2008 Global Event on Measuring the Information Society
Organized by the Partnership on Measuring ICT for Development
Dr. H. Touré, Secretary General, ITU
Opening Speech

Geneva, 27-29 May 2008, 10:00-11:00

Ms Puri, Ms Dirven, Mr Becker,

Distinguished participants,

Ladies and gentlemen,

- It is my great pleasure to be here with you today, to open the *Partnership on Measuring ICT for Development's* 2008 Global Event on Measuring the Information Society. As the world is moving towards a global Information Society, countries are now very aware of the central importance of extending access to information and communication technologies to their populations.

- Both, the Millennium Declaration, as well as the World Summit on the Information Society, acknowledge that ICTs are an important tool to achieve development goals: they can help alleviate poverty; improve the delivery of education and health care; make government services more accessible; and much more. With the growing recognition of ICTs as an effective tool for social development *and* economic growth, there are ever-greater incentives for countries to foster higher access levels and to overcome the digital divide, the gap that exists between those *with* and those *without* access to ICTs.

- Countries' desire to increase the availability of ICTs has highlighted the growing need for reliable, comprehensive and comparable statistical information. ITU has repeatedly emphasized that, to appropriately tackle the digital divide, it is crucial to overcome the statistical divide. This is important on a national level to help governments identify their progress, their strengths and their weaknesses, so as to tackle and finally overcome barriers to wider and better access to ICTs.

- The right set of indicators and benchmarks further help governments identify targets and adopt policies accordingly. At the same time, these statistics are used to make international comparisons and allow governments to assess their performance objectively, identify realistic targets and create pressure for improvement. International comparisons and benchmarking are important in facilitating the chain from statistics, to knowledge, to policy.

- As the UN organization in charge of telecommunications and ICTs, ITU has a clear mandate to objectively analyze countries' progress in the area of ICTs and to highlight those countries that risk falling behind. Only a global picture and our in-depth knowledge of ICT developments will allow us to do so.

- Take Africa, for example. Just two weeks ago, ITU published the African Telecommunication/ICT Indicators Report which highlighted that Africa remains the region with the highest growth rate in mobile subscribers. Within a year the continent added no less than 65 million new mobile subscribers to its subscriber base and by today, mobile penetration has risen to over a fourth of the population.

- I think I am not exaggerating that even five years ago, people would not have believed this to be possible. These developments are not only encouraging but also show that Africa is ready for technology and ready for business.

- At the same time, we need to see these trends in perspective. Globally, the stakes have risen and the criteria by which success are measured are changing. Two decades ago, achieving a teledensity of one per one hundred inhabitants represented a major milestone, but today's benchmarks of achievement are much higher. The rest of the world has not stopped and is moving ahead with strong investment and the adoption of new technologies.

- So while Africa has made impressive gains in access to ICTs, we believe that it can do even better. Our data suggest that broadband is still the exception, bandwidth remains too limited, and tariffs too high.

- In Africa, Internet tariffs - as a percentage of national income - are so high that most people can simply not afford to go online. ITU statistics further show that a major barrier is the lack of Internet access and computers in households. Based on this information, governments can adopt short and medium-term policies accordingly, for example, by promoting alternative and affordable access locations, including public Internet access centers and schools.

- This information allows us to formulate appropriate policy measures and to address barriers to higher ICT levels. They include, for example, a deeper reform process, the liberalization of international gateways, the licensing of wireless broadband technologies, the sharing of infrastructure and the reduction of taxes.

- What is important is that ICT policy makers do have a choice and that we, ITU, have a clear message and key recommendations. Our statistics do not only help policy makers to review progress and put their achievements into perspective; they are also critical for the private sector. ITU data help identify market potential and investment opportunities and attract businesses, for a win-win situation.

- Which takes me to another I believe clear example for a win-win situation: *the Partnership on Measuring ICT for Development.*

- The World Summit on the Information Society highlighted the much broader and cross-cutting role that our work in the area of telecommunication & ICT indicators has. Indeed, world leaders recognized the extreme usefulness of developing tools to further develop and harmonize statistical indicators and they called on the international community to collaborate on the development of indicators with a view to tracking global progress in the use of ICTs.

- The response to this call was immediate and the work carried out by the Partnership is truly impressive. It is not every day that a total of ten international and regional

organizations with very different development agendas, from different geographic regions of the world and with diverse constituencies and agendas, manage to create such a strong multi-stakeholder partnership.

- While ITU fully assumes its central role in monitoring ICT developments in the area of infrastructure and households, a truly global and inclusive Information Society can only be realized through a global partnership.

- Since its launch four years ago, the Partnership has made a number of very important contributions.

- Its work has helped to raise awareness about the importance of statistical information for countries. It has helped guide countries in their data collection efforts by identifying the core list of indicators - endorsed by the 38th session of the UN Statistical Commission in March 2007 - and by providing supporting methodological material.

- This includes a Manual for the Measurement of ICT Access and Use by Households and Individuals, which ITU is currently preparing.

- It is also very encouraging to see that more and more countries have started to collect information on the number of households with access to, and use of, ICTs. We are also seeing increasing cooperation between ICT policy makers, including the regulatory authorities and Ministries, and the National Statistical Offices, in identifying indicators and collecting information. This cooperation is important to combine policy needs with technical expertise.

- The discussion this week of "ICT in education" indicators and their expected inclusion to the core list of indicators will make an important contribution towards the tracking of the Information Society.

- Another recent achievement of the Partnership includes the publication of the 2008 Report on *Measuring ICT: the Global Status of ICT Indicators*, which will be presented this week. The report highlights the advancements that have been made in terms of measuring the Information Society over the last few years and it provides a detailed overview of data availability in every country.

- This week's meeting has an ambitious agenda, and includes the discussion on impact measurement, e-government indicators, gender, and measuring security and trust.

- This week will also see the revision of the core list of indicators. Since we are dealing with a highly dynamic sector, we need to adapt quickly and review our indicators regularly. Revisions must be made to reflect new trends and to incorporate changes made by the introduction of new technologies. This includes, for example, the phenomenal growth and new technologies in mobile telephony, as well as broadband developments.

- I would like to extend a special welcome to Mr. Ralf Becker, from the UN Statistical Division and thank you for attending this Event.

- Finally, I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate and to thank every single Partner that is part of this project with the ITU: UNCTAD, the World Bank, UNESCO Institute for Statistics, OECD, EUROSTAT, and the four regional commissions, UNECA, UNECLAC, UNESCWA and UNESCAP. Through our ambitious goals and by joining forces we have achieved so much more than any single organization alone could achieve.

- I trust that so much experience and expertise will make this a very successful meeting.

  Ladies and gentlemen, thank you very much.