ITU-T Workshop on Standardization in E-Health
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Opening Speech by Mr. Hamadoun I. Touré, Director BDT

Dear Mr. Houlin Zhao, Director Telecommunication Standardization Bureau (TSB),
Dr. Andrei Issakov, Coordinator, Health Facilities and Service Outcome, Department of Health Service Provision, Evidence and Information for Policy Cluster, World Health Organization,
Esteemed Ladies and Gentlemen!

I am honoured to be invited by the workshop organizing committee to address you here at this so challenging for ITU event.

Within ITU, and more particularly at BDT, we have deployed number of Telemedicine projects for the developing countries, like Ukraine, Malta, Georgia, Myanmar, Bhutan, Uganda, Senegal, Mozambique and Nicaragua.

We are in the process of activating new projects for Bulgaria, Zimbabwe, Guinea, Mauritania, Haiti, Rwanda, Ethiopia, just to name few.

All of them have one common feature: they are pilot projects of small scale.

We wanted to test in real environment the Telemedicine applications ant it was worth the time, resources and energy devoted. The users are happy and looking forward to expand their Telemedicine projects, interconnecting at least all regional hospitals with referral center.

Our members continue to request us to assist in further deployment of larger and bigger Telemedicine projects.

Last year, at the World Telecommunication Development Conference (WTDC-02) in Istanbul such multinational project perspective was discussed at high level and the Conference mandated us to widen the horizon of the Telemedicine applications within ITU Membership.

However the experience acquired showed that the level of technological development is still at the "medieval" age. All vendors promote TM systems of propriatory nature and unfortunately, as feudal cities/states in the medieval time, they are locked inside with almost no interoperability.

We believe that unless interoperability aspects iron-out, there would be little hope in reality to deploy large-scale interoperating systems for Telemedicine or if you wish, E-Health applications.

This is the reason why we looked at the right point where such strategic objective could be pursued with real chances for success.

Two enthusiasts for Telemedicine applications, namely Prof. Leonid Androuchko, Rapporteur of ITU-D Study Group 2 Question 14/2 on E-Health applications and Mr. Petko Kantchev, Focal Point for the Telemedicine in ITU, have advocated and promoted the idea to create the necessary environment bringing together the industry, users, telecommunication operators and health constituency and discuss interoperability issues. They also proposed to target the Study Group 16 of the Telecommunication Standardization Sector, dealing with all aspects of the multimedia standardization.

In my view, the idea deserved wholehearted support and backed it up.

The excellent cooperation between the Telecommunication Standardization Bureau, steered by my good friend Houlin Zhao, and BDT at both executive and professional level enabled elaboration of this attractive idea at practical level.

We have also got the enthusiastic support of Mr. Probst, the Chairman of ITU-T Study Group 16.

The Workshop Organizing Committee attracted interest amongst Telemedicine and E-Health associations, academia, industry, financial circles, WHO, European Commission, European Space Agency, etc.

This visionary idea has resulted in the Workshop of today.

We look forward to establishing an example of partnership among health constituency, industry, telecommunication operators within Study Group 16 of ITU-T, enabling the setting-up of a framework for E-Health related standards leading to worldwide interoperability of E-Health applications in perfect harmony with the output of other standard setting bodies.

Yesterday it was too early, tomorrow it will be too late. The positive action is needed now!

I believe that E-Health interoperability standards will enable the conceptualization and deployment of large scale E-Health projects. It will blow away the conservatism of today and the opportunities offered by the merger of medical science and ICT will enhance the health services to be rendered to the citizens of the world.

We look forward to the successful outcome of this workshop!

Thank you all of you E-Health pioneers for joining us in Geneva!