



INTERNATIONAL TELECOMMUNICATION UNION
TELECOMMUNICATION DEVELOPMENT BUREAU

**WORLD TELECOMMUNICATION DEVELOPMENT
CONFERENCE (WTDC-98)**

Valletta, Malta, 23 March - 1 April 1998

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PLENARY MEETING

MINUTES

OF THE

FOURTH PLENARY MEETING

Tuesday, 24 March 1998, at 1410 hours

Chairman: Mr. E. BORG (Malta)

Subjects discussed

Documents

- | | | |
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| 1 | Strategic session: "Telecommunication development in the world: Trends and strategies" (continued) | - |
| 2 | Basic Conference documents | 2, 3, 4 |
| 3 | Report on the implementation of the 12 programmes of the Buenos Aires Action Plan and BDT operational activities from 1994 to 1997 | 5, 64, 87 |

1 Strategic session: "Telecommunication development in the world: Trends and strategies" (continued)

1.1 The **Deputy Minister for Planning and Development of the Islamic Republic of Iran** said that liberalization and privatization were the logical consequence of telecommunication development and called for approaches to those processes which were conducive to a harmonious world telecommunication network that served the interests of all. That goal was to be achieved through multilateral cooperation and not through a one-way flow of information. The network should channel the accumulated store of knowledge that was the common heritage of mankind in such a way as to promote peace and mutual understanding and not to establish technological and cultural ascendancy. ITU could play a catalytic role if all parties invested the requisite effort and willpower in the enterprise. It was to be hoped that the current Conference would contribute to the attainment of that objective.

1.2 The **Minister of Information, Posts and Telecommunications of Zimbabwe** expressed the hope that the Valletta Conference would come up with a programme of action based on an assessment of the successes and failures of the Buenos Aires Conference. Mindful of the key role of telecommunications in socio-economic development, Zimbabwe had pursued a policy of liberalization and restructuring of the sector which had led to a marked development in basic services, generating in turn a very strong surge in demand - hence the need for innovative solutions. As regards new services, the Internet was developing rapidly and the expansion of cellular telephone services had exceeded all forecasts. Looking to the future, Zimbabwe had drawn up a strategy aimed at promoting universal access to telephone and Internet communications during the first decade of the next millennium. Zimbabwe also attached great importance to development of the African basic services capacity, and the African group would submit a draft resolution to that end.

1.3 The **Director-General of International Affairs of the Ministry of Post, Telegraph and Telephone of Saudi Arabia** said that telecommunication development in his country had taken a qualitative leap forward, spurred by the fact that, as in other Gulf countries, the economic environment had always been market-based. Saudi Arabia was completing the process of privatization of its telecommunication sector. The telecommunication network was already developed and the third extension phase was to result in the installation of over 1.5 million new lines, to which should be added GSM systems. His country was also cooperating with ITU at all levels and hoped that the Union would adopt decisions at the Conference that would assist the developing countries in expanding their infrastructure. In a context of globalization and privatization, the funds needed for telecommunication development were to be found in the private sector, so that it would be necessary to forge partnerships.

1.4 The **Chef de Cabinet of the Vice-President of the European Commission** said that in 1996 the EEC had embarked on a process of joint identification with the developing countries of mutually beneficial possibilities offered by the global information society. The Commission had also allocated a substantial volume of funds to the restructuring of operators in the countries concerned. The problems of the information society were by definition global and could only be resolved at that level. Valuable work had been done in such organizations as WTO, OECD, WIPO and ITU, but also under bilateral agreements. For its part, the European Commission had looked into such matters as taxation and customs duties, responsibility, respect for private life, intellectual property, illicit or harmful content, security and authentication. The first stage involved gathering all guidelines already established through international agreements as the basis for possible subsequent identification of major priority issues regarding appropriate machinery for addressing

such problems and bodies capable of implementing and securing respect for the guidelines. With a view to developing such a coherent and global approach, the Commission proposed that all commercial partners, international organizations, governments and industry should work together to develop an international telecommunication charter through an international conference at which agreement on how to address the major problems raised by the new telecommunication environment would be worked out.

1.5 The **representative of Libya** said that the statement by the representative of the European Commission summed up the basic goal of the Conference and could be viewed as a broad outline of telecommunication development, especially in Africa.

