**Global Media briefing on WCIT-12, 17 September 2012**

**Speech by Malcolm Johnson, ITU's Telecommunication Standardization Bureau Director**

Thank you for joining us at this press briefing.

As you know there has already been a lot of coverage ahead of WCIT.

We welcome this debate as there are some very important issues on the table.

In preparing for the conference, governments will take account of the views of the private sector, civil society and public… a truly multi-stakeholder discussion.

Perhaps because of the wide range of issues covered there has been some confusion around a number of key proposals, but most attention has been on ITU’s role in the Internet and censorship.

So, on behalf of the Secretary General, I would like to take this opportunity to dispel some myths and to clarify what WCIT is really about. My colleague Richard Hill will give a presentation covering the issues in detail and following that we will be open to your questions.

So the purpose of WCIT is to review the only truly global treaty on international telecommunications known as the International Telecommunication Regulations (ITRs), that was adopted in 1988 and to which 178 countries are bound to.

By advocating market liberalization this treaty laid the foundations for the growth of the Internet and mobile telephony.

But since the treaty is 24 years old it clearly needs to be updated to address a number of concerns that did not exist in 1988.

That is why ITU’s membership, (a membership that includes 193 governments, over 700 private sector entities, academia and civil society, as well as other international bodies both governmental and non-governmental) has spent quite sometime preparing for this conference that should ensure the continued – and expanded – access to what we now know as information and communications technologies (ICTs) for the next generation of users.

The many regional preparatory meetings around the world, and a Council Working Group open to ITU Member States and Sector Members, have made contributions that will be the basis for the proposals to revise the treaty.

The ITU Secretariat’s role is to facilitate this dialogue and ensure the preparations and the conference itself benefits from all the necessary support to create a treaty which, we hope, will address all the issues on the table.

Although there are many important issues before the conference, unfortunately they are not receiving the media attention they deserve due to a paranoia created by claims that ITU wants to take over the Internet!

Firstly, I would like to emphasize that ITU is yet to decide anything, it is for the Member States to make proposals, and for the conference to decide what ITU’s position will be on these proposals. Like other ITU conferences, WCIT-12 will work towards achieving consensus on these proposals. In the unlikely event of a vote, it will be on a one-country-one-vote principle. So no proposal is going to be passed if it does not have very wide support from all involved.

Secondly, there are no proposals submitted to create new international regulatory agencies, or mechanisms, and hence no proposals to put ITU in control of the Internet!

As for the suggestion of increased censorship, ITU’s Constitution (Article 34) gives Member States the right to block any private telecommunications which appear “dangerous to the security of the State or contrary to its laws, to public order or to decency.” The ITRs cannot override the Constitution, in this or any other respect.

And, as we all know, many countries around the world already intervene in communications for various reasons, be it to stop access to gambling sites or sites promoting politically extremist views, or the circulation of child abuse photographs.

The important topics on the table include: reducing the cost of international mobile roaming; prevention of fraud; misuse of the telephone numbering system; as well as incentives for investment in the telecommunication network; and the empowerment of consumers.

Improving access to ICTs for people with disabilities is also the subject of a proposal to the conference, as well as another on improving energy efficiency and the responsible disposal of ICTs.

The revised ITRs should provide an international regulatory framework that will help develop markets that encourage investment to meet the growing demand, just as the ITRs did in 1988. The current ITRs provided the foundations for the so-called ‘mobile miracle’ and the growth of the Internet. A revised treaty can create the right conditions for a new ‘broadband miracle’ and growth of the knowledge society.

The alternative to WCIT would be a scattering of discussions among forums that deal with various aspects of the telecommunication ecosystem. And when I refer to telecommunication, I mean as defined by ITU that is: Any transmission, emission or reception of signs, signals, writings, images and sounds or intelligence of any nature by wire, radio, optical or other electromagnetic systems. Clearly, an all-encompassing definition.

So the stakes are high.