

**Closing Remarks by ITU Secretary-General Houlin Zhao at the World
Telecommunication Development Conference 2022**

16 JUNE 2022 – KIGALI, RWANDA

Let me begin by thanking our hosts – the Government of Rwanda and the people of Kigali – for their tremendous generosity. Congratulations for making this conference such a success! You had little time to prepare, but you delivered beyond our expectations. Rwandans have made all Africans proud during this conference. We are grateful to the people of Rwanda and their beloved Government for the warm hospitality they have shown, and to all local staff for their support. Let's give them all a big round of applause!

I commend President Paul Kagame for his dedication to ITU's mission – and for reminding us at the opening that we cannot let digital inequalities go unchecked. I was humbled that the President awarded me the National Order of Honour (Agaciro) at Urugwiro Village earlier this week, and I vow to continue fighting for all those who are still unconnected.

I salute the Chair of WTDC-22, Minister Paula Ingabire, for her extraordinary leadership and outstanding contribution to the work of this conference. A mother of three, I hope the Minister will be as successful in convincing her son (who loves football) to study STEM as she expertly managed this conference.

I am grateful to BDT Director Doreen Bogdan-Martin, BR Director Mario Maniewicz, TSB Director Chaesub Lee, and the entire team at ITU – and all those who have worked tirelessly behind the scenes, including the interpreters, translators, captioners and technical staff.

I express my gratitude to the Prime Minister of Luxembourg and all the Ministers and Vice Ministers who joined us at this conference, and thank all delegates for the remarkable spirit of cooperation during these 10 days of intense negotiations. Thank you to all the Heads of Delegations, Regional coordinators, Chairs and Vice Chairs of conference committees, Plenary Working Group, and ad hoc groups who demonstrated their leadership skills in facilitating the work of the Conference.

ITU has emerged as a key partner in development in areas as diverse and critical as education, health and the environment. We are more than a technical agency, and we need to recognize it and strengthen our global development role. With just over seven years left to achieve the UN Sustainable Development Goals, we need to continue our efforts to show what ITU and ICTs can do for the SDGs. And by "we," I mean all ITU members and partners.

Today, I call on our Member States, industry members, academia members, international and regional organizations and all stakeholders to join in efforts to promote sustainable development for all through the use of ICTs. Cultivating and growing ITU's relationship with the public and private sector is paramount, to further our technical work and advance meaningful work in development.

Initiatives like the Partner2Connect Digital Coalition show the way by mobilizing governments, the private sector and others behind ground-breaking commitments – and by aligning global connectivity strategies with the SDGs. This sends a powerful message that together, we can ramp up investments in ICT development to leave no one behind.

Equitable access to digital technologies is not just a moral responsibility, it is essential for global prosperity and sustainability.

Before I close, I would like to highlight some important dates in the history of ITU's development work... where we started... where we are now... and where we are heading.

This journey started in the 1960s with the inclusion of telecommunications development items on the agenda of the ITU Council, and intensified in the 1970s. The 1982 Plenipotentiary Conference in Nairobi addressed the “Missing Link” and the challenges faced by developing countries. The first conference on development – already called the “World Telecommunication Development Conference” – would be held three years later in Arusha, Tanzania, in the Spring of 1985.

The Development Sector (ITU-D) was established at the Additional Plenipotentiary Conference 1992, and the first WTDC was held in Argentina in 1994. Having this conference take place in Rwanda – the first WTDC to be held in Africa since the establishment of ITU-D 30 years ago – is an important milestone. We have travelled a long way to come here today. We have achieved a lot, but there are still a lot of challenges. With 3 billion people still unconnected, we still have a long way to go.

Let’s build on this momentum to strengthen the image of ITU as a UN specialized agency not just for technology but also for development. Let’s work hard to march forward together in this direction and accelerate digital transformation for all here in Africa and the rest of the world.

I wish you a safe journey back home and look forward to seeing you in September and October in Bucharest, Romania, for PP-22.

I would like now to invite the Honorable Paula Ingabire, Minister of ICT and Innovation of Rwanda and Chair of WTDC-22, to join me. I am pleased to present the Honorable Minister with the ITU Silver Medal and certificate as a token of our appreciation.

Thank you.