

World Telecommunication Development Conference

Opening Ceremony Address

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Ministry of ICT and Innovation, Rwanda**

Monday 6 June, 2022

Your Excellency, Paul Kagame, President of the Republic of Rwanda,
Your Excellency, Faure Essozimna Gnassingbé Eyadéma, President of the
Togolese Republic,
Mr Houlin Zhao, ITU Secretary-General, and fellow ITU elected officials,
Ambassadors and dignitaries, esteemed colleagues,
Ladies and gentlemen,

Please accept my warm welcome to Rwanda and to the 8th edition of the
World Telecommunications Development Conference, WTDC-22.

I must thank your Excellency Paul Kagame for your continued vision and
leadership that has enabled the world to congregate in Rwanda for the very
first WTDC to be held on the African continent.

I also thank your Excellency Faure Gnassingbé, and other excellencies and
distinguished guests for taking time from your extremely busy schedule to
come and help us to shape the future of global telecommunications over
the next four years.

Previous WTDCs have moved us closer to achieving the outcomes
encapsulated in our WTDC-22 theme; connecting the unconnected for
sustainable development.

But we all know the stats. We all know the targets. Much has been
achieved, much remains to be done.

This WTDC-22 is our chance to work together, to achieve consensus on key issues we will deliberate, so that we can bring the 2.9 billion people worldwide into the digital world they currently do not know.

We need to remain laser-focused on our common motivation to move further towards closing the connectivity and digital divide for all our citizens.

Universal, affordable and accessible connectivity for all underpins our individual and collective efforts in industrialization, in building the digital economy, in ensuring our youth have access to information that improves their lives and have access to jobs created through the new future of work.

More importantly, we have all experienced the impact of COVID-19 and we have seen why connectivity is and will continue to be the cornerstone of our individual and collective resilience of humanity.

Connectivity enabled our children to continue learning, opened up new opportunities for trade, connected us globally, and enabled our citizens to access government services even as local and global movement was severely restricted.

This is why I see that the success of WTDC-22 will be measured from the yard stick of how far our collective decisions over the next two weeks lead to a better world and the achievement of the SDGs.

This is why our yard stick will include measures of how many more of humanity we connect over the next four years, and how the decisions we take over the next two weeks help us to build back better.

Of the 2.9 billion that remain unconnected, majority of them are our youth. Majority of them are African youth.

Majority of them are African young women.

WTDC-22 is our chance to achieve consensus on impacting each of these lives positively.

The just-concluded Generation Connect Youth Summit was one of the most exciting events I have had the pleasure of engaging with recently.

Our youth spoke to us and told us loud and clear about what they need from us during this WTDC-22.

In their call to action, our youth reminded us that they were born in an era of unprecedented technology innovation and disruption, and that, as they come of age, they want to be able to enjoy the digital world fully, safely and inclusively.

Our youth told us that they want to sit at the decision-making table, or at least, to influence decisions that impact how they live, work and play.

Our young people asked us to work on digital policies, governance, strategies and programmes, that enable them to be connected, enable them to be digitally skilled, to access jobs, and to prosper.

This is what we all should keep in our minds as we work towards the foundational outcomes we seek from our WTDC-22 deliberations.

As was said, this is why this conference has to be different.

Let us use the collegial discussions we will have in our committees and plenaries to remain focused on the important technical work before us as we work towards consensus on important issues that affect us all.

Let us use the opportunity provided by the Partner2Connect forum to create innovative new partnerships that build on the success already achieved.

Let us do all we can to deliver on promises that we made to our youth.

Regardless of where we come from, our political affiliations, or our religious beliefs, connecting the unconnected is a global issue that ties all of us at the hip as brothers and sisters.

We can only achieve what we set out to do over the next two weeks if we work as brothers and sisters.

As I said in my closing remarks during the Generation Connect Youth Summit, we used to say that the future is digital. Now, we must accept that the present is already digital.

As we work together during the WTDC-22, we must, and we can put in place strategies and programmes that will enable us to look back proudly at we will have achieved over the next four years.

Let us use WTDC-22 to shape the digital present we are in into an even better digital and connected future.

Thank you.