BDT COMMUNIQUÉ

Addressing development challenges and driving collaboration for a thriving digital future at the ITU Regional Development Forum for the Arab States

8 November 2023, Bahrain

The Regional Development Forum for the Arab States (RDF-ARB) was held from 6-7 November 2023 in Bahrain to discuss priority development issues for the region, and identify avenues to scale-up implementation of country and regional priorities to advance meaningful connectivity and sustainable digital transformation.

The Forum was organized by the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) Telecommunication Development Bureau (BDT) and hosted by the Ministry of Transportation and Telecommunications of the Kingdom of Bahrain. The event welcomed over 100 participants from 19 countries and the State of Palestine.

"This Regional Development Forum provided an important platform to strengthen digital cooperation and contribute to the realization of the Sustainable Development Goals, and the Partner2Connect matchmaking sessions were very fruitful," said Dr. Cosmas Luckyson Zavazava, Director of ITU's Telecommunication Development Bureau. "I would like to thank the Kingdom of Bahrain for hosting this Forum. The discussions held will help strengthen cooperation and partnerships for impactful change to advance digital development through the implementation of the ITU Kigali Action Plan."

The Regional Development Forum was opened by H.E. Mohamed Bin Thamer Al Kaabi, Minister of Transportation and Telecommunication, Dr. Cosmas Luckyson Zavazava and Mr. Khaled El Mekwad, UN Resident Coordinator in the country. Eng. Mohammed Ahmed BinAli, Acting Director, Ministry of Transportation and Telecommunications was nominated as the Chair of the Regional Development Forum.

"The Kingdom of Bahrain was proud to host the Regional Development Forum for the Arab States in coordination with the ITU's Telecommunication Development Bureau as a further step towards the implementation of the outcomes of the World Telecommunication Development Conference 2022 held in Kigali, Rwanda in June last year," said H.E. Mohamed Bin Thamer Al Kaabi. "This comes at an opportune time for us as we launch our 6th National Telecommunications Plan, which aims to build a sustainable digital economy through digital transformation. The priorities of the Regional Initiatives go hand-in-hand with our telecommunications strategy and we are looking forward to sharing expertise and discussing new initiatives of achieving our common goals."

An executive panel on 'Digital Development in Arab Region: Trends, Opportunities & Challenges' discussed regional and country specific challenges and opportunities arising from digital development and transformation.

The Forum also reported on the progress that has been made towards the implementation of the [five Regional Initiatives for Arab Region](#) approved at the [World Telecommunication Development Conference 2022](#) (WTDC-22) held in Kigali, Rwanda in June 2022.

"Forum discussions included an overview of multistakeholder cooperation for digital development, support provided to countries through the newly launched BDT global initiative, 'Innovation and Entrepreneurship Alliance for Digital Development' as well as the Partner2Connect Matchmaking Roundtables," said Adel Darwish, Regional Director of the ITU Regional Office for the Arab States. "I am confident that the interactive discussions that took place at the Forum will help advance the realization of the Regional Initiatives for Arab States."

The Forum also featured sessions on the ITU-D Network of Women (NoW), giving women delegates the opportunity to exchange views on how to develop gender mainstreamed policies to facilitate meaningful participation and engagement of Arab women delegates in ITU's work. In addition, understanding that young people aged 15 to 24 years old are the most active online, the session 'Youth: Generation Connect and Inter-generational Dialogue' facilitated a dialogue on involving young people in work on digital development and digital transformation.

Partner2Connect Matchmaking Roundtables

The Partner2Connect (P2C) Matchmaking Roundtables allowed participants to review and report on the implementation of announced pledges and committed to match country and regional needs with concrete solutions. The roundtables discussed and identified effective mechanisms to coordinate and collaborate for better and optimal use of resources that will bring high impact and sustainable development in the Arab States and beyond.

