

Emergency Telecommunications Guidelines Launch Event
Welcome remarks
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Thursday 19 March 15:05

Distinguished colleagues,
Ladies and gentlemen,

Welcome to ITU's first-ever fully virtual launch. In just a few short weeks, COVID19 has turned our world upside down. And as Wikimedia Foundation CEO Katherine Maher said, in a blog on Monday, "in a world that's changing, we need to change how we work".

Our ability to continue our important work, despite the severe restrictions now in place, testifies to the critical role digital technologies play – not only for us, joining this meeting remotely, but for all who are using technology to ensure continuity in their daily lives and work.

We are lucky, here in Europe, to have access to exceptionally good connectivity. But we must remind ourselves that for almost half of the world that is not the case.

3.6 billion people still have **no** access at all to the internet.

And billions more suffer from access that is not sufficiently meaningful to profoundly change their lives, because of low bandwidth, high prices, and lack of digital skills.

I do hope that one thing that might come out of this **global**

health emergency is increased recognition by governments of the vital need to rapidly extend connectivity and bring more affordable access to those most in need. At times like these, ICTs are uniquely powerful tools, and it is our job to ensure that such tools are within reach of all.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Even before the arrival of this epidemic, we live in a world where natural disasters kill at least one million people **each decade**, and leave **many millions more homeless**.

The destruction wrought by natural catastrophes and extreme weather events devastates families and communities, with rebuilding and rehabilitation efforts often measured in many long years.

In 2018 alone, 315 natural disaster events were recorded, affecting over **68 million people**.

In financial terms, **2018** was the **fourth-costliest** year for disaster damage in the past 40 years, with 2019 not far behind. Overall, the annual impact of natural disasters on the global economy is estimated at over **400 billion dollars**.

These facts and figures clearly demonstrate the need to do everything we can to make communities better prepared and more resilient, in order to reduce the high price paid in:

- loss of life,
- damage to private property and public infrastructure,
- and set-backs to national development.

The incredible growth in ICT networks and services, including radio, satellite and mobile, means the opportunity to reach more people and communities in a timely manner **is there**.

But to fully leverage the power of these technologies, effective **national and international strategies** must be in place.

The current COVID19 crisis shows that **the speed and efficiency of our response is proportional to our level of preparedness**.

Policies, procedures and practices that ensure the continued availability of reliable and resilient networks, services, and platforms are vital for promoting information sharing across all levels of government, within communities, and between humanitarian agencies on the ground.

National Emergency Telecommunication Plans are a key element in ensuring the continuity of communications during all phases of disaster management.

These plans oblige all **relevant stakeholders** to comprehensively and methodically consider the lifecycle of a potential disaster, to determine the required ICT capabilities for effective emergency response.

Most importantly, they help establish a **clear governance framework** of roles and responsibilities for each of the government entities and personnel involved.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Since 2018, our Bureau has supported the development and

implementation of National Emergency Telecommunication Plans in many countries including Vanuatu, Samoa, the Solomon Islands, Papua New Guinea, Guatemala, Bolivia and the Dominican Republic, to name just a few. Right now, we're working closely with Afghanistan and Saint Lucia on the development of their plans, too.

Today's launch of these new guidelines marks another important milestone in our work.

We've created these guidelines in recognition of our Members' need for expert advice on best practices in developing robust plans **that will stand up** to the many challenges disasters bring in their wake.

The guidelines describe the main elements that every National Emergency Telecommunication Plan should consider, in order to enhance disaster-readiness and enable the continued use of networks and services both during, and in the aftermath, of a disaster.

It is my hope that these guidelines will serve as an invaluable tool in assisting national administrations and policymakers to develop:

- a clear
- flexible
- and user-friendly National Emergency Telecommunication Plan that incorporates a multi-stakeholder approach.

Distinguished colleagues,

Our last World Telecommunication Development Conference in 2017 identified disasters as a major threat to socio-economic development.

We are making our best effort to respond to the needs of our Member countries – but we cannot do it alone. COVID19 underscores the fact that, effective disaster management needs to be a collaborative effort.

We are actively seeking new partners – financial partners, strategic partners and implementation partners – to help strengthen global efforts and assist the growing number of vulnerable countries around the world to protect their inhabitants, industry and infrastructure.

We have already established a fruitful partnership with the Emergency Telecommunication Cluster led by the World Food Programme, a global network of organizations working together to provide shared communications services in humanitarian emergencies.

I am delighted to have Enrica Porcari joining us today. Enrica is Director of Technology at WFP and chair of the ETC, and she will shortly introduce our joint ITU-ETC publication on simulation exercises, which are crucial for better preparedness when disasters hit.

COVID19 reinforces the urgent need to continue to actively build new, broad-based partnerships to strengthen global emergency response. I invite all organizations – **big or small, public or private** – that might be open to partnering with ITU,

and with the broader UN family, to make your interest known to myself or my team. We'd love to explore how we might work with you.

Thank you.