1.6 The **President of Worldspace** said that a society's development could be measured in terms of its access to information but also in terms of the technology at its command. In one part of the world, microprocessors, optical fibres and satellites had brought about an information revolution, while in the developing world, millions of people were still living in the agricultural age. Technological convergence could offer those people a direct passage from the agrarian society to the "signal culture". It was possible through digital coding to combine the computer and telephone to produce a phenomenon, the Internet, which was superior to the sum of its two components. But it was a synthesis that called for private investment, a regulatory framework, human capital and the ability to adapt to change. The information revolution was nevertheless accessible to the entire developing world. Worldspace was already at work, creating new electronic media that would permit direct transmission to portable and handheld receivers. It would shortly launch three satellites designed to extend that service to Africa, the Middle East, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean. Such a system could be used to transmit text, data and images in conformity with ITU-R Recommendations. Worldspace was therefore endeavouring to make the most deprived regions of the world "info-rich", a priority that the Conference would do well to endorse.

1.7 The **President of WorldTel** said that his company had been established to carry out projects in developing countries. With regard to general trends in the telecommunication environment, he expressed the view that privatization, however necessary, was being conducted on a scale and at a pace that were excessive and it was often equated with the mere sale of access to foreign operators. Privatization must be planned and ITU could be of assistance in that regard. The question of the regulatory framework was invariably viewed from a purely national angle, which was often too restrictive. ITU should play a role in that context too, expanding the regulatory framework at the subregional level when it was more appropriate. There was a general tendency to give precedence to vectors and equipment over content, whereas it was in the area of content that the developing countries had the most creative potential. Practical plans for content creation by developing countries must therefore be prepared. The Valletta Action Plan must also contain a specific programme for effective implementation of decisions, which remained nothing but slogans for the time being. Lastly, while telecommunication technology was by definition global, frontier-bound visions were a permanent feature of any discussion of the subject.

1.8 The **Minister of Communication of Senegal** said that telecommunications was the sector in which the relationship between growth and development could be of the most universal benefit. However, the sector could not develop without communication and information technology, and that called for often far-reaching reforms, which Senegal had undertaken by liberalizing and privatizing its telecommunications, involving the private sector in the management of the main operator. The same applied to most African countries, and Africa as a whole must play an active part in the revolution. For the first time in human history, all protagonists had the opportunity to

conduct a revolution jointly and to share the benefits, a project which called for cooperation and solidarity but also justice. It followed that whenever a decision was made, the particular circumstances and interests of everyone concerned should be taken into account.

1.9 The **Director of Communications of the Ministry of Public Works, Transport and Communications of Haiti** said that irreversible technological development called for a process of legislative reform followed by the extension of basic services, particularly in the least developed countries. Achievements in that regard, however, had fallen short of expectations. In Haiti, reform of the regulatory framework had scarcely begun, the density of services was the lowest in the region, the State monopoly continued to exist and accounting rate reform was making the problem worse by depriving the national operator of its main source of revenue. As time was running out and financial resources were in short supply, ITU must shoulder its responsibilities and take steps to promote the harmonious development of the telecommunication sector.

2 Basic Conference documents (Documents 2, 3 and 4)

2.1 Introducing the Buenos Aires Declaration and Action Plan (Document 2), the **Director of BDT** said that Document 2, submitted for information, would assist the Conference in formulating and drafting the Valletta Declaration and Action Plan and in assessing progress since the Buenos Aires Conference. In reply to a question from the **representative of Germany**, he said that the work of ITU-D Study Groups 1 and 2 would be considered respectively by Committees A and B of the Conference and would not, unless there was a proposal to the contrary, be discussed in Plenary.

2.2 Speaking on behalf of the Working Group of the Plenary on the Action Plan, the **representative of Syria** said he shared the view that Document 2 would facilitate the task of preparing the Valletta Action Plan and requested that all relevant proposals submitted in Plenary be referred directly to the Working Group whose members were not always in a position to follow the Plenary proceedings.

2.3 The request was **noted**.

2.4 Introducing the report on the African Regional Telecommunication Development Conference (AF-RTDC-96) (Document 3) and the report on the Regional Telecommunication Development Conference for the Arab States (AR-RTDC-96) (Document 4), the **Director of BDT** said that the Conference must subsequently take the results of the two regional conferences into consideration when it set about identifying the activities, programmes and priorities that would constitute the Valletta Action Plan and that the BDT secretariat had prepared draft priorities for the ITU Development Sector (Document 71), which could serve as a basis for ITU-D strategic planning.

