

Statement  
by  
H.E. Philippos W/Mariam,  
State Minister of Infrastructure,  
Ethiopia

at the  
ITU Plenipotentiary Conference  
23 September – 18 October 2002  
Marrakesh, Morocco

Mr. Chairman,  
Excellencies,  
Distinguished Delegates,  
Ladies and Gentlemen

First of all, it gives me great pleasure to join other speakers in congratulating you, Mr. Chairman, on your election to the chair. I would also like to thank the Government and people of the Kingdom of Morocco, and in particular the people of Marrakesh, for hosting this Conference and for the warm welcome and hospitality extended to us. In addition, I wish to express my delegation's deep appreciation of the excellent work done by the Secretariat of ITU in making the necessary preparations for the Conference.

Mr. Chairman,

Considering the perspective of my country, telecommunications infrastructure and services are regarded to be strategically important:

- to enhance the expansion and penetration of basic education particularly to the disadvantaged communities;
- to support health service delivery to the rural population;
- to facilitate market access for agricultural products and small and medium scale enterprises;
- to assist in promoting good governance and efficiency of the civil service; and
- to strengthen partnerships between the public and private sectors and other stakeholders in the development process.

However, the challenges of the dynamics of ICT, on the one hand, and the inadequacy of skills and other resources, on the other, aggravate the problems that most of our countries, especially the developing countries, are facing in their efforts to modernize their ICT infrastructure and to introduce operational efficiency in the delivery of services at affordable prices.

Therefore, in implementing global initiatives such as the World Summit on the Information Society, it is important to pragmatically address how the challenges encountered by developing countries can be tackled and what the information society would bring to developing countries in particular.

Mr. Chairman,

Please allow me to briefly draw your attention to the efforts that my country is currently making to develop its telecommunications sector. Our overall development strategy seeks to promote rapid, broad-based and equitable growth by focusing on rural development where 85% of our population lives. The role of telecommunications infrastructure cannot be overlooked in the process of implementing such a development strategy. Ethiopia has, therefore, adopted a dynamic communications policy, whose objectives are to achieve universal and equitable access to telecom services at affordable rates.

Results achieved so far are very encouraging. Telecommunications penetration has more than doubled in the last four years. Data communications network has been introduced to provide enhanced and dedicated digital data exchange service, and an aggressive nationwide mobile and internet service expansion is in progress. To further accelerate

and expand these gains, we have also decided to engage a strategic partner to join the existing telecom operator as a minority shareholder. To this end, we have recently announced an invitation for expressions of interest to identify potential partners. My delegation would be pleased to provide further information on this issue to those who may be interested.

Mr. Chairman,

Before concluding I wish to make the point that in order to wisely deploy and exploit the opportunities made available by the ICT revolution, and in particular to narrow the digital divide between the developed and developing countries, strong global cooperation will be necessary more than ever before. Therefore, it is important for us all to do everything possible to further strengthen ITU and regional institutions like telecommunication unions and associations of regulators. In this regard, I would like to assure you that Ethiopia, which is already hosting ITU's African Regional Office and facilitating its operation by providing office and other facilities, will continue its commitment and support to the ITU.

Thank you.