

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

06 JUNE 2022 – KIGALI, RWANDA

Mr. President,
Mr. Chairperson of the African Union,
Heads of State and Government,
Ministers,
Madam Director of the ITU Telecommunication Development Bureau,
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is wonderful to be here together in Kigali... one of Africa's great cities... in Rwanda... a model of digital transformation for the African continent and the world.

Thank you to the people of Rwanda for the warm welcome and the extraordinary hospitality.

We are honored by the presence of His Excellency, Paul Kagame, President of the Republic of Rwanda. Thank you, Mr. President, for hosting and addressing the Conference! Your words will be a source of inspiration for us—like those delivered by His Holiness Pope Francis at our last conference five years ago, stressing the importance of leaving no one behind.

How are we doing, and how connected is humanity in 2022?

Much progress has been made, with almost 5 billion people being online today. We've seen the strongest growth in ICT uptake in the developing world, and that's very encouraging.

Yet, one third of humanity is still offline. That's close to 3 billion people... mostly people in developing countries... poor areas... rural areas... areas where we need to attract investments... something that's been one of my priorities.

I echo the UN Secretary-General's call for universal connectivity with affordable services by 2030 and hope this conference will make headway on removing all remaining barriers to connectivity.

What makes me confident is all the young people we saw during the Youth Summit earlier this week...those Nelson Mandela called "our greatest asset" when he came to Geneva for one of our ITU events almost 30 years ago.

We have obligations to them and to each other—to connect the unconnected, drive the development of new technologies central to achieving the UN Sustainable Development Goals, and continue to show the world what ITU can do as a technical and, equally important, development agency.

I look forward to the output from this conference, which will be fed into the ITU Strategic Plan to be endorsed by our Plenipotentiary Conference in Bucharest, Romania, this coming October.

I also draw your attention to an information document I have provided for your consideration, based on the many outputs of the WSIS Forum 2022 that concluded last week in Geneva relevant to the discussion in this conference.

I call on the spirit of collaboration of the ITU family and wish you all a successful WTDC 2022!

I would like now to invite President Kagame to come to the stage to deliver his keynote address. I am honored to present His Excellency with a certificate that recognizes Rwanda's digital transformation and commitment to bringing broadband connectivity across Africa and the world. Thank you.