

Keynote address

Malcolm Johnson, Director, ITU Telecommunication Standardization Bureau ITU Regional Development Forum: Bridging the ICT Standardization Gap in Developing Countries 19 – 20 May 2008, Brasilia, Brazil

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen

It is a great honour and pleasure for me to be with you at this regional development forum on bridging the standardization gap, which will be followed by the World Telecommunication Standardization Assembly (WTSA) preparatory meeting for the Americas region. My sincere thanks go to H.E. Ambassador Ronaldo Sardenberg, President of ANATEL, for hosting this event, and to his staff whose have worked very hard to make it happen. I also thank Mr. Clovis Baptista, Secretary of the Inter-American Telecommunication Commission (CITEL) for his continuing support of ITU, and for CITEL's leading role in regional harmonization of telecommunication standardization.

I am proud of the close links we have between ITU and the Americas, and this is of course largely due to our very active regional office here in Brasilia, and the efforts of its Head Mr Juan Zavattiero.

This is my second visit to the region since being elected, having had the pleasure of attending the CITEL PCC1 in Mendoza last September. It is very nice to be welcomed back. I very much hope that this event will serve to forge even stronger links between the region and ITU, especially its standardization work.

Standardization is a complex business, and it is getting more complex by the day. But as you here will know, standards are essential for international communications and global trade. Globalisation requires global standards, and a global standards body like ITU clearly has an increasing role to play. Global standards avoid costly market battles over preferred technologies, and for companies from emerging markets, they create a level playing field which provides access to new markets. They are an essential aid to developing countries in building their infrastructure and encouraging economic development. They can reduce costs for all: manufacturers, operators and consumers, through economies of scale. The World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) recognized ITU's core competence in standards development as being crucial in building the Information Society. WSIS gave ITU specific responsibility as facilitator for its Action Line C2: Information and Communication Infrastructure; and Action Line C5: Building confidence and security in the use of ICTs; as well as a role in many other action lines. Much of ITU's activity is related to WSIS follow up, as is explained on our website.

One of the major objectives of ITU is to extend the benefits of our standardization work to a wider audience. This is what we call bridging the standardization gap. I can assure you that it is something that I take very seriously. Indeed, I am mandated to do so by Resolution 123 of the last ITU Plenipotentiary Conference.

We have defined the standardization gap as the disparity in the ability of representatives of developing countries, relative to representatives of developed countries, to access, implement, contribute to, and influence international ICT standards, specifically ITU Recommendations.

This is the second regional forum on bridging the standardisation gap, the first being held in Kigali, Rwanda last October. We intend to hold one forum per region each year. That Kigali forum was very well attended, and there was a lot of interest in participating in our standardisation work. However, the main problem people have is the cost of participation, especially to meetings in Geneva, as well as the cost of membership, especially for small start up companies in developing countries.

We have made an attempt to overcome these difficulties, although more clearly needs to be done at the WTSA. For example, I have been encouraging members to host meeting in the regions, and I have established a fund to assist hosts with the cost of doing so, as well as for providing fellowships to attend the meetings. I am pleased to say that I have been promised an invitation to hold our NGN Global Standards Initiative in this region in September 2009. Of course this is one of the largest and most important of our standards groups,

Over the last few months we have also been trialing new collaboration tools which will allow remote participation in our meetings. The intention is to organized meetings in the regions which can be linked to the main meetings, in Geneva (or elsewhere). I am encouraged by the success of these trials. They clearly have the potential to significantly increase participation from the regions

There are many of our activities in which participation is free even for non-members. For example focus groups. We are now using focus groups more and more to initiate and drive our standards work. We had two very successful focus groups conclude their work last year – on identity management and on IPTV. We are also holding many workshops throughout the year, which are open to anyone interested free of charge. These events are now webcast live and archived on the ITU website. Our recent symposium on ICTs and Climate Change in Kyoto had 260 participants but another 160 followed it on the webcast. The follow-up symposium on the subject will be held in London 17-18 June and will also be webcast. The Kyoto symposium recommended that I establish a focus group to standardize the methodology for determining the impact of ICTs on greenhouse gas emissions, both directly and in terms of the reduction they could make in other industry sectors. I will consult the next meeting of the Telecommunications Standardization Advisory Group (TSAG) on this, but I hope we will be able to hold an event on climate change in this region in the near future.

