

INTERNATIONAL TELECOMMUNICATION UNION TELECOMMUNICATION DEVELOPMENT BUREAU

WORLD TELECOMMUNICATION DEVELOPMENT CONFERENCE (WTDC-98)

Valletta, Malta, 23 March - 1 April 1998

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MINUTES

OF THE

OFFICIAL OPENING CEREMONY

Monday, 23 March 1998, at 1030 hours

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1 Welcoming remarks

- 1.1 The **Master of Ceremonies of the Conference** welcomed all participants to the Conference and to Malta, and expressed the hope that they would enjoy their stay in his country. Malta would extend every assistance to facilitate the work of the Conference and to ensure a successful outcome.
- 1.2 He invited participants to view a short video on the history of Malta, including the role of telecommunication development.

2 Address by Sir Donald Maitland

2.1 **Sir Donald Maitland** delivered the address set out in Annex 1.

3 Address by the Director of BDT

- 3.1 The **Director of BDT** welcomed all participants and expressed appreciation to the Government of Malta for their kind invitation to hold the meeting in Valletta. Many civilizations and cultures, especially from around the Mediterranean, had contributed to the development of Malta and of humankind as a whole. Such civilizations and cultures were based on communications between peoples and individuals. The world was now facing a new age of information and communication and the Conference represented a new step forward in that age as well as a recognition of experience gained thus far. ITU had made its own modest contribution to development. It had been shown that countries that were small in geographical terms could play an exemplary role in the construction and implementation of the global information infrastructure. Malta was clearly one such country - with entrepreneurial spirit, a dynamic people and far-sighted leadership. The burning question was whether it would be possible for all countries to move forward together into the twenty-first century, progressing at the same speed in their telecommunication development, and leaving no one behind. The number of participants in the Conference certainly signalled a readiness to overcome the obstacles of the past and to progress towards a better world, a world of solidarity, peace and prosperity which would enable future generations to achieve better communications, improved cultural exchange and enhanced mutual understanding.
- In his address, Sir Donald Maitland had reaffirmed the clear vision set out in 1984 in the report entitled "The Missing Link". There had been some progress since that time: in 1984 some 3 billion people had lived in areas with a telephone density no greater than 1%; in 1998 that figure had fallen to 800 million. Moreover, thanks to new technological developments, universal access to telecommunications had become technically feasible. Realistic measures for obtaining universal access in practice must now be sought. They were the subject of the World Telecommunication Development Report just issued, and should be at the heart of the Conference's discussions. The second World Telecommunication Policy Forum held in Geneva from 16 to 18 March 1998 had addressed the same topic. Industrialized countries had succeeded in operating universal access systems, often through monopolies, and on the basis of conventional accounting rate systems. The developing countries, however, were seeking to establish such systems in a quite different environment, one that was competitive and liberalized, and they would have to develop new approaches if they were to succeed. The Policy Forum had emphasized the importance of cooperation between ITU and WTO, of taking into account the impact of liberalization of telecommunication services on developing countries, which should include the clear definition of assistance programmes, and of reactivating ad hoc mechanisms, with the involvement of the Standardization Sector, notably Study Group 3, in order to accelerate progress in that area.

