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## **Introduction of the roundtables**

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Excellences Mesdames et Messieurs les Ministres,  
Mesdames et Messieurs les chefs de délégations  
Distingués délégués,  
Mesdames et Messieurs

C'est un grand plaisir pour moi de m'adresser à vous au début des 5 tables rondes de ce sommet. Ayant participé à plusieurs tables rondes qui n'étaient physiquement pas rondes, je me suis récemment posé la question de l'origine de l'expression table ronde. Mes recherches m'ont conduit à une explication fort intéressante: C'est un leader, qui pour éviter les querelles de jalousie et de concurrence entre ses conseillers dont aucun ne voulait être au bout de la table rectangulaire, a créé le concept de table ronde.

Ici nous ne sommes pas dans ce cas de figure et nous avons une vraie table ronde pour deux raisons. Premièrement, tous les acteurs

dans cette salle à leurs grades et origines divers sont complémentaires et non concurrents. Deuxièmement, les TIC nous permettent désormais de faire la réplique virtuelle de toute réalité physique.

## **PAUSE**

Excellences,

This morning we heard thoughtful and important reflections on the role of ICT and opportunities in the Arab region. With the high level of collective political will that we see, there is no doubt that this region will continue to register faster growth in ICT in the coming years. This assertion is based on the fact that the region has already, attained one of the fastest growths in mobile-cellular subscriptions with almost 100% penetration in 2011. Access to the Internet has greatly improved with almost 30% of the population getting online. This is very good news for the region, because information and communication technologies are the enabling platform for many of the solutions for fast and efficient delivery of services such as commerce, health, education and good governance.

Excellences, Ladies and gentlemen

Beyond any shadows of doubt, in years to come, broadband infrastructure will be considered as a basic infrastructure that underpins our economies, just like roads, railways, water and power

networks. Hence the full potentials of broadband are yet to be tapped into.

I am pleased to note that we have, for our roundtables, a list of distinguished panellists who come from diverse backgrounds. They will provoke debate based on their experiences, on what they believe is the role of ICT in socio-economic development in this region and across the globe. They will focus on topics that are both interesting and challenging. It is my sincere hope that the fruitful exchange of ideas during the Roundtables will help deliver concrete answers the following questions:

- How can ICT be used to help countries achieve the Millennium Development Goals on Health, Education and Employment Creation and how could we dismantle many of the entry barriers to education, digital literacy, entrepreneurship, and support a robust Arab ICT industry?
- As a region, how could we harmonize policies, regulations and the legal frameworks to attract more investment, foster competition and ensure universal access to ICT?
- Cybersecurity is a concern in all regions. How can we ensure easy access for all while securing our transactions, and protecting people and especially children on-line?
- How can we do more to give the Arabic language the prominence it deserves online, given that it is the sixth most spoken language, and yet only 113th of the 140 languages present on the web?

- How do we use ICTs to preserve our cultural heritage and to enhance social inclusion and social cohesion?
- Some 60% of the population of the Arab region is under thirty years old. This region is blessed with millions of young people who are smart and indeed digital natives.
- Projections show that there is a need to create at least 50 million new jobs in the region by the year 2020. The Roundtables will certainly explore ways and means to respond to the job demands of youths through creative entrepreneurship initiatives.

### Distinguished Delegates

As I lead the development agenda of the ITU in support of countries, let me share my insights with you in three points as we start the roundtables. **First**, I **certainly** believe that infrastructure is critical in laying the foundation of a Knowledge Society. **Second**, I **do** believe that infrastructure alone is not enough to lead us to sustainable development. We therefore need the right policies, regulations and legal framework that will open doors to new ICT applications and services such as e-business, m-banking, e-health, e-education, e-environment, e-governance. **Third**, I **firmly** believe that partnership is the glue that brings everything together.

Let me now challenge you all, to ask yourselves at the end of each round table the following question: **“What two new ideas did I get out of this roundtable and what must I do to put them into motion**

**in order to improve my life, that of my family, my community, my country, my region and the world?”**

I can assure you that my colleagues and I will be listening carefully to our distinguished panellists and participants. When we go back to our duty stations, we will try to implement each and every one of the ideas that will come out of the discussions in order to contribute to making this world a better place for all.

Finally, let me humbly say that it is a great privilege for me to address you and share my insights as Director of the Telecommunication Development Bureau particularly, at this historic event that history shall always record as a turning point. Let me end by saying that I am deeply convinced that this region will make it based on the regional political will and commitment reaffirmed today.

Once again, thank you for coming and let us all benefit from each other's perspectives.

Thank you