



WTDC-17 OPENING CEREMONY

Mr. Houlin Zhao, Secretary-General, ITU
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Excellencies, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen.

It is my great pleasure to welcome you to the seventh World Telecommunication Development Conference here in Buenos Aires, where was held 23 years ago the first WTDC after the establishment of ITU's Development Sector (ITU-D).

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the Argentine Republic and the City of Buenos Aires for hosting WTDC-17, and for showing the world once again that information and communication technologies (ICTs) and sustainable development must go hand in hand. I would expect no less from a country that has implemented major initiatives like *"Argentina Conectada"* and *"Argentina Innovadora 2020"*.

ITU and Argentina have a long and rich history of cooperation. Over the years, Argentina has made valuable contributions to ITU activities. It's fitting to be back in Buenos Aires the year we celebrate the 25th anniversary of ITU-D.

And on this occasion, we are very fortunate to have a message from His Holiness Pope Francis, who wanted to address our Conference. It was a real honour and a privilege for me to meet with the Holy Father just a few weeks ago, on September 1. His Holiness Pope Francis underlined the important role of ICTs and new technologies in bringing humanity closer together.

It was also at the heart of the video address by UN Secretary-General António Guterres, who reminded us that ICTs can empower people and transform lives for the better.

This is essential at a time when 3.9 billion people are still not connected to the Internet.

What can we do for them, especially those in the most vulnerable areas and developing countries?

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We must pursue every avenue to bring more people online. Digital inclusion can only be meaningful and effective if and when everyone feels empowered to use the technology – and when the technology is affordable, attractive and safe.

The theme of WTDC-17 – ICT for Sustainable Development Goals – is very timely because now more than ever, we need ICTs to drive development and accelerate the achievement of the SDGs' vision to leave no one behind.

What we achieve here in Buenos Aires in the next two weeks will shape not just the next four years, but the next 13 years – all the way to 2030, the year set by the international community to achieve the SDGs.

Distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen,

On this collective journey, four principles based on infrastructure, investment, innovation and inclusion (the “4 I’s”) must guide our work.

First, infrastructure is a backbone for the digital economy.

Building the next generation of ICT infrastructure will power the evolution of smart, sustainable cities and communities all around the world. We must connect not just all people but things.

Second, investment is a key enabler for sustainable development.

ICTs are enablers; they can fast-forward progress on the SDGs. But we need to create a better environment for investment. We need to develop innovative financing mechanisms and creative public-private partnerships that cut across industries and sectors – in particular in those hard-to-reach areas with no Internet access.

Third principle: innovation is a creator for opportunity.

Since the last time we met, efforts have focused on developing emerging technologies like big data, 5G, cloud computing, the Internet of Things and artificial intelligence. We've also promoted ICT entrepreneurship, facilitated digital innovation ecosystems and accelerated the digital transformation.

At the forefront of both industry disruption and economic growth, in developed and developing markets alike, entrepreneurs and SMEs are critical in this new ecosystem. They are an important source of economic growth, job creation and innovation – and we need to improve and strengthen our cooperation with them.

Finally, inclusion (the last “I”) is a foundation for prosperity and peace.

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More than two billion adults still don't have a formal bank account, most of them in developing economies. But 1.6 billion of these unbanked people have access to a mobile phone and potentially empowering digital financial services.

Digital financial inclusion is one of many examples. It can act as a multiplier for poverty eradication, job creation, gender equality and women's empowerment.

As we explore how to unleash the power of ICTs for the SDGs, let's remember what a difference a mobile phone can make in the lives of humans across the globe.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Let us remember that we are stronger together – that together we can make the most of ICTs to realize the 2030 Agenda and keep its promise of a life of dignity for all.

Let all these principles guide our work during this Conference.

It is our responsibility to bring the power of ICTs to all nations, all people and all segments of society.

Your Excellency Andrés Ibarra, Minister of Modernization,

Thank you for honouring this opening ceremony with your presence.

On behalf of all conference participants, let me close by reiterating our deepest gratitude to you, and through you, to the people of Argentina for the warm welcome and the extraordinary hospitality.

I wish you all a successful and productive WTDC-17!

Thank you for your attention.