- 3.3 Numerous meetings and seminars held over the past three years had contributed to the preparation of the present Conference. In addition, two study groups had examined a programme of 12 Questions over the period 1994-1998 and had produced a number of Recommendations and reports which participants would consider. The Telecommunication Development Advisory Board had also made valuable contributions.
- 3.4 The Valletta Conference represented an opportunity for both continuity and innovation. It would be essential, for example, to consider such topics as the impact on employment of liberalization and privatization of the telecommunication market, the role of women in the telecommunication sector, new applications of telecommunications in education and medicine, and the impact of the content and format of new technological media on the world's children. A Valletta Action Plan would assist the developing countries in particular to tackle those new aspects of telecommunication development.
- 4 Address by the Secretary-General of ITU
- 4.1 The Secretary-General delivered the address set out in Annex 2.
- 5 Address by the Under-Secretary-General, Director-General of the United Nations Office at Geneva
- 5.1 The Under-Secretary-General, Director-General of the United Nations Office at Geneva, speaking on behalf of the Secretary-General of the United Nations, said that the Secretary-General had asked him to extend his best wishes to participants in the Conference and to pay tribute to the foresight of ITU and to the generosity of the Maltese Government and Maltacom in organizing the Conference. The Conference would determine the shape of the telecommunication industry in the next century, open channels of closer cooperation between the representatives of a wide range of cultures and regions and promote peace among nations. New ways would be discovered of making communication an agent for change and a tool for broadening horizons. The world today was an interdependent global village. The challenges facing mankind cut across all borders and involved all aspects of human security. Issues such as the environment, drugs, pandemics and sustainable development carried no passports. The United Nations was trying to send precisely that message, yet the public still thought in terms of boundaries. That was where the possibilities of communication came into play.
- 5.2 Communication technology had a great power of democratization that was waiting to be harnessed to the global struggle for peace and development. The quantity and quality of available information was changing every day, and the spread of information was making accountability a fact of life for all governments. New technologies that were simpler to use at a fraction of the cost held out the possibility of a truly global information society. The challenge now was to make information available to all. Economic inequality and perhaps even fear of freedom had for too long prevented the majority of humankind from taking advantage of the information revolution. Information technology could help ensure that young people made such knowledge their partner in the pursuit of a better future.
- 5.3 Those words by the Secretary-General underscored revolutionary changes in the information sector, changes that were particularly vivid in mobile communications. Experts predicted that within five years, 600 million mobile telephones would be in use, vying with fixed telephone lines in sheer numbers. In its economic and social consequences, the information revolution was perhaps the most important phenomenon of the end of the century. But as with any

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other technological innovation, it could be used to benefit people, or it could be abused. It offered astonishing opportunities but could create grave problems. That was why the key task today was to utilize the benefits of the information revolution fully and to avert or minimize its possible negative consequences. Universal access to resources and opportunities must be ensured in order to overcome the information technology gap and prevent information poverty. Modern telecommunication technology, especially mobile communications, could be particularly beneficial for developing countries, allowing them to build trade and accelerate economic growth. It was imperative, in the interests of global development and international stability, to ensure that everyone had the right and ability to use basic communication facilities.

- 5.4 The proposal by the Secretary-General of ITU to start a worldwide campaign to promote the right to communicate as a fundamental human right was an outstanding and timely initiative that demanded a coordinated approach from the whole international community. The United Nations was impartial and objective, and its technical assistance programmes were never conditioned by political requirements, unlike the situation in other structures. It was accordingly in the best position to grapple with the issue, to the benefit of all. The goal of providing universal access to basic communication services required close cooperation between governmental structures and the private sector. The United Nations and the private sector had worked together before, but today the cooperation had to be brought to a new level, at which the role of private enterprise in facilitating economic and social development would be fully acknowledged. Cooperation with the United Nations offered the business community numerous advantages. First, private enterprises could benefit from participation in United Nations technical assistance and development programmes. Second, businessmen could be more closely involved in international decision-making and operational activities. Lastly, private enterprises had a chance to become the driving force in improving the well-being of people.
- 5.5 In conclusion, he expressed confidence that the Conference would become a milestone in defining the contours of the global communication society of the twenty-first century and would contribute to the efforts of the international community to make the next century safer and more prosperous for all people of the world.
- **6** Address by the Prime Minister of Malta
- 6.1 The **Prime Minister of Malta**, delivered the statement set out in Annex 3.

The official opening ceremony closed at 1200 hours.

Annexes: 3

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ANNEX 1

Address by Sir Donald Maitland

Prime Minister, Your excellencies, Secretary-General, Ladies and gentlemen,

It was with special pleasure that I received the Secretary-General's invitation to take part in this important Conference, not least because it provided an opportunity to enjoy the hospitality for which Malta is famous. The name of Valletta will be added to the prestigious list of cities which have played a role in the development of world communications.

The Secretary-General suggested that my personal appreciation of the performance of ITU in responding to "The Missing Link" and my vision of the future of telecommunications would assist the work of this Conference. I will do my best to respond to that challenge. I have been helped by the opportunity I had last week in the charming environment of Gozo to learn something about the preoccupations and aspirations of the many graduates of the Telecommunications Executive Management Institute of Canada who assembled there to exchange views and experiences. Over the years this Institute has made an outstanding contribution to raising standards of management in this vital sector.

