

Please check against delivery



**Statement**

**by**

**H. E. Mr. Cheick Sidi Diarra**

**Under-Secretary-General  
Special Adviser on Africa and High Representative  
for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked  
Developing Countries  
and Small Island Developing States  
and  
Secretary-General  
of the Fourth United Nations Conference on the Least  
Developed Countries**

**at the International Telecommunications LDC IV  
Pre Conference Event  
'Digital Inclusion for LDCs: Innovation, Growth,  
Sustainability'**

**Geneva  
8-9 March 2011**

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

*Mr. Zhan  
Mr. Zhao  
Zana Zava  
Ambassador of Turkey to the UN, Geneva.*

It is indeed a pleasure to address you this morning in Geneva. Allow me to first express my sincere appreciation to Dr. Toure and his very able team at the International Telecommunications Union for the organization of this pre-conference event ahead of the Fourth UN Conference on the Least Developed Countries. I should say that I am genuinely heartened by the ongoing efforts of the ITU to ensure that the world's poorest nations remain a key focus of discussions on the pivotal role that information technology plays in development. I also would like to thank all of you for your participation in this event, which will take a constructive look at one of the top priority issues for the group of 48 Least Developed Countries.

Distinguished Participants,

With just two months to go before the Fourth UN Conference on the Least Developed Countries in Istanbul, today's meeting on ICTs and the LDCs is indeed timely. Over the next two days we have an opportunity to take stock of the progress achieved, share best practices and improve on our efforts. It is my belief that the thrust of our discussions should be to

consider how to concretely extend the benefits of the digital revolution to the LDCs to ensure their sustainable socio-economic development.

As many of you may recall, the World Summit on the Information Society, held in Geneva in 2003 and Tunis in 2005, linked information and communication technology with human development and called on Member States to build a global “inclusive, people-centred and development-oriented information society” through the sharing of information and knowledge. The WSIS Declaration of Principles highlighted the case of particular groups of countries as deserving special attention. Since then we have witnessed a plethora of tangible initiatives in ICT diffusion in the LDCs.

Today communities living in remote areas have access to the vast wealth of global knowledge through ICTs, and the benefits of ICTs extend to almost everything from water supplies, power networks and food distribution chains, to healthcare, education, government services and financial markets. Indeed, many of you are also familiar with the countless examples of the extent to which ICTs have shown to be a catalytic force in multiplying the delivery of internationally agreed upon development goals.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Since the advent of the Brussels Programme of Action (BPoA) in 2001, the use of ICTs in the world's 48 least developed countries has risen significantly, especially in mobile telephone and the internet access. One of the goals of the BPOA is that the number of internet users in LDCs should reach ten people in every 100 by 2010. I am pleased to inform you that several LDCs have reached penetration rates of around 5 per cent, and those LDCs that have liberalized their telecommunications markets have seen particularly high growth in the ICT sector. Today, eighty seven percent of LDCs authorize competition in the provision of mobile services, relying on effective policy and regulation.

Owing to the growth in privatization, the opening of markets to competition and the establishment of telecommunications regulatory authorities, there has been a rapid growth in the telecommunications sector. In mobile communication, in particular, there has been a significant improvement. LDCs raised their mobile penetration from 2 in 2003 to 20 in 2008, reducing the gap vis-à-vis the world average from 1:13 to 1:3.

But despite these positive trends, much more needs to be done to achieve an information society for all. Important gaps remain within and among the LDC economies and societies due to language, content, rural versus urban, gender and generational usage. What we are witnessing is that improved access to ICTs (especially other than mobile phones) has mainly benefited the urban and young people speaking a dominant language.

Further, major challenges remain in the form of outdated policies and regulations, which ~~not only hinder the development of IP convergence,~~ but also result in poor service delivery. Admittedly, the task of formulating an ideal policy and regulatory framework for these countries is in itself a daunting task.

What we cannot neglect is the reality that while there has been a significant growth in ICT development, especially mobile technology and services, the Least Developed Countries are often constrained by high initial pricing access which are way above averages. Considerable barriers persist in many LDCs, due to the cost of technology, lack of infrastructure, limited human capital, a weak private sector and a paucity of public sector resources. In the case of broadband access, the digital divide between developed, developing and the LDCs is particularly wide

Allow me to provide you with an illustration. In Australia, a country with 21 million inhabitants, there are more broadband subscribers than the whole of Africa, where 33 of the 48 LDCs are located. Furthermore, there is a significant gap in terms of broadband speed. While high-income economies keep pushing the limit, LDCs broadband connections generally remain slow. [The situation in the Asia-Pacific region is equally illustrative; high-income economies such as Japan and the Republic of Korea boast minimum bandwidths for an entry level broadband package that are much higher than the maximum broadband speeds in, for example, Bangladesh, and Cambodia.] Achieving more widespread deployment of broadband backbones and access networks in remote and less densely populated areas is a particular challenge, which deserves our attention.

