

## Welcome address

**Malcolm Johnson, Director, ITU Telecommunication Standardization Bureau  
ITU Arab Regional Development Forum 2008  
Bridging the ICT standardization gap in developing countries  
20 – 22 July 2008**

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen

It is indeed a great pleasure for the ITU team to be in Damascus, and I would like to welcome you on behalf of the ITU to this regional development forum on bridging the standardization gap.

Our sincere thanks go to the Syrian Telecommunications Establishment (STE) for hosting this event. These regional forums will now become a regular fixture on the ITU calendar following the great success of ITU's first ever global Forum on Bridging the ICT standardization and development gaps in Kigali, Rwanda, last October and events since in Brasilia, Accra and Tashkent.

"Connecting the World" – this is the main ITU task. That is being implemented by different means including development of telecommunication standards for the improvement and rational use of telecommunications of all kind (wired and radio). Two ITU Sectors: the Radiocommunication Sector (ITU-R) and the Telecommunication Standardization Sector (ITU-T) develop these standards and the Telecommunication Development Sector (ITU-D) makes great efforts to foster cooperation in the implementation of ITU standards (Recommendations), especially, in developing countries. The General Secretariat coordinates the work of all Bureaus in this area. 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.

At all of our regional forums we have heard the same message, a lot of interest in participating in ITU's standardization work. All have shown the extent of interest in developing countries in participating in this important work. The main problem identified is the cost: the cost of attending meetings in Geneva; and the cost of membership. We are putting a lot of effort into overcoming these difficulties, but clearly more needs to be done.

In order to minimize the cost for memberships all ITU Sectors and their secretariats are organizing forums, seminar, meetings, etc. in different regions and different countries. For example, I have been encouraging members to host meetings in the regions, and a special fund has been established in TSB budget 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.

The ITU Standardization Sector is also encouraging the establishment of regional groups. These are groups in the regions following the work of a particular ITU-T Study Group. I am pleased to say the ITU-T SG 2 has established a Regional Group for the Arab region and I hope we will see good participation in that group.

Activity of developing countries, including Arab countries, has significantly increased during last decades. Your representatives participate in all ITU major events such as Plenipotentiary Conferences, World and Regional Radiocommunication Conferences, World Development conferences, Radiocommunication and World Standardization Assemblies. There is a significant increase in ITU leaders in Study Groups of all ITU Sectors. For example, the number of ITU-T Study Group Chairmen and Vice-Chairmen from developing countries has increased from just 10 in 1996 to 36 in 2004. From the Arab Region we have ITU-T Study Group officials from Egypt, the Lebanon, Morocco and Syria. Officials from Egypt, the Lebanon, Morocco, Oman, Tunisia and

Syria lead the studies by the ITU-R Study Groups. Mr. **M. H. LEBBADI** from Morocco was reelected at PP-06 to the Radio Regulations Board. I hope the number of ITU-T Study Groups leaders from developing countries 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.

Ladies and Gentlemen, in 2007 the newly elected management team of ITU identified five key priorities:

- Bridging the digital divide, through infrastructure projects, capacity building and assisting our Member States in developing an enabling and regulatory environment;
- Stewardship of the radio spectrum, on behalf of our membership, through global treaties;
- Adopting international standards to ensure seamless global communications and interoperability;
- Building confidence and security in the use of information and communication technologies (ICTs); and
- Emergency communications to develop early warning systems and provide access to communications during and after disasters.

To illustrate how quickly things move in the world of ICTs I expect that many of you know that a new priority can be added to this list. ITU is spearheading initiatives to reduce the impact of ICTs on climate change as well as create better understanding of how ICTs can mitigate its effects. Two recent ITU symposia, the first in April, in Kyoto in Japan and the second in London in June, have led to the acceleration of work in this field. Based on the result of these symposia TSAG has created a new ITU-T Focus Group. I encourage you all to participate in this group which has great significance for us all. Details are on the ITU website.

The next very important ITU forum – the World Telecommunication Standardization Assembly 2008 (WTSA-08) will be held in a developing country – South Africa on 21-30 October. WTSA-08 will be the first to be preceded by a Global Standardization Symposium, on 20 October 2008. Climate change will be one topic on the agenda but high level speakers will also discuss addressing the standardization gap, concerns about the proliferation of ICT standards bodies (now estimated at over 300) and accessibility. 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.

We are 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 should be in very good hands indeed!

The Arab 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.