Prime Minister, in May 1983 the Administrative Council of ITU charged the Independent Commission with the task of recommending ways of stimulating the expansion of telecommunications across the world. My colleagues and I interpreted the term "telecommunications" in that mandate to mean public telephone systems, because we felt that improving and expanding these would bring the greatest benefit to the greatest number of people throughout the world. The gross imbalance in the worldwide distribution of telephones appalled us. But that was not our only concern. We knew even then that technical innovation would provide inhabitants of the industrialized world with the benefits of the emerging information society before the end of this century.

That was more than 13 years ago. The situation we face on the threshold of a new century presents us with equally daunting challenges. While the defeat of communism in 1989 liberated millions in central and eastern Europe after 40 years of tyranny, it also released national ambitions and revived ancient rivalries. We still see the tragic consequences in former Yugoslavia. The collapse of communism in Europe also destabilized the States which composed the former Soviet Union. The reunification of Germany recreated a dominant economy in the heart of Europe, but did not remove the tensions between the two halves which persist to some extent to this day.

On the world scene we hoped that the end of the cold war would enable the United Nations Security Council at long last to act as was originally intended when the Charter was approved in 1946. But, through lack of coherent thought, lack of political resolve and lack of funds, the United Nations has failed to respond effectively to man-made disasters in parts of Africa and south-east Asia. In many regions, economic recession has taken its toll. Today 15% of the world's population suffer chronic malnutrition. Population growth, especially in the developing world, has reached new levels and is

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still rising. Excessive consumption of fossil fuels, irresponsible use of chemicals and the destruction of forests threaten the environment. In many countries citizens are systematically denied their fundamental rights. International terrorism - the Third World War by another name - organized crime and traffic in drugs place public security and the well-being of the young in jeopardy.

The other side of the coin is of more direct concern to this Conference. Decades ago the late, great Koji Kobayashi, who was to play a distinguished role in the Independent Commission, determined to devote his talents and energies to promoting the marriage of the technologies of communications and the computer. The information society and, more recently, the Internet have satisfied Koji Kobayashi's ambition and, at the same time, are making a reality of Marshal McLuhan's vision of the global village.

The importance of this development cannot be exaggerated. It raises fundamental questions of concern to each one of us - questions about the international division of labour, about the structure of corporations, the future of work, the nature of human society, the individual's sense of identity, systems of governance and the meaning of sovereignty in an interdependent, interconnected world. Now this is no secret. But it is a curious fact that, at the political level throughout the world, there has been marked reluctance to address these issues. The outstanding exception is Vice-President Al Gore, who identified himself with the concept of the global information infrastructure as the foundation of the future information society when he addressed the Buenos Aires Conference in 1994.

It is legitimate - indeed essential - 13 years after the Independent Commission submitted its Report, to ask whether the link is still missing - whether the gap the members of the Commission found unacceptable has been narrowed. The answer must be that, while there has indeed been some narrowing of the gap at least in basic services, disparities persist, not only between industrialized and developing countries, but also within countries - and within regions - between urban and rural areas. And there is an additional problem. The advance of the information society and, more recently, the expansion of the Internet have led to the opening up of a new gap - between "information-rich" and "information-poor" societies. This disturbing trend seems to have been largely unaffected by other developments during the restructuring of the telecommunication sector, such as the separation of operational and regulatory functions, privatization and the liberalization of segments of the market.

Were a new Independent Commission to be established today, its mandate would be significantly more complex, but no less daunting. In its initial survey of the world scene, the new Commission would soon appreciate the main preoccupations of those who labour in this sector. The members of the Commission would become familiar with the debate over the rival merits of universal access and universal service. They would examine different approaches to the liberalization of telecommunication systems and assess the importance of competition in this process. This would lead them to compare methods of regulation. The perennial problem of funding the expansion and improvement of networks in the poorer developing countries would occupy much of their time and thought. They would wish to assess the performance to date of the Development Sector and to consider whether, and if so how, this might be enhanced. This would lead the Commission into the especially important area of partnerships between industrialized and developing countries. The Commission would be compelled early in its work to form a view on the impact of the WTO Agreement on Telecommunication Services which has recently come into force.

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These and other issues would occupy the time and thoughts of the members of any new Commission, and the international telecommunication community would hope that, in the end, they would point the way forward. However, there is no need for a new Commission. Over the next several days the knowledge, experience and wisdom assembled at this Conference will be applied to these issues and, when your work is done, the way ahead should be clearer.

