SG5RG-AFR and SG12RG-AFR, ITU Regional Standardization Forum for Africa

Dakar, Senegal, 23-27 March 2015

***Opening Address***

Hiroshi Ota

On behalf of the TSB Director
International Telecommunication Union

Distinguished colleagues

Ladies and gentlemen,

On behalf of Chaesub Lee, Director of the ITU Telecommunication Standardization Bureau, it is with pleasure that I extend you all a warm welcome to this ITU Regional Standardization Forum for Africa and the meetings of the African Regional Groups within ITU-T Study Group 5 and Study Group 12.

I would like to begin by expressing our great appreciation to Autorité de Régulation des Télécommunications et des Postes (ARTP) of Senegal for generously hosting these events in the vibrant city of Dakar. The facilities provided are excellent and will no doubt contribute to making these events successful and our stay enjoyable.

As many of you will know, ITU has a prestigious history and we are celebrating our 150th anniversary this year. We are the United Nations specialized agency for information and communication technologies (ICTs) and we are headquartered in Geneva, Switzerland, with twelve regional and area offices around the world.

Technical standardization has been at the core of ITU’s mandate since the organization’s inception in 1865.

International standards are one of the most important tools to address the digital divide as they increase competition and reduce costs, enabling companies in emerging markets to access global markets. They are an essential aid to developing countries in building their infrastructure and encouraging economic development.

Increasing the participation of developing countries in ITU’s standardization work is one of the foundational pillars of our mission as an organization. This will ensure that ITU produces standards to meet their particular requirements. Participation also helps to build better understanding of standards and how to implement them most effectively.

ITU’s Standardization Sector (ITU-T) has introduced a number of initiatives to increase the participation of developing countries in our work.

Making ITU-T Recommendations available to download free of charge from the ITU website was one of the first initiatives. ITU previously sold around 5000 copies of standards a year; now downloads are running at over 2.5 million copies a year.

Eligible countries are granted up to two partial fellowships for meetings of all ten ITU-T Study Groups.

We have increased the number of meetings in the regions and we have created Regional Groups within ITU-T Study Groups. We also offer online ‘remote participation’ in all of our study group meetings, which allows delegates to avoid costly airfares and hotel expenses.

Other significant steps forward have been the establishment of a reduced membership fee for companies from certain developing countries and the formation of a new membership category for academic and research institutes.

Since this new academic membership category opened its doors at the beginning of 2011, 92 institutions have joined ITU. For a greatly reduced membership fee, academia members can participate in all areas of ITU work: standardization, policy and regulation, or the application of ICTs to drive sustainable economic development.

This Forum will address a wide variety of key issues, with specific focus on the African context. We will look at damage protection and safety, human exposure to electromagnetic fields, tackling e-waste, Quality of Service (QoS) for digital financial services, tools and methodologies for QoS assessment of multimedia services, and operational and regulatory aspects of ICTs.

ITU-T standardization on these topics is led by ITU-T Study Group 5 and ITU-T Study Group 12, and the work of these groups is of great value to Africa as it works to build Smart Sustainable Cities.

The international standards developed by ITU-T Study Group 5 address ICTs’ relationship with electromagnetic effects, the environment and climate change. ITU-T matches this technical work with efforts to raise awareness of ICTs’ role in tackling climate change as well as assistance in the development of ‘green ICT’ strategies and policies by organizing dedicated symposia, workshops, and training and capacity-building events.

With respect to human exposure to electromagnetic fields, ITU provides technical frameworks for the responsible management of the ICT systems that underpin wireless communications.

With input from the World Health Organization, we recently launched an EMF Guide & Mobile App which provides information and education resources on electromagnetic fields suitable for all communities. We encourage you to promote this cross-platform app in your countries as it provides clear information on a subject that is not always very accessible to the public.

An upcoming activity that you may be interested is the final meeting of the ITU-T Focus Group on Smart Sustainable Cities (FG-SSC, chaired by Silvia Guzmán Araña, Telefónica), which will be held in Dubai on the 5th of May 2015. This meeting will be followed by the first meeting of a new Study Group 5 work stream (known as a ‘Question’ in ITU-T) which will conduct standardization work on the topic of ‘Smart Sustainable Cities and Communities’, based on the output of the Focus Group.

Standardization work on ‘performance, QoS and QoE’ is led by ITU-T Study Group 12, and this work is of great relevance to operators in providing the level of service required to attract and retain customers.

The standardized performance criteria and measurement methods developed by Study Group 12 are internationally respected tools to enable high-quality ICT services.

African governments, operators and users are very aware of the importance of QoS.

Africa’s ICT networks are expanding at an extraordinary pace. The number of ICT users and the volume of traffic they generate increases every day. The innovation of the ICT industry has given us many new ways to communicate and, not surprisingly, this has created new challenges when it comes to achieving good network performance and a satisfactory user experience. And this is exactly where SG12 comes into play...

The evolution from circuit-switched to packet-based networks has made the assessment of QoS more complex as new multimedia services and applications have emerged. The standards developed by Study Group 12 thus work to achieve the end-to-end performance levels required to support adequate QoS in an IP environment characterized by a wide array of user applications.

As a final note, I would like to invite the ICT regulators and mobile money operators in this region to participate in our new Focus Group on Digital Financial Services (FG-DFS, chaired by **Sacha Polverini,** the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation)

The objective of this Focus Group is to use technologies such as mobile-wireless communication to expand access to formal financial services. The overarching aim of this work is to increase financial inclusion.

The Focus Group is an important platform for dialogue between ICT and financial-services regulators on the many issues that we need to resolve to ensure that the use and impact of digital financial services achieves significant scale.

During today’s forum, we will receive an update from African mobile money players on the state of the industry, and I encourage these players to join us for the next meeting of our Focus Group on Digital Financial Services to be hosted by the World Bank in Washington DC from the 20th to the 22nd of April.

I am sure that the presentations and discussions of this Forum will trigger new ideas to progress the work of ITU-T Study Group 5 and Study Group 12. And I certainly hope to see many of you participating in the work of these groups in the near future.

Thank you.