

ITU Telecom World 2009 Youth Forum Declaration

The ITU Telecom World Youth Forum 2009 has served as platform for the development of a global network of youth that truly want to make a difference in the future of information and communication technologies (ICTs).

We are aware of the challenges that stand before all of us in achieving the global goal of connecting our world by 2015. However, the dire need to connect the world is too great for us to slow the pace of progress. We urge all UN agencies, national governments, industry and market leaders, educators, and society as a whole to support the ITU *Connect a School, Connect a Community* initiative. It will reach those who can most benefit from adequate ICT connectivity and applications: children, and underprivileged groups. The Youth Forum is proud to have been addressed by United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon to support this important initiative and thank ITU Secretary-General Dr. Hamoudon Touré and BDT Director Sami Al Basheer for moving this initiative forward.

The following declaration aims to highlight the most significant challenges related to ICTs today and our vision is: to address these challenges. Our focus is on all ICTs, from basic public payphones and mobile phones to television, Internet and IPTV. We request your kind attention and thank you for taking the following demands for action seriously.

Connectivity and accessibility

The world tends to emphasize innovation in ICT development rather than on the widespread distribution of ICT technologies and services. While innovation is a vital necessity, we cannot ignore the needs of those who: lack affordable access even to the most basic ICT networks and services, electricity to power these services, in addition to those who cannot afford broadband or local community content

Our vision is: Innovation should strive to match resources available to local communities and their needs rather than promoting innovation for its own sake. ICT firms should promote the commercialization of renewable energies to power ICTs and the use of Green ICTs to address climate change. In addition to ensuring connectivity, there is a need to ensure accessibility for those with special needs. This includes assistive technologies for persons with disabilities; training and tailor-made software for people with literacy issues and specialized vocational training for marginalized people including women, the elderly, the disabled, and people in rural areas.

Education

In today's world, where information and technology prevail, the need for up-to-date information and education has become crucial. It is essential for economic and social development as education can teach less fortunate people to help themselves. Nevertheless, many lack access to ICT and education, and promoting ICT access and literacy is often not a priority. Too often, the mode by which content is delivered marginalizes people with disabilities and the illiterate, which undermines the world's non-English speaking population. The Youth Forum reminds world leaders that education and basic access to the world's knowledge is a primary human right and should be treated as such. In our opinion, a united world can identify the resources to meet this important demand and harness the power of ICT as a tool for education and social development.

Our vision is: Developing and developed countries should work hand-in-hand to promote education along with stronger collaboration between the public sector, private sector and civil society in connecting schools. Experienced ICT users can take the lead in training the less fortunate people of this world in basic ICT literacy and how ICTs can be used to improve the quality of their lives and their communities. New users can then train others, leading to the exponential growth in training of future trainers. In addition, a global network of universities should be created, providing lectures and classes online where students from every corner of the world can work together on assignments and projects.

Safety

The Internet is growing dramatically into a virtual world that can be accessed by almost anybody. It is important to recognize that innovations like Web 2.0 provide opportunities and benefits as well as risks and threats that must be tackled. These include commercialization, inappropriate content, cyber crime, unreliable information. There is a need for cybersecurity against spam and viruses and to protect personal and financial information online, as well as the need to raise awareness about online risks for our youth and children. Internet safety education is often not provided in schools and universities while parents and teachers often lack the appropriate ICT knowledge to guide their children online.

Our vision is: Civil society has a key role to play in raising youth awareness on Internet safety and how to identify online risks. Internet service providers should provide solid solutions for child online safety that are easily attainable to everybody. Legislators should require that safe use of the Internet to be part of the school curriculum and that ICT companies instruct and provide learning materials to parents so they can be more involved in communicating safe Internet usage to their children and keep up with their children's ICT expertise.

Regulations

We believe effective regulation of ICTs' to be crucial to development, both economic and social, especially in light of the global financial crisis. Access to open ICT networks and communication is an extension of the basic human right to free speech, while recognizing the need for safety and protection of these individuals. The needs of users should be the driving force for all regulations to promote safe, affordable and widespread access to ICT's. Regulation is also necessary to address intellectual property rights and ensure appropriate content for children and youth including all online and PC games.

Our vision is: Regulations should establish guidelines rather than restrictions and be based on common basic principles that can be followed by all countries of the world. The United Nations Organization can help establish such guidelines, permitting individual countries choosing the best way to apply them in their own territory. We want to see open markets for telecommunications and ICT in order to stimulate competition, and at the same time motivate local ICT companies in each respective country, to ensure affordability.

'Self-Sustainability

ICT related projects and initiatives in many communities often last only a few months. The lack of sustainable projects and initiatives is a waste of time and resources that could otherwise be allocated for other useful projects. Often local people are not aware of how ICT projects can improve their daily lives, and therefore do not consider ICT as a primary need. Local people in the community may not be actively involved in project implementation or there may be no teaching of skills on managing, financing and maintaining the projects after external experts have left.

Our vision is: Extensive research and feasibility studies prior to the execution of projects; programs to empower local people and increase their acceptance and participation; schools to be the hub of projects since schools bring communities together; communities that have the knowledge and skills to manage and finance projects on their own, as well as initiate their own projects.

Our Commitment

We are dynamic individuals, representing different nations, religions and cultures, yet united in our commitment, a commitment to global change and increased awareness.

This week we brought our initiative and passion, but it's you who have empowered us with knowledge from the world's best minds.

As UN Secretary-General Mr. Ban Ki-moon shared with us, "The goal is to help countries connect all schools to broadband Internet services by the year 2015 ... I am pleased to help launch the initiative on a global basis."

We are the global basis. We urge a minimum of at least 1 computer for educational use in each school by 2015. We, the fellows of the Youth Forum commit ourselves to continued engagement with governments and other stakeholders, and pledge to report back by December of each year to ITU to track the progress until the 2015 evolution of this global initiative.

We will thank you for implementing our vision. It starts here.

Educate people, unite countries, connect the world.