Your starting point might be the Declaration issued at the conclusion of the Buenos Aires Conference. This reminded Members of ITU that telecommunications are an essential component of political, economic, social and cultural development. However, the evolving information society will either hasten the closing of the gap between developing and industrialized countries or, inadvertently, widen it. This is the challenge of today and you may well consider that it would be right for ITU to ensure that the malign as well as the benign implications of the information society are understood by the Member States you represent *at the highest political level*.

As regards the contribution ITU itself can make to confronting this challenge, you may conclude that the best course is to apply the long-standing military principle of reinforcing success. Since its establishment in 1992, the Development Sector has done sterling work. It is well understood that the circumstances of each developing country are unique. This means that progress can be made only case by case. For this reason you may take the view that the scope of partnerships, or alliances as they are sometimes called, might be widened and that they should embrace not only financial cooperation, but also the sharing of knowledge and experience and the transfer of expertise. You may also conclude that these partnerships will not be productive if they are short term; the experts concerned do need adequate time to learn and understand the specifics of the market so that they may offer appropriate guidance to officials and operators in the host country. The fact that the resources available to the Development Sector are limited suggests that further encouragement should be given to the private sector to play an increasingly important role in this field. Discussion of this aspect of relationships with developing countries may lead you to stress the importance of the training of managers and other senior staff and to point to the substantial benefits which have been shown to flow from this.

Then there is the range of funding issues. One such which calls for close attention is the impact of the process of liberalization on accounting rate systems. In some cases this could inadvertently prejudice revenue flows and, in consequence, the prospects for investment in developing countries. So you may consider in this context that ITU's admirable programme could be strengthened by new emphasis on regulatory and commercial strategies to improve revenue and teledensity, particularly by providing targeted advice to specific countries.

There is also the question of universal access which, now that the United Nations has enunciated a right to communicate, is no longer seen as a technical issue for ITU alone, but one of high political importance. Until now it has been assumed that the shift from state-owned to privately-owned systems would lead to more rapid development of the network as prices fall. In many cases this has proved to be true, but there have been notable exceptions where privatization has not been followed by the introduction of competition. In any case, you will wish to examine this issue in the light of the recent WTO Agreement on Telecommunication Services. I personally am confident that this Agreement will soon prove its worth. Renato Ruggiero, the Director-General of WTO, was right when he said that, since it will make access to knowledge easier, the Agreement "gives nations, large and small, rich and poor, better opportunities to prepare for the twenty-first century". That surely is a good enough reason for developing countries to subscribe to it. But there is another

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reason. By openly undertaking the obligations the Agreement contains, in whatever way and at whatever moment is most opportune, developing countries can, at a stroke, enhance their attractiveness to potential investors with an assurance of regulatory certainty.

Some here today may recall the comment in the introduction to "The Missing Link" on the disparity in the distribution of telecommunication services across the world: "Neither in the name of common humanity nor on grounds of common interest is such a disparity acceptable". Prime Minister, the striking technological advances of the past decade have made the elimination of this disparity a practical possibility. The funds can be secured; after all, compared with the construction of roads, railways and airports, the expansion and improvement of telecommunications are cheap. The technology is proven and versatile. The expertise and skills are readily available. There is a wealth of relevant experience to draw on. What is at stake - what is within our grasp - is beyond price.

As we leave behind this wonderful and dreadful twentieth century, universal access to one of the most valuable products of human ingenuity could at last link members of the human race across the globe. All that stands in the way is reluctance to appreciate the significance of either the challenge, or the opportunity, and above all, lack of political will.

I for one hope that ITU, in its wisdom, will feel able in the course of this year to adopt the measures which are needed to clear the way ahead.

Thank you.

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ANNEX 2

Address by the Secretary-General of ITU

Mr. Prime Minister, Honourable Ministers, Excellencies, Distinguished delegates, Ladies and gentlemen, Dear friends.

On behalf of the members of ITU, it is my great pleasure to thank the Government and people of Malta for having invited us to be your guests for the next 10 days, and to celebrate the second World Telecommunication Development Conference with you.

