BDT Director's Speech
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Global Indicators Meeting on Community Access to ICTs

What: Opening Speech
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Excellency, Mr. Pedro Cerisola y Weber, Minister of Transport and Communication of Mexico
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is with great pleasure that I open the Global Indicators Workshop on Community Access to Information and Communication Technologies. Over 130 participants from more than 70 countries as well as a number of regional and international organizations have come together to make this a truly global event. First of all I would like to express my gratitude to the Mexican Ministry of Transport and Communications, whose support and backing have been instrumental in the realization and organization of this event. The wonderful facilities but particularly Mexico's hospitality have *already* created an atmosphere that could not be more conducive to making this a successful event. I trust that the presentations and discussions that we will hear over the next four days will allow us to agree on a globally relevant approach regarding this important topic.

Statistics and data are crucial:

- To determine where countries stand;
- How they compare to others; and
- How well they are doing over time.
- Statistics and data further provide the basis of analysis, and help determine the effectiveness of policies.

It is also with the help of statistical information that we have recognized the importance of community access to ICTs. Please allow me to present you with some of the ITU statistics to explain and to put the topic of community access into context.

The speed with which Information and Communication Technologies, particularly the Internet, have changed the world over the last 15 years is astounding. From just eight countries online in 1988, the Internet has developed into a world-wide network that allows instant access to information. Parallel to these technological developments the role of telecommunications as a tool for development has received international recognition. In September 2000, at the UN Millennium Summit, world leaders agreed to a set of time-bound and measurable goals and targets for combating poverty, hunger, disease, illiteracy, environmental degradation etc. The Millennium Declaration acknowledges that ICTs are an important tool to achieve its overall goals. ICTs can help alleviate poverty, and *promises* delivering innovative applications in government, commerce, education, and health.

I deliberately say *promises* because while the potential of ICTs is enormous, penetration levels vary among *and* within countries. Still in 2004 most people do not have access and the possibility to use ICTs. Based on available 2003 data, 80 percent of the world's population lives in low and lower-middle income countries but only about 25 percent of the

world's Internet users come from these countries. In Latin America and the Caribbean one of ten inhabitants use the Internet. In sub-Saharan Africa we estimate that less than one percent of the population use the Internet. This *has* to change. And community access will play a major role in making this change, simply because the vast majority of households in developing nations do not have modern ICTs such as computers and Internet access. ITU statistics show that in many developed countries today almost every second household is connected to the Internet. But in the developing word - representing 80% of the world population - this is just not the case. Let us take Mexico, for example, where in 2002 less than 10 percent of all households were estimated to have Internet access. And the numbers are much lower in many other parts of the world. To tackle this problem, and to provide more people with the potential of ICTs at least in the short and medium term, access will have to be provided through public locations, including community access centres, schools, and Internet cafés. Community access is also particularly important to overcome the rural/urban divide that many countries are facing.

The ITU recognized the importance of community access early on and it has a number of projects and public/private partnerships to connect people all over the world. For example:

1. ITU and the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA) joined hands to establish four Multipurpose Community Telecentres in Vietnam, including in very rural areas. The MCTs were established in partnership with local, national and international stakeholders and they provide access to telecommunications and focus on applications in the areas of agriculture and rural development, small and medium-size enterprises, education and telehealth/medicine.

2. Four years ago a pilot project for Central America started in Honduras, where the Multipurpose Community Telecentre (MCT) Project connects rural, semi-rural areas and urban locations that deliver training and the use of Internet and applications to villagers. This project, jointly carried out by BDT and the Honduras Telecommunication National Company, has made a difference for citizens through e-health, e-education, e-commerce, e-government applications. After the establishment of the first MCT four years ago, the project is today self-sustainable and is attracting new partners with new applications. I believe we will hear some more about this project later in the day.

3. We are currently launching the MCT Network for African Women project, which will involve the construction of a network of at least 100 MCTs in 20 or more African countries, owned and managed by women. These centers will provide public telephones, fax and Internet connectivity and provide users with IT equipment and training as well.

These projects represent only part of the ITU's Telecommunication Development Bureau's work, but they are good examples of how it has used community access to create digital opportunities. These examples are also testimony of the importance of partnerships, between the ITU and its member states, as well as public private partnerships.