2.5 The **representative of Saudi Arabia**, supported by the **representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran**, vigorously stressed the importance of regional telecommunication development conferences, given the extent to which, over and above their immediate results, they enabled the countries concerned to better plan their network and to specify procedures for its funding. Noting that regional conferences were planned for Latin America and Europe, particularly Eastern Europe, he urged ITU, through its Regional Offices and in collaboration with relevant financial institutions, to make every effort to promote that type of conference as a vital link between developing and developed countries.

2.6 The **representative of Syria** endorsed the previous statement and added that many proposals submitted to the Conference, for instance those of his own country (Document 33), were based on resolutions and recommendations of the regional conferences. In conclusion, he expressed the hope that ITU would continue to mobilize the resources needed to convene regional conferences.

2.7 The **representative of Lebanon**, associating himself with the two preceding speakers, noted that regional conferences were useful not only in terms of the quality of the discussions but also and above all in terms of the concrete action to which they gave rise. For example, BDT had given practical assistance to the countries of the Arab States region in preparing specifications or master plans and in setting up infrastructure. He added that a follow-up meeting on AR-RTDC-96 held on 24 and 25 February had proved highly productive, confirming the importance of the role to be played by BDT in organizing meetings of that kind. Lebanon would submit a document on the subject on behalf of the Arab States.

2.8 The **observer for the Palestinian Authority** supported the previous statements and drew attention in particular to Resolution 4 of AR-RTDC-96.

2.9 The **representative of Senegal** endorsed the statements by the previous speakers with respect to Africa, adding that it was now generally accepted that customers' real needs must be taken into account, with ITU acting as service provider for the international community. Regional conferences were an ideal forum for pinpointing those needs. In conclusion, he urged that the consideration of requests and proposals put forward by regional conferences should not be confined to the Plenary but extended to the committees.

2.10 The **representative of the Philippines** said that world telecommunication development conferences were the culmination of lengthy preparatory work involving the participation of all the regions, and that the resolutions and recommendations they approved called for ITU support. The international decisions taken on such important issues as financing or numbering should be reflected in the countries through regional conferences and regional meetings, like the one held in Manila for Asia and the Pacific, and through national coordinators. In view of the acknowledged value and usefulness of regional conferences, they should receive greater direct support from ITU.

2.11 The **representative of Saudi Arabia** emphasized how important it was to implement the resolutions adopted by regional telecommunication development conferences and asked for a progress report on the measures taken under Resolution 4 of AR-RTDC-96 (Beirut).

2.12 The **Director of BDT** said that AR-RTDC-96 Resolution 4 was based on the provisions of Resolution 32 of the Plenipotentiary Conference (Kyoto, 1994). The Kyoto Plenipotentiary Conference had decided that two regional development conferences should be held, which was why BDT had organized a larger number of colloquia on trade, finance and tariffs in the different regions in order to prepare the subjects discussed at the conferences more effectively. He was convinced that the various meetings and preparatory activities that had taken place would facilitate WTDC-98's work. Finally, having pointed out that no financial provision was made for the implementation of decisions and resolutions of development conferences, he said that needs at both the world and regional levels should be reflected with precise figures in the Valletta Action Plan.

2.13 The **representative of Greece**, referring to Documents 3 and 4, wondered whether the resolutions adopted at the conferences in question only related to the regions concerned or had broader scope.

2.14 The **Director of BDT** said that a number of resolutions and decisions had been adopted with the regions in mind, but some of the issues were common to all the regions. The fact that the resolutions of development conferences did not have treaty status in no way diminished their importance.

3 Report on implementation of the 12 programmes of the Buenos Aires Action Plan and BDT operational activities from 1994 to 1997 (Documents 5, 64, 87)

