Joint ATU-ITU Seminar on the Outcomes of WTSA-12 and WCIT-12

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*Welcome Remarks*

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Distinguished colleagues,
Ladies and gentlemen,

I would like to thank the Secretary General of the African Telecommunication Union (ATU), Mr. Abdoulkarim Soumaila, for ATU’s co-organization of this event with ITU. My sincerest thanks are also due to the Republic of South Africa’s Department of Communications for the kind offer to host this event, and their hospitality. The International Conference Centre (ICC) is a truly world-class facility, made even better by Durban’s renowned hospitality, and there is little more anyone can ask of a conference venue.

2012 will be remembered as a very eventful year for ITU. It is important that following the extensive preparatory work, we reflect on the outcomes of WTSA and WCIT, and over the coming two days we will discuss how successful regional proposals were, as well as how the decisions taken can be implemented in the African region.

We will review the three important events held in Dubai at the end of last year: the Global Standards Symposium (GSS); the World Telecommunication Standardization Assembly (WTSA); and the World Conference on International Telecommunications (WCIT).

GSS hosted high-level representatives of leading standards development organizations (SDOs) including ISO; IEC; IEEE; and IETF, as well as top-level representatives of industry, government and regulatory bodies.

The GSS highlighted that the convergence of industry sectors and the technologies comprising the ICT sphere is having the effect of blurring the demarcation between different standards bodies, leading to a risk of overlap and duplication. As such, the GSS called for the development of cooperation agreements which will identify the specific but complementary roles of different standards bodies in achieving mutually defined objectives, and in developing common international standards or suites of standards.

On the point of industry convergence, GSS acknowledged that ICT standardization no longer applies to only the ICT industry and that more must be done to integrate the unique needs of vertical sectors – a move which would enable the widespread deployment of innovations such as e-Health, e-Learning, Intelligent Transport Systems, Mobile Money, and Smart Grid.

WTSA acted on these conclusions by establishing a Review Committee to address how ITU will meet these challenges over the coming years. The Committee met for the first time on 3 June in conjunction with 2013’s meeting of TSAG.

June’s TSAG meeting was in itself a reminder that TSAG does not have the time to fully address these issues, already tackling a very intensive agenda. By contrast, the Review Committee is designed as an opportunity for some more lateral thinking and brain storming to uncover ideas of how to address these challenges.

WTSA also adopted 50 Resolutions, 6 new and 44 revised, and produced the first-ever ITU Resolutions on e-health, software-defined networking (SDN), and e-waste. We also saw the ITU-T mandate re-emphasized and strengthened in areas such as climate change, conformity and interoperability, and accessibility, and saw encouragement for greater engagement of academia in our work. I would like to thank the African region for its strong, unified support in these areas, the way Africa has thrown its full weight behind our standards work in some of the most challenging areas, particularly in these critical areas.

In addition, WTSA revised seven of the A series Recommendations that guide our work, in particular A.7 on Focus Groups which now allows TSB to provide Focus Groups with some support.

The Assembly also made significant changes to Resolution 76 on conformity and interoperability, which I believe puts us on a sound footing to implement this programme led by Study Group 11.

WTSA was followed by the World Conference on International Telecommunication (WCIT).

152 countries participated actively in Dubai’s revision of the ITRs, leading to a strong new treaty which provides a considerable boost to the work of the ITU-T Sector, as it requires Member States to encourage the application of relevant ITU-T Recommendations by service providers and authorized operating agencies in many areas, including Quality of service, numbering, International calling line identification, international roaming, emergency communications, countering spam, energy-efficiency, e-waste and accessibility.

WCIT also called for ITU-T to study the regulatory, technical and economic issues which need to be taken into consideration in the transition from dedicated phone and data networks to converged IP-based networks.

Of the 35 African Member States participating in WCIT and authorized to sign the ITRs, 32 chose to do so. This is shows the degree of unity of the African countries, and one that attests to the relevance and value of the treaty to developing countries. Growing at very healthy rates, African economies will be at the heart of global economic growth over the coming decades, and the new ITRs establish a sound framework in which to frame policies to enable the continued development and expansion of African ICT networks.

In total 89 countries signed the treaty immediately, and many more are expected to accede to it before it comes into force on 1 January 2015. This compares well with the 112 that signed the current treaty in Melbourne and to which 190 member States are now party to.

This morning, colleagues from ITU and ATU will provide and in-depth view into the contents and significance of the ITRs, also addressing some the reasons countries have expressed as their motivations for not signing the treaty. We will also recap the common African proposals to WCIT and analyze the impact of the new ITRs and WCIT-12 Resolutions on Africa’s interests. Finally, today’s closing session will wrap up our discussions by focusing on the implementation of the treaty – working towards an Action Plan defining the timeframes, responsibilities and modalities for collaboration between African Member States in carrying out the ITRs’ provisions.

I would like to thank the African region for its role played in leading many of the charges that led to new ITRs provisions which require Member States to take action against any misuse of names and numbers in their territory; to improve transparency in mobile roaming charges; to enhance energy efficiency and cut e-waste; to bring access to the 650 million people living with some kind of disability; to improve broadband connectivity for landlocked developing countries and small island states; and to encourage investment and competition.

Another very positive aspect of the ITRs is the Preamble’s placing special emphasis on freedom of access to international telecommunication services, and its affirmation that Member States commit to implement the treaty in a manner that respects and upholds their human rights obligations.

The treaty provides a framework for the accelerated growth of ICTs at the national and international level, in particular to bring Internet access to the two-thirds of the world’s population which is still offline, by driving investment in broadband roll out and in ensuring the continuing promotion of digital inclusion for all.

I look forward to our discussion of these issues over these two days. I wish you a very informative and enjoyable event, and I again offer our thanks to our colleagues in ATU and of course our gracious hosts, South Africa’s Department of Communications.