both the GSS, which promises to herald a new era of standards collaboration, and the WTSA which will define an exciting new period of work for us. I am especially pleased that my good friend Lyndall Shope-Mafole, Director General of the Ministry of Communications, South Africa, has agreed to chair the Assembly, so we are in very good hands indeed!

The African region has an important role to play. Through your participation you can influence the future direction of standardization, ensuring that standards meet the specific requirements of the region, and changes are introduced to facilitate greater participation from the region. The upcoming GSS and WTSA promise to be an exciting opportunity for positive change – and I encourage innovative proposals. Please take part and influence the outcome for the good of the region and the ITU.

I will not take more of your time. You have a very interesting programme to look forward to and excellent speakers. I would like to thank the speakers for their efforts to prepare their presentations and for coming here to support our event.

I wish you all a productive and informative meeting.

Thank you for your attention.