ITU Workshop on Making Media Accessible to all:   
the options and the economics

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Opening Address

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Ladies and Gentlemen:

Good afternoon and welcome to this *Workshop on Making Media Accessible to all: the options and the economics*.

ITU has long taken accessibility very seriously. We have been working hard to address this issue, and provide better access to ICTs for persons with disabilities for many years. And, I am proud to say that it is in particular through the work of ITU’s Standardization Sector, which was the first standards body to produce a standard specifically for persons with disabilities, that ITU members have focussed their effort.

All of our work in this area is designed to help achieve the goal of universal access to communications for everyone. To do this we have focussed on the three elements of universal design, availability, and affordability.

It’s clear that ITU’s goal to connect the world will not be achieved without connecting the more than one billion people with disabilities who face accessibility challenges.

Effective standardization will increase the quantity and quality of accessibility services. And, in ITU-T, we identified a long time ago, that involving experts with disabilities from the outset of a standards’ development, ensures that users’ needs are built-in right from the start.

Standards can make simple improvements, for example telephone service pictograms, symbols and icons; or more complex ones, for example defining the requirements for sign-language and lip-reading in video codecs, or by defining telecommunication relay services for the deaf.

From a business perspective, standards widen the market for products and services, thus incorporating the needs of persons with disabilities makes sound business sense.

Access to audiovisual media is essential to full inclusion and the access services that we will see presented during this workshop are indispensable to persons with all types of disabilities.

It is imperative that access services like subtitling, audiodescription and closed sign-language become part of future media services.

ITU already uses captioning for many of its meetings and has found that it is appreciated not just by those with accessibility needs, but also as an additional tool to aid the following of a meeting. Creating and defining global standards for these services will undoubtedly drive efficient deployment throughout the world.

I am very proud to announce that, at ITU’s last Council meeting, the very first Accessibility Policy in the United Nations system was approved. The policy aims to achieve full participation of persons with disabilities in all ITU activities.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

It is a great pleasure to see contributions to this workshop from the emerging economies that have become the powerhouses of the world economy. Persons living with disabilities in these countries are often facing the greatest challenges.

It is clear that there remain many barriers to making media accessible to all.

And what is equally clear is that – whether we are talking about the two per cent of the population with recognized disabilities, or the 20 per cent of the population with less-serious functional impairments – all of us will, in the course of our lives, benefit from accessible media.

Finding ways to optimize the use of technology and promote inter-working and interoperability is central to the challenge of making media accessible to all.

With several deliverables produced, the Focus Group on Audiovisual Media Accessibility has made some excellent progress to this end, and I am pleased to see a proposal to take this work forward.

I am also happy to note that the results of this group will be captured in a brand new online toolkit on audiovisual media accessibility, and yet another positive step has been the proposal to improve the coordination of accessibility work undertaken by ITU’s Standardization and Radio sectors through the formation of an Intersector Rapporteur Group on Audiovisual Media Accessibility (IRG-AVA).

Just before I hand over to Seong-Ho Jeong I would like to highlight that we will shortly launch a new IPTV Application Challenge with the theme *Better Quality of Life with Global Standards: An accessible world for all.* The challenge will be developed in partnership with the International Paralympic Committee with a view to showcasing the winners at the 2016 games. I am sure you will agree that this is an excellent opportunity for all and I hope that you will help us spread news of the competition when it is launched in the next few weeks.

Let us join forces to make sure that the next generation of products and services are accessible to persons with disabilities and therefore all of us throughout the world.

Thank you and I wish you a very successful workshop.