We have also taken an initiative to encourage greater participation of universities and research establishments in our work. Last week we held what we called a kaleidoscope conference with universities and research establishments. This was the first of its kind and proved very successful with over 140 papers submitted for peer review, with the best 50 papers presented in parallel sessions over the two days. We had 220 participants and around 50 universities participating. The authors of the winning three papers received prizes totaling \$10,000 and their papers will be published in the IEEE proceedings, and will be considered as the basis for new standardization activities, including a possible focus group looking beyond NGN. I am pleased to say that I have also received an invitation to hold this event in this region. This should encourage greater participation from the universities in the region. Details of all these events and access to the webcast archive is available free of charge on our website.

I am also encouraging the establishment of regional groups. These are groups in the regions following the work of a particular study group. One was established last year in the Arab region dealing with ITU-T Study Group 2 (numbering) issues, and another was established recently in Africa dealing with ITU-T Study Group 12 (QoS) issues. I hope we will see regional groups established in this region too.

I would also like to see an increase in study group leaders from this region. The number of Study Group chairmen and vice-chairmen from developing countries has increased from just 10 in 1996 to 26 in 2000 and 36 in 2004. The best represented developing country from this region is Brazil, but we also have Study Group officials from Argentina, Cuba, Ecuador, and Trinidad and Tobago. I hope this number will increase at the next WTSA.

A significant development in closing the standardization gap was the agreement of last year's Council to my recommendation to make available the ITU-T Recommendations for downloading free of charge. In 2006 we sold just 5000 copies of ITU-T Recommendations. In 2007 almost 3 million copies were downloaded free of charge. We have found a notable increase in access from developing countries, both in terms of total number of downloads and the percentage that were downloaded, which has risen from 10 per cent of sales in 2006 to 16 per cent of downloads in 2007. Clearly this makes a significant contribution to bridging the standardization gap.

As for implementation of the Recommendations, a complaint I often hear, especially from developing countries is that there is no way of being sure that a vendor's equipment meets an ITU Recommendation. This is because we do not have any testing or certification to our standards. I believe this is something we should address at the WTSA. ITU was founded to ensure interoperability of international telecommunications. But this can only be ensured if we reintroduce a form of testing certification and the issuing of an ITU Mark. I intend therefore making such a proposal at the next TSAG.

This year's WTSA in Johannesburg will be a unique event for a number of reasons. It is the first time it has been held in Africa. The first time it will be chaired by a woman (Lyndall Shope Mafole, Director General of the Ministry of Communications in South Africa). The first time that the term limits will apply to the chairmen and vice-chairmen. Although this will mean losing many experience chairmen and vice-chairmen, it should make it easier to agree on restructuring the sector. It will be the first WTSA preceded by a Global Standardization Symposium, on 20 October 2008. This will have a number of high level speakers (including ministers, ambassadors, and CTOs) addressing the standardization gap, as well as concerns about the proliferation of ICT standards bodies (now estimated at over 300), climate change and accessibility. The afternoon session will be devoted to improvements in global standards collaboration to meet these objectives and future challenges. Finally it will be the first WTSA to have a small exhibition to allow members to showcase their latest products. Again all the details are available on our website.

I am very much looking forward to both the GSS, which I think promises to herald a new era of standards collaboration, and the WTSA which will define an exciting new period of work for us.

The Americas region has an important role to play. Through your participation you can influence the future direction of standardization, ensuring that the standards meet the specific requirements of the region, and changes are introduced to facilitate greater participation from the region. The upcoming GSS and WTSA promise to be an exciting opportunity for positive change – and I encourage innovative proposals. Please take part and influence the outcome for the good of the region and the ITU.

I will not take more of your time. You have a very interesting programme to look forward to and excellent speakers. I would like to thank the speakers for their efforts to prepare their presentations and for coming here to support our event.

I wish you all a productive and informative meeting.

Thank you for your attention.