ITU Regional Forum on Bridging the Standardization Gap

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*Opening Address*

Malcolm Johnson

Director, Telecommunication Standardization Bureau  
International Telecommunication Union

Mr. Khin Maung Thet, Director-General of the Posts and Telecommunications Department, Ministry of Communications and Information Technology, Republic of the Union of Myanmar

Mr. Chasik Leem, President of the Telecommunication Technology Association, Republic of Korea

Distinguished colleagues

Ladies and Gentleman,

Min ga la ba

Good morning and welcome to this ITU regional forum on Bridging the Standardization Gap.

I would like to thank the Ministry of Communications and Information Technology of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar for hosting this event, in the beautiful city of Yangon. In addition I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the Telecommunications Technology Association (TTA) for its support in organizing this event, and the Ministry of Science, ICT and Future Planning of the Republic of Korea, for its generous support to our Bridging the Standards Gap fund which helps us carry out many activities such as this.

Myanmar is changing rapidly and embracing the new ICT world at a very fast pace. There are many challenges ahead, in common with many other countries in this region. Participation in this forum and other ITU activities will surely help to address these challenges.

As many of you will know, ITU is the UN agency responsible for ICTs. Our membership comprises 193 Member States and over 700 private-sector entities, including academia.

Over the past almost a century and a half, ITU has helped to fulfil the dreams and desires of people to communicate efficiently and safely, irrespective of distance. You cannot make a phone call, or surf the web, without engaging in a multitude of ITU standards.

And since we now live in an increasingly global and digital society, with smart technologies informing nearly everything that we do, whether at the individual or the institutional level, standardization is increasingly important.

Internationally developed and approved standards have been fundamental in fostering the development of the interconnected world that many of us rely on today.

Standards increase competition, and create a level playing field, with reduced costs and reduced barriers to entry that enable companies in emerging markets to access global markets.

The participation of developing countries in ITU’s standardization work ensures that ITU produces standards to meet their own particular requirements. Participation also enables a greater understanding of standards, so that companies and administrations can make more informed choices, and gain knowledge of how to implement the most appropriate standards.

ITU has introduced a number of initiatives to facilitate greater participation of developing countries in our standards work.

We support participation with fellowships available to all eligible countries for meetings of all ten ITU-T study groups. Myanmar and other countries represented here fall into this category, and I very much encourage you to take advantage of this opportunity.

We have increased the number of meetings in the regions, we have created regional study groups, and we offer remote participation for most of our meetings. This allows delegates to avoid costly airfares and hotel expenses. Last year we held over 600 meetings with remote participation, enjoyed by over 3000 delegates.

Consequently I am pleased to say that since 2006 we have seen over 40 new countries participate in ITU-T meetings, countries that had never participated before.

Another significant step forward has been the establishment of a reduced membership fee for Sector Members from certain developing countries, and a new category of membership for academia and research institutes.

The Sector Membership fee has been reduced to CHF4000 a year for certain countries, and universities in all developing countries can join ITU for CHF2000 per year, compared to the normal fee of CHF32,000.

Since introducing this new academic membership category, 64 institutions have joined ITU.

In a recent study, supported by the Korean government, we discovered that the absence of a body at national level to coordinate standardization activities is a major obstacle. Standardization secretariats can help drive ICT standardization activities at the national level. So, to that end, we have recently finalized guidelines on the establishment of standardization secretariat and these will be presented today.

By the end of this year, according to ITU estimates, global Internet penetration will be approaching 40 per cent. However two thirds of people in the developing world will still be offline; and over 90 per cent of people in the world’s least developed countries will still have no access to the Internet.

It is crucial to address this disparity, because in the 21st century, broadband has become an essential infrastructure, just like roads and railways.

This is not about technology for technology’s sake; it’s about technology for educating people; it’s about technology for better health care; it’s about technology for sustainable social and economic development.   
  
This workshop will also address options for deployment of broadband infrastructure in the region, especially in rural areas.

I certainly hope to see many of you taking advantage of these opportunities and participating in ITU’s standardization work in the future.

I wish you all a most productive and enjoyable meeting