While the success of these projects and the potential of community access to create digital opportunities is widely recognized, most countries know little about how many of their citizens are actually using community access. We also lack information and statistics on how many villages, localities and people *potentially* have access to community centres or privately run Internet cafés. Whereas the ITU's World Telecommunication Database includes indicators such as mobile subscribers, fixed telephone lines, and Internet users, there has been no indicator to measure community access. The main reason for this is that only very few governments have actually started collecting this type of information. Moreover, existing efforts have not been harmonized and data are not internationally

comparable. This will change with the outcome of this workshop and benefit particularly the developing world that, towards the transition into information societies will rely on shared access. Quantitative data on community access will help countries make the right decisions as to where to invest scarce resources and how to serve the largest possible number of citizens. To make sure that data are harmonized and internationally comparable, this workshop will review existing and new indicators, definitions, collection, methodology and dissemination. Although today is the first time this issue is discussed on a global level, a number of countries and regions have identified ways of measuring and defining community access. These national and regional experiences which will be presented during the meeting will help us take into consideration different levels of socio-economic development, expertise as well as diverse geographic realities and challenges. I am confident that by the end of this week a key set of globally relevant indicators will guide ministries, national regulators and statistical offices to improve statistical coverage of community access. Through this we will have taken a major step towards overcoming the digital divide by narrowing the statistical divide. Because one thing is certain: to tackle the digital divide, we need to understand it. The ITU's role in this context has been reinforced in several ways.

As the only source of globally comparable ICT/telecom statistics, the ITU has received a clear mandate, from its own membership as well as from the outside, to develop community access indicators. Every four years the World Telecommunication Development Conference (WTDC) takes place to determine the BDT's activities. The last WTDC took place in March 2002 and adopted the Istanbul Action Plan. The Istanbul Action Plan underlines the leading role, which the ITU Development Sector can play in bridging the digital divide. The Action Plan has the needed elements to fast track the ITU Development Sector's objectives of bridging the divide in all its dimensions – technical, societal, and economic – and to harness the power of ICTs for socio-economic development of the widest number of people, particularly the world's most deprived. Amongst other measures, the ITU membership in the Istanbul Action highlighted the importance of community access and passed a Resolution calling on ITU to discuss and develop community access indicators.

Similarly, this week's workshop presents an important step towards the implementation of the goals and objectives articulated in the World Summit on the Information Society's (WSIS) Plan of Action, adopted at the first phase of the Summit last December. In particular it will respond to the Plan of Action's call for the evaluation and follow-up through comparable statistical indicators, "*including community connectivity indicators*".

Adapting to new challenges and reinventing itself to best serve its members is not new to the ITU, whose world is that of changing technologies. Similarly, the ITU needs to re-think its indicators and how best it can measure ICT developments. To this end the BDT's indicators group works closely with sister international organizations such as World Bank and UN in areas of harmonization, and data exchange and tracking of the Millennium Development Goals. One relevant example is the recently launched "Partnership on Measuring ICT for Development" in which the ITU has taken a lead role. This Partnership, which also includes the World Bank, UNCTAD, UNESCO Institute for Statistics, the UN Regional Commissions (ECLAC, ECA, ESCWA, ESCAP), the UN ICT Task Force, the OECD and others, aims at developing a global database on ICT indicators and agreeing on a common set of core ICT indicators. These must include community access indicators. To achieve this we need close cooperating with governments – Ministries, regulators and statistical agencies - who remain the ITU's major source of information in this area.

Finally I would like to highlight that it is anything but a coincidence that we are gathered here in Mexico. The Mexican government has recognized the importance of community centres for achieving widespread access to telecommunications for a number of years. Its

digital community centers are a key element to enhance access to underserved areas. The government has also carried out in-depth analysis to quantify the community access issue to be able to calculate the population that could benefit from community access. Indeed the Mexican government has taken a lead role and become not only a crucial promoter but also a key ITU partner in this area. In October 2003 the ITU and the Mexican Ministry of Transport and Communications together organized the Regional Workshop on Indicators for Community Access to ICTs. The meeting produced a number of possible indicators for measuring community access and will allow this workshop to build upon those results. I think we can say that the ITU and the Mexican government have set a good example for joining forces and expertise. For this and for our future partnership projects I sincerely thank you once again. Muchas gracias.