Mr. Prime Minister, you - and we - have a lot to celebrate. As much as any country, Malta has shown the world the power of telecommunications to help people transcend the apparent limitations imposed by the physical realities of space and time. With will, imagination, enterprise and intelligence, small nations can become world telecommunication leaders, as you have done. Over the next few days, let us rejoice in your success, and learn all that we can from your experience.

But even as we enjoy your hospitality, let us not forget that we, the members and staff of ITU, have much to celebrate too. The four years since the previous Conference in Buenos Aires have seen remarkable developments in our field, and significant progress in our Union. Although normally a cautious man, I am tempted to say that a telecommunication revolution is in progress, and that the people assembled today in this hall are among its leaders. This may surprise at least some of you. After all, telecommunication revolutions rarely start in beautiful buildings, like this Mediterranean Conference Centre. Instead, they usually begin in other places - in a dust-free lab, with the production of a more powerful microprocessor, in the mind of a software genius, with a "killer application", in a corporate boardroom with a mega-merger, in a parliament or court with a new policy and regulation, in late-night negotiations leading to a free-trade agreement. As far as I know, none of these items is on the agenda of this Conference. So how can we begin a revolution here, in Valletta?

In the four years since Buenos Aires, we have seen plenty of revolutions of the kind I just mentioned. We will continue to see their effects for many years to come. But in my mind, they are no longer revolutions. The telecommunications world has changed - and it has changed forever. It is not possible to go back, even if we wanted to. So what is the best way forward? This is the question we should focus on over the next ten days.

In trying to answer this question, we must begin by taking account of all of the changes that have taken place in telecommunications since Buenos Aires. Some of these changes have been in technology - most notably in the introduction of new satellite systems that will make basic telecommunication services universally available. Other changes have been in services and applications. Here, the Internet has been the outstanding development. It has redefined our notion of what telecommunications are all about. Still other changes have taken place in policy and regulation. Whether at the national, regional or global level, telecommunications are beginning to be seen as a business, not just as a public service.

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We must review the work we have done in the light of these developments. When we look at the balance sheet of the last four years, I am confident we will find that our successes far outweigh our failures, and that the youngest Sector of the Union is maturing quickly into a healthy adult. However, the purpose of this Conference is not to congratulate ourselves on a job well done. The real challenge we face is to project a future which is not simply the sum of the trends that have transformed telecommunications - but a future which moves the world of telecommunications to an even higher level of development - a future which adds human value to these trends - a future which once again transforms how the world views the telecommunications industry - and how the telecommunications industry views the world. This is the revolution we must plan, together. Every revolution needs a slogan, a credo, a manifesto - and the Valletta revolution is no exception. In the next ten days, I know you will find the right words to express your vision of the future, and to lead you in your quest for more human telecommunication development. To help you begin this search, let me repeat the belief that has guided me over the past eight years, the belief that has served as my revolutionary credo and my moral compass during my tenure as ITU Secretary-General. I believe that the right to communicate should be recognized as a fundamental human right in the global information society of the twenty-first century.

I cannot of course claim to have invented the idea that there should be a "right to communicate". The origins of this idea go back more than two millennia, to the civilizations that developed on the shores of the Mediterranean Sea. Since Malta is the crossroads of the Mediterranean world, and since ancient splendours are still present here, we should listen carefully for echoes of the past, even as we go about our business of designing the future. The idea that the right to communicate is a fundamental human right was given modern expression by Woodrow Wilson who, as you may know, was the founder of the multilateral system and a man whose memory is still very much alive in Geneva, the seat of ITU.

A decade and a half ago, at the beginning of the telecommunication revolution, the right to communicate was given practical definition by another outstanding public servant - Sir Donald Maitland - who has honoured us with his presence today. As we seek to define our vision, we should draw inspiration from all these voices, as well as from the general example - although probably not the specific vision - of the knights who originally built this magnificent site, as part of their quest.

But our work should not only be serious -- it should also be fun. As is my practice at every major conference of the Union, I have tried to make an appropriate and inspirational acronym from the name of the venue. Let me close these remarks by offering this modest contribution to the conference proceedings.