Highlights from the regional Partner2Connect Matchmaking Roundtables include:

The commitment by **UN-ESCWA** to expediting the use of technology and innovation for enhanced operations in Arab Public Institutions through its multi-stakeholder project ENACT in Algeria, Bahrein, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Mauritania, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan, Syrian Arab Republic, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates, Yemen; the commitment by **Vodafone** to continue implementing its USD 190 million connectivity pledge and further connect 60 million persons in addition to the 20 million already connected; the commitments by the **League of Arab States** worth a total of USD 160,000 to a) implement the initiative 'Arab Digital Capital' launched by Saudi Arabia; b) to implement the 'Arab Strategy for artificial intelligence', and, c) to develop and implement the 'Arab ICT Strategy' in all Arab countries where applicable; the commitments by **Huawei** to bring connectivity to about 120 million people in remote areas globally by 2025, including in relevant Arab states, and, to build capacity through development of cybersecurity maturity model; the commitment by **UAE,** to invest USD 1.4 million (AED 5 million) to support the I-Codi initiative, through hosting the I-Codi regional hub and providing trainings and workshops to empower Arab Member States in Digital Innovation in ITC; the commitment by **Oman** to further implement its pledge of USD 2.7 million for the

establishment of Arab Regional Cybersecurity Centre (ARCC); commitment by **BUGLOUD** to provide different learning opportunities for participants in the region through its cybersecurity activities; the commitment by **E-Space** to deploy service and resources into developing Arab nations, that will allow for rapid advances and highly advanced critical infrastructure, smart cities and environmental monitoring network; the commitment by **ICANN** to continue the implementation of its pledge and provide support to strengthen ccTLD registries which will support the capacity development activities as well as technical and hands-on assistance; the commitment by **GSMA** to further implement its pledge of providing free training to policy makers and regulators on topics such as, Humanitarian Crisis response, IoT, 5 G, Big Data and Bridging the Mobile Gender Gap; the commitment by **RIPE NCC** committed to further support Arab states in their efforts to cultivate and secure digital infrastructure and enhance workforce digital skills; the commitment by **Access Partnership** to further promote better policies and regulations in Arab region which will enable the use of new technologies; the commitment by the **Egypt** to further implement its pledge of training 500 trainees in the field of ICT technologies and services in Arab and Africa regions by 2026; the commitment by Saudi Arabia to enhance capacity development in the realms of digital regulation and transformation to ITU members worth USD 400,000 until 2024.

At the Forum, new Partner2Connect pledges and commitments were also announced. Here is a snapshot:

Egypt committed to promote digital inclusion for nearly 300,000 refugees in Egypt in collaboration with UNHCR by ensuring equitable internet access and SIM card availability; **Somalia** committed four pledges focused on: a) the establishment of CIRT, b) development of national cybersecurity strategy, c) regulation for government services, d) ICT Development priorities; **Djibouti** committed to advance in its digital transformation including seven (National Digital Strategy, Broadband Development Strategy, Connect Schools and Hospitals to Broadband, Improve quality and affordability of telecommunication services, Strengthen digital trust, Establishment of legal and regulatory framework, Host ITU event on business planning) processes and activities which are in line with Djibouti's National Priorities; **Comoros** committed to engage with willing partners in the realization of a digital economy which will be based on developed digital infrastructure; **Members of the ITU Generation Connect Arab Region** committed to help advance digital transformation in the region by creating strategies, addressing challenges and enhancing youth empowerment through pro-active action and activities.

Detailed information on the matchmaking sessions and new pledges will be featured in the official report of the Regional Development Forum for the Arab States to be posted on the Forum's website by 16 November 2023.

New agreement

During the Regional Development Forum a Framework Cooperation Agreement was signed with Somalia's Ministry of communications and Technology focusing on key areas of ICT development through regulatory frameworks, capacity building, strengthening digital infrastructure, connectivity and fostering trust in the use of digital services.

Resources and background information:
- RDF-ARB website
- RDF-ARB event photos
- RDF-ARB event highlights video

Discover what others are saying on social media and join the conversation by searching and posting with the hashtag #ITURDF

For questions, please contact:

ITU Office for the Arab States
ITU-RO-ArabStates@itu.int

About the International Telecommunication Union (ITU)

The International Telecommunication Union (ITU) is the United Nations specialized agency for information and communication technologies (ICTs), driving innovation in ICTs together with 193 Member States and a membership of over 900 companies, universities, and international and regional organizations. Established over 150 years ago, ITU is the intergovernmental body responsible for coordinating the shared global use of the radio spectrum, promoting international cooperation in assigning satellite orbits, improving communication infrastructure in the developing world, and establishing the worldwide standards that foster seamless interconnection of a vast range of communications systems. From broadband networks to cutting-edge wireless technologies, aeronautical and maritime navigation, radio astronomy, oceanographic and satellite-based earth monitoring as well as converging fixed-mobile phone, Internet, and broadcasting technologies, ITU is committed to connecting the world. For more information, visit: www.itu.int