Second Meeting of the Preparatory Committee (PrepCom-2)
of the Tunis Phase of WSIS

Opening remarks

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Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to extend a heartfelt welcome to you all to Geneva and to this 2nd PrepCom of the Tunis Phase of the world summit on the Information Society.

I would also like to express my most sincere thanks to the Director-General of UNOG, Mr. Ordzhonikidze for his very generous and invaluable support in providing facilities and services for this PrepCom.

In just a few months, Heads of State and Government, Business Leaders and other opinion-formers will be gathering in Tunis for the Summit. So this preparatory meeting is very crucial.

By next week, we should have concluded our discussions on the plan for implementation of the Geneva Action Plan and the financial mechanisms for ICT development. And we should use the time to make sure that we not only share the same goals, but that these goals are both ambitious and achievable.

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Ladies and gentlemen,
Sometimes, as we focus on ICTs, we can neglect something very important.

When the recent Indian Ocean tsunami struck, it soon became clear that there were insufficient warning systems in place.

There would have been plenty of time to warn people and save lives, because the tsunami hit some hours after the earthquake took place. With an effective warning system, more lives could have been saved.

In the aftermath of the tsunami, governments, international organizations and NGOs have been working together, right down to the grassroots level, to tackle the crisis. They have been looking at how to avoid a repeat of this catastrophe.

Indeed, disaster prevention by early-warning and monitoring systems was one of the key items agreed in the WSIS Plan of Action.

But even the most efficient technology in the world is useless without the will and readiness of people and governments to use it.

Recently, I read an article about a man in Indonesia who was in his car as the earthquake struck. He instinctively felt something was wrong and switched on his radio. But instead of news, all he heard for hours was music and chatter. It was only many hours afterward that news of the tsunami catastrophe came to him over the radio.

For me, this story illustrates how technologies, like radio, could have helped limit the damage. Radio sets and broadcasting system were there, but the readiness to use them was lacking.

Technology leads to real progress only when fully supported by people, not to mention governments and industry.

This is why I am pleased to announce that ITU will lead a new global effort to establish new initiatives and scale up existing ones to connect all communities by 2015.

This new multi-stakeholder initiative is called "Partners to Connect the World". It will bring together private sector companies, governments, NGOs and international organizations in a joint effort to address the global digital divide. There are many exciting projects already underway in this area, including a number in which ITU is an active contributor. "Partners to connect the World" will not be another

project. Rather, it will be a complementary, high profile, global platform for partners to promote existing projects, launch new partnerships and share experiences and best practices. We will build this new initiative over the coming months, and we will take our first major step towards connecting the world at a high level gathering of partners at the Tunis Summit.

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I firmly believe that together we can achieve the goals we have set to build an inclusive and equitable Information Society.

I wish you every success at this PrepCom

Thank you