3.1 The **Chief of the Policies, Strategies and Programming Department**, introducing Document 87, said that under Programme 1 of the Buenos Aires Action Plan BDT had published a number of documents on national telecommunication policies and strategies, regulation worldwide and telecommunication financing, as well as organizing a number of round tables and seminars on those subjects. Under Programme 2 (Human resources management and development), apart from the Mandevtel project, BDT had set up a teleproject and a virtual training centre and provided distance-learning courses over the Web. Standards and guidelines on HRM/HRD had been drawn up, and from the TELECOM surplus BDT aimed to establish a global telecommunication university. Under Programme 3, guidelines and training material had been prepared. Under Programme 4 (Development of maritime radiocommunication services), the formulation of master plans for the maritime radiocommunication sector should be pursued, with the key aim of enabling administrations to meet their international obligations in connection with the GMDSS. Under Programme 5, regional courses had been organized for the PLANITU software, and several pilot projects had been conducted. Under Programme 6 (Frequency management), the BASMS system had been developed and should be available in three languages, and several seminars were to be organized in different regions. Under Programme 7, guidelines had been drawn up and seminars had been organized for the improvement of maintenance. Under Programme 8, a handbook had been drafted and several seminars organized on the subject of mobile cellular radiotelephone systems. Under Programme 9, BDT was contributing to the establishment of community telecentres and the use of space communication technology for remote areas. Under Programme 10 a number of practical handbooks and guides had been developed and seminars had been organized on the question of broadcasting infrastructure. Under Programme 11 (Information services), a database of indicators was now available online. Last but not least, under Programme 12 BDT was participating in various pilot projects on the development of telematics and computer networks.

3.2 The **Chief of the Field Operations Department**, introducing Document 64, said that it contained the report on activities undertaken by BDT from 1994 to 1997 in the areas of promotion of development of national networks, strengthening of the technical and administrative capacity of national telecommunication organizations, and development of human resources in the sector. In the past, the bulk of such activities had been funded by UNDP and the World Bank, but since those institutions had changed their priorities, BDT was obliged to mobilize funds from other sources. A detailed breakdown by region indicated that the number of projects had declined everywhere except for Latin America, and that significant funding problems had been encountered, particularly in Africa. The Council of the Union had therefore allocated a sum of US\$ 17.5 million from TELECOM surpluses for projects specifically intended for Africa. During the period 1994-1997, BDT had implemented about 470 projects in all regions representing almost US\$ 100 million, trained some 2 250 specialists, carried out 170 human resources development activities and organized a large number of seminars and workshops both in the area of training and in that of financing and mobilization of resources. Lastly, having drawn the attention of participants to the

two annexes to Document 64, he noted that a BDT activity of special interest to the least developed countries, namely ad hoc assistance, had been maintained despite the fact that it had not been included in the Buenos Aires Action Plan.

3.3 The **representative of Benin**, introducing Document 5, said that, although progress had been made, emphasis must still be placed on continuous training of telecommunication staff in the developing countries and on providing support for those countries, particularly in the area of frequency management and improvement of maintenance. To that end, he drew the participants' attention to the various suggestions contained in the document submitted by his country.

3.4 The **representative of the Philippines** said that, notwithstanding the economic boom in her country, the Philippines was suffering the full impact of the financial crisis in South East Asia and wished to be considered again for the fellowships granted to LDCs to facilitate their participation in the various activities organized by BDT. Her request was supported by the **representative of Thailand**.

3.5 The **representative of Syria**, commenting on Document 87, said that some documents such as those on sources of financing or software (BASMS for example) must be regularly updated to ensure that they remained valid. Referring to Document 64, he said that ITU-D must continue to provide emergency assistance, which was a vital service and the very raison d'être of the Development Sector.

3.6 The **representative of Kenya** welcomed the BDT guidelines on the improvement of maintenance but regretted that, given the shortage of software engineers and specialists in developing countries, ITU-D had failed to give attention to software maintenance.

3.7 The **representative of Libya**, stressing the importance of telecommunications for medicine, education, trade and industry, said that rural telecommunications should not be neglected in the context of overall development and that ITU had an important role to play in the area of convergence of information technology and telecommunications. Furthermore, countries should study the impact on their telecommunications of the agreements resulting from the GATS and possibly amend their telecommunication regulations.

3.8 The **representative of Ethiopia** said that while, according to Document 64, LDCs in Africa had benefited from fellowships and vocational training meetings, very few projects had been carried out on their behalf. He added that the Conference should take steps to ensure that the decisions taken at regional conferences were carried into effect.

3.9 The **Director of BDT** said that many subjects covered in the documents would be re-examined in the various committees. With regard to assistance to LDCs, it was admittedly a weak point in ITU-D programmes and a reason, in his view, for establishing a specific programme for those countries.

The meeting rose at 1710 hours.

The Secretary:
H. PIETERSE

The Chairman:
E. BORG