Distinguished Participants,

Efforts need a degree of pragmatism. There will be situations where fibre is not practical at the moment, and where it may be more realistic to bridge the gap with various fixed wireless solutions. Increased deployment can be facilitated by the adoption of a universal access and service policy that complements a national broadband policy aimed at creating an enabling environment. Governments might require operators

*optic*

to make specific minimum speeds available to households or provide subsidies or other incentives using universal access and service funds to operators for rolling out broadband infrastructure.

10

In my capacity as Secretary-General of the Fourth United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries, I should mention that I am encouraged by the increased emphasis among policy-makers on ICT for development. Two main plans of action define ICT activities in Africa, namely, the Africa's Science and Technology Consolidated Plan of Action which proposes a regional process promoting the role of science and technology to support social and economic development in Africa, and the African Regional Action Plan on Knowledge Economy aiming at building a continent fully benefiting from ICT services.

I am sure we all agree that a knowledge based economy is one in which the exploitation of knowledge has come to play the predominant part in the creation of wealth and prosperity for the communities highly correlated with the state of the economy; the availability of skilled human capital with sustainable supply process; enabling environment, and access to financial resources. I should also mention that initiatives such as the creation of the Broadband Commission for Digital Development steered by the ITU and the e-MDG Center formulated by the UN Global Alliance

and UNESCO

for ICT are indeed testament to the commitment of ensuring that poorer countries do not get left behind in the pursuit of their development goals. The onus is now on us to ensure that guidelines, policies and strategies arising from initiatives address the plight the particular challenges facing the LDCs.

Distinguished Participants,

To date, experience world over has shown that the rapid and coherent diffusion of ICTs in a country is closely linked to the level of government direction and support. The government, through its ICT policies and regulation, must present a vision and solid strategies leading to the creation of an enabling environment, favourable to the establishment of a infrastructure and ICT services. There is need for an autonomous regulatory authority with a clear vision of what needs to be achieved to stimulate – and not stifle – growth of the sector. The right policies and an enabling environment generally stimulate competition which, in turn, creates a market for investors. Investment and funding for ICT infrastructure development is and has always been the challenge of LDCs. For this reason, appropriate policy and regulation could be a magnet for financial flows into the sector.



Any major technological improvement that dramatically changes the status quo by reducing unit costs and expanding service capabilities offers the potential of enormous benefits in terms of network and market expansion, cost and price reductions, and new service development. But as I have mentioned before in various fora, one size does not fit all. Standard strategies do not work for all the countries, but instead strategy should be country and regionally-specific. It is equally fundamental that we recognize that every new ICT strategy to reduce the digital divide has to have a framework for coordination that involves all stakeholders, especially the private sector. This is a key component.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The rapid rate of change in ICT technologies, markets and services being stimulated by IP convergence is creating two sets of problems for policy-makers and regulators. Many established policies and regulations have become obsolete and now provide inefficient and increasingly untenable restrictions and barriers to the development and dissemination of the benefits of IP convergence. Policy-makers and regulators must therefore forge a transition path away from the old regulations that may have served a useful purpose in the past, but are today barriers to progress.

The second equally challenging task is how to develop the appropriate policy and regulatory framework that will facilitate the realization of the full benefits of ICT network and service development and the achievement of public interest goals. In many LDCs, policy changes are required. These changes should seek to provide regulators with powers, flexibility and tools to implement a transition path to a new framework of regulation that facilitates new network development opportunities that is fuelled by increased investor financial flows into the sector.

The Fourth UN Conference on LDCs will be one of the biggest and most comprehensive development conference of this new decade. The new Programme of Action will determine the development paradigm for years to come. The key objectives for the next ten years must include some ambitious targets on ICTs. My office has proposed to create a Science and Technology Bank for LDCs to facilitate LDCs' access to technologies and technological know-how. This would provide access especially to critical technology <sup>applied to</sup> ~~in~~ agriculture, renewable energy, infrastructure, ecosystems management, water supply, and health, and would also help to overcome the digital divide. This Science and Technology Bank for LDCs would facilitate access to essential technologies on concessional terms to the LDCs by providing not only

cheaper access to patented technology, but also information about adequate technologies for LDCs.

There is also a need to ensure full compliance with the multilateral commitments in the area of technology transfer to LDCs. Enhanced support is not only required from traditional development partners in this area but the potential of South-South cooperation in facilitating technology catch-up should also be exploited.

*We need to set our selves targets in the areas of ITCs - because the knowledge of technology is more affordable and specific*

I would like to conclude here by saying that I am confident that this meeting will provide fresh and innovative ideas which will help to guide our deliberations as we journey to Istanbul in May. I thank you for your kind attention and wish you all fruitful deliberations in the coming few days.

*It is important to fully operationalize the Digital Solidarity Fund as one of the means to reduce the digital divide.*

~~Digital Solidarity Fund~~