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ANNEX 3

Address by the Prime Minister of Malta

Secretary-General of the United Nations, Secretary-General of ITU, Dr. Pekka Tarjanne, Ministers, Deputy Secretary-General of ITU, Excellencies, Ladies and gentlemen,

On behalf of the people and the Government of Malta, I welcome you to our country to participate in the second World Telecommunication Development Conference. We are honoured that you chose Malta as the venue for this prestigious Conference, which brings together high-level decision makers and representatives of governments, regional and international telecommunication organizations, multilateral and bilateral funding agencies, manufacturers, operators and service providers. Together we shall set the agenda and guidelines for global telecommunication development in the coming four-year cycle.

In the era of cyberspace and advanced technologies, the catalytic effect telecommunications have on a country's economic, social and cultural development cannot be minimized. Here in Malta, we have the opportunity to give tangible proof of this concept by developing action-oriented strategies that will be of substantial benefit to all humanity in the coming millennium. Among such strategies, I can mention sector reform, privatization, market liberalization, the adoption of new technologies and a commitment to infrastructural investment. Without any doubt, this process requires the full and coordinated support of governments, international organizations, funding agencies and service providers that have the responsibility for the formulation of short, medium and long-term programmes that will include the formation of international joint ventures, corporate planning and new business development.

In the current political environment, and with the new threats and challenges that have followed the end of the cold war, we need to use this telecommunication advancement to the best of our abilities and capabilities. Through electronic crime control, tele-education, telemedicine, telecommunication and information technology, we can provide effective tools to combat terrorism, illegal migration, illicit trade in drugs and armaments and money laundering, and above all to strengthen international efforts to eradicate poverty. It is a recognized fact that these emerging phenomena are the result of political tensions, social inequalities, demographic imbalances, prejudices, misgivings and lack of trust. We find these problems in many geographical zones, including the Mediterranean regions. We trust that in the coming years, telecommunication and information technology will help countries cope more effectively with these problems and challenges.

For many countries the liberalization and privatization of the telecommunication sector continues to be a paradigm shift in culture. In the meantime, those countries that had the courage and determination to take such a step are realizing that the benefits which were being predicted as the results of their decisions are being achieved. In Malta, a telecommunication regulator has been appointed, with responsibility for sector policy and control and with particular emphasis on technical, consumer, competition and licensing issues. The former Telemalta Corporation, which

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was a fully government-owned corporation with regulatory and significant monopoly powers, has been converted into a company named "Maltacom p.l.c.", to function as Malta's incumbent telecommunication operator while the Government will retain a 60% shareholding in the company.

I realize that ITU is restructuring itself through its strategic plan to meet the challenges of the new millennium and aligning its culture to changing world needs, rapidly changing technologies, transformation of the regulatory and competitive environments and the phenomenon of globalization. This much-needed restructuring is being achieved within the context of the moral authority that comes from its affiliation with the United Nations. The latter, in particular, explains the rationale of the Development Bureau's high concern with getting telecommunication investment in less developed countries to stimulate economic and social development. In this regard, Malta welcomes the Development Bureau's evolving network of offices and associates that take it closer to the administrations under most pressure to reform, by advising them how to meet privatization and deregulation challenges as well as in the organization of assistance to meet their specific needs.

This international conference has a wealth of material to work on, including the Resolutions, Recommendations and deliberations of the second cycle of regional telecommunication development conferences held in Abidjan and Beirut, as well as the four regional preparatory meetings and the inputs from the Telecommunication Development Advisory Board. Their work will be considered in the light of the concept of sustainable development emphasized by the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro and its Agenda 21. I augur that the conclusions of this Conference will enable ITU to move another step forward in the dissemination of its vital message to political decision makers by highlighting the valid contribution which telecommunications can make to the economic, social and cultural advancement of our societies and to the democratic political development of each and every one of us.

ITU has a special if not unique role to play in the coming years, particularly in advising policy makers on the options available in tailoring policies and regulatory structures to fit a country's particular requirements. Not only that, but it can also play a creative catalytic role that will project the telecommunication sector towards the achievement of wider and more rewarding frontiers for present and future generation. I am sure that with the full support of the World Telecommunication Development Conference and the forthcoming Plenipotentiary Conference, ITU will face this challenge with determination. I am convinced that your concerted endeavours during these coming days will be translated into meaningful and innovative measures that will have a lasting and indelible impact on the lives of our citizens as we together embark on an interesting and challenging journey into twenty-first century.

Thanking you for your attention, I wish you every success in your work.