Mr. Chairman,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me start by expressing my deep condolences for all the people who have been affected by the recent, tragic, catastrophe in the Indian Ocean.

This tragedy has again underscored the need for effective disaster preparedness and response. For ITU, reliable telecommunications forms an integral part of this effort. We take note and express our full support on the current initiative to establish a comprehensive Tsunami Early Warning System in the Indian Ocean and Southeast Asia and the Thailand Concept Paper provides a very good framework. ITU can play a very active role within the outlined areas. I noted with great interest the plan and measures outlined by the Prime Minister and the two co-chairs. ITU would like to be a part of the Thai’s proposed initiatives. For example, ITU would like to participate in the ICT technical meeting announced by His Excellency, Minister of ICT to be held in February 2005.

Following the recent tragedy, ITU responded to the urgent communication needs by offering the affected countries the use of free satellite terminals. We also deployed experts to some of the countries that suffered both human and economic loss to assess the damage to the telecommunication networks, develop viable reconstruction projects and to provide as well as mobilize the resources needed to reconstruct their telecommunication networks. ITU has also allocated seed money to the tune of US$250’000 to be used for network reconstruction and early warning systems. We invite development partners to co-finance this important initiative.

ITU has worked on disaster recovery and mitigation from its early days. The creation of disaster resistant telecommunication networks has been a strategic imperative of ITU through the development of the telegraph, radio and television broadcasting and the Internet. We have done this by producing recommendations that range from SOS signalling to technical standards to reduce degradation or disruption of communication networks as a result of disasters. From the beginning of this new century, ITU has placed disaster relief issues again high on its agenda as well as generating significant discussion of the issue at all its major conferences.
ITU was instrumental in the development of the Tampere Convention, which was ratified earlier this month and will make the use of life-saving telecommunications equipment much easier to deploy in emergency situations. We continue to study the regulatory issues that are vital to our work in this area and are implementing projects to ensure their success.

**Excellencies,**

**Distinguished Guests,**

We have noted that four communication channels: citizen to authority, authority to authority, authority to citizen, and citizen to citizen play a pivotal role especially, but not limited to, carrying out successful early warning. To contribute to the success of such a system, internationally agreed standards on new ICT technologies that we develop, are necessary to facilitate the interconnection of the information and communication technologies that are so much a part of today’s national and international relief efforts. These new technologies and services can facilitate swift reaction to global as well as regional disaster incidents and solve the problems of incompatibility of systems arising from the use of proprietary systems by public protection agencies and disaster relief organizations.

ITU, with its competence and technical expertise is committed to cooperating with ITU Member governments, UN family organizations, the private sector, the scientific community and civil society in a joint effort to develop an integrated early warning system based on modern technologies. If deemed necessary, ITU will study any new information and communication technologies that would contribute to the early warning systems for disasters.

We will work tirelessly to help countries and regions build resilient infrastructure during the project management process to enhance preparedness, provide human resource training, and to mobilize resources for reconstruction by forging partnerships. We will intensify work on regulatory issues including the promotion of further ratifications of the Tampere Convention.

Mr. Chairman,

Let me re-assure you of ITU’s commitment in fulfilling its role as the specialized agency of the United Nations for telecommunications and our willingness to cooperate with all of the partners needed to do this essential work. Given the critical role of ICTs in disaster prevention and relief, ITU’s contribution can go beyond an early warning system for tsunamis because we know that telecommunications can save lives regardless of the nature of the disaster or where it takes place.

I hope that the effort to build the tsunami early warning system will serve to strengthen the international cooperation needed to avert future tragedies regardless of
where in the world they may occur. We are proud to be part of this powerful global effort.

In closing, on behalf of the Secretary-General of ITU, let me extend my gratitude to the Government of the Kingdom of Thailand for hosting this important Ministerial Conference, and for inviting ITU to attend. I have no doubt that the conclusions of this meeting will mark a turning point in disaster management and will provide valuable lessons for the entire global community.

I thank you.