INTERNATIONAL TELECOMMUNICATION UNION
TELECOMMUNICATION DEVELOPMENT BUREAU

WORLD TELECOMMUNICATION DEVELOPMENT CONFERENCE (WTDC-98)

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PLENARY MEETING

Syrian Arab Republic

CONTRIBUTION TO WTDC-98

ADDRESSING THE PROBLEM OF THE YEAR 2000 WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK
OF THE TELECOMMUNICATION DEVELOPMENT BUREAU (BDT)

1   Definition of the problem

When developing programs, in all electronic systems including computers and software, whether pre-established or newly added, programmers have considered that a year is composed of two boxes only. The reason may have been that no confusion was likely in the significance of these two boxes, in addition to the limited memory available and the importance of leaving most of the memory for the needs of performance and operation; another reason may have been that programmers did not expect their programs to last until today or that they did not pay attention to the related future problem.

With the approach of the year 2000 and as the years pass successively (95, 96, 97, 98, 99, 00), the program will indicate the year 2000 in two boxes only, as if the year in question is 1900. This may cause operational problems and may eventually lead to total, partial or marginal interruption that may occur in computers handling network management or control, safety systems, orbital position systems, satellite telecommand and tracking, etc.

2   Particularity of the problem

a)   For the first time in history and without prior experience, we face the question of a fixed date that cannot be postponed (i.e. 1.1.2000).

b)   The problem involves large amounts of work, is not transparent and affects a wide range of equipment.

c)   The problem is common in the field of activity concerned and at the national, regional and international levels.

3   Proposal

The problem will be more serious in the developing countries that do not manufacture equipment and that lack the expertise and experts available in the advanced countries. In addition to the importance the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) places on this issue through Study Group 2 (SG 2) and the Year 2000 Task Force, it seems, therefore, necessary to establish a body within the framework of the Telecommunication Development Bureau (BDT). The terms of reference of such an international telecommunication body would be as follows:

a)   To follow the problem of the year 2000, and investigate ways of addressing it on a worldwide basis through individual or collective efforts within the framework of the studies conducted by the International Telecommunication Union and its Members.

b)   To inform the Members of the Union of all the related results.

c)   To provide the developing countries with the necessary support, through measures such as:

–   provision of advice and consultations;

–   provision of experts;

–   organization of workshops.

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