NEPAD AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF SATELLITE SERVICES IN AFRICA

Mr Chairman,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is good to be back again at the ITU and to share this space and time with old friends and colleagues. And it is particularly pleasing for me to note that the purpose of my return to the ITU is to address this workshop, which is organized under the auspices of the Standardization Sector of the ITU and devoted to satellite transmission.

We certainly have come a long way! In the heady days following the advent of the fibre optic cable, it was not always easy for satellite people to get a hearing in the standards fora of the ITU.

The general feeling in these fora was that the satellite medium had passed its heyday and should be relegated to the fringes of world telecommunications. That was a decade ago. To-day, it looks as though the climate has improved quite a bit for the satellite folks in the ITU Standardization Sector.

Out there in the African market place, satellite transmission is alive and well and a bright future lies ahead for the industry in the African continent especially in this era of IP and multimedia.
However, for this future to be fully realized, it is essential for the satellite companies and the African development institutions to sit down together and have a discussion about the role that satellite technology can play in meeting the development needs of the continent.

From the very inception of commercial satellite communications, Africa seemed to be the one continent that stood to benefit most from satellite technology.

Following the inauguration of the INTELSAT system, African countries were quick to embrace the use of satellites to connect their countries to countries in other continents, especially Europe.

Today, thirty years later, an impressive array of satellites, operated by different companies, have footprints on the continent of Africa. But with a few exceptions, and despite the rapid technological advances in satellite technology, the use of satellites for links within and between African countries remains relatively limited.

We look forward to the day when satellites will be seen to integrate the nations of the continent rather than dividing them with the necessity for transit routes through hubs in Europe at great cost to the African customer.

We also look forward to the day when satellites would provide the means for efficient management of health care systems or for connecting African schools to the internet or for delivery of government services to African citizens or for widespread delivery of programming content to African viewers.

The greatest impact of satellite technology on the development of African economies and societies will occur when its usage enables Africans and African institutions to communicate

more with each other than to communicate abroad. For this to happen, the technology will need to be affordable; the earth terminals will need to be small and inexpensive and the air time and space segment capacity will need to be affordable.

This will require the satellite companies to invest more in Africa: more in the sense of paying attention to the specific needs of the continent; more in the sense of providing high power beams that are ubiquitous across the continent with earth terminals that are small and truly affordable.

The companies will need to expend resources in devising marketing and financial arrangements to enable the demand for satellite services to emerge and to grow and to remain sustainable.

The foregoing are requirements on the supply side. There is also a need to address the demand side of this equation.

In this connection, African development institutions need to do more to identify opportunities for the application of telecommunications and computers to their societies; to develop and promote these applications in a significant manner and finally, to engage the satellite companies constructively and in ways that will enable them to develop effective marketing strategies for Africa.

These African institutions need to address policy and regulatory issues. They need to put in place continental policies and strategies that are hospitable to the development of satellite services. In particular, the institutions should seek to secure predictable regulatory regimes and uniform conditions across the continent.

I am here as a representative of one of those African institutions, namely NEPAD, the New Partnership for Africa's Development. This is a new and exciting African initiative which enjoys the overwhelming support of the African governments. It is moving forward with the support of the governments of the G8 countries and a large section of the African and non-African private sector. NEPAD is expected to have a major impact on African development.

NEPAD is premised on African States making commitments to good governance, democracy and human rights, resolving existing conflicts and endeavoring to prevent new ones. NEPAD is committed to sound economic and corporate governance and to the improvement of critical elements of the physical and human infrastructure.

NEPAD has identified the development and use of information and communication technology (ICT) as one of its top priority programmes and has established the e-Africa Commission as the Task Team to drive its ICT programme.

The e-Africa Commission has put in place programmes in ten focus areas. Each programme is devoted to a specific area of application of ICT African problems.

Specific projects are being formulated and developed within each programme focus area. For example, under the umbrella of the Human Development programme, there will be ICT projects in education, in health and in areas related to employment and labour.

Another focus area of considerable interest is the e-applications programme, which includes e-commerce, e-tourism, e-government, e-agriculture e.t.c. The NEPAD 'e-government' project has been identified for development on a fast track.

The e-government project aims to introduce the widespread use of ICT in the conduct of government activities and for improvement of efficiency in the delivery of government services to African citizens. This project is expected to play an important role in supporting the good governance initiative of NEPAD.

The Commission thus plans a wide range of activities aimed at developing ICT in all aspects of life in Africa. These activities will have a significant impact on the demand for communication services, including satellite services, on the continent.

Underlying all these programmes is the need to construct an extensive and robust ICT infrastructure across the continent. The NEPAD ICT infrastructure programme aims to interconnect the African countries with a broadband terrestrial fibre optic network that will also link Africa to the rest of the world.

This broadband network will be supplemented by satellite links of various capacities (from thin route to broadband), which will meet the general needs of the continent as well as support specific NEPAD projects.

Let me highlight one project which is a high priority NEPAD project and which I believe, is of interest to the satellite companies represented here.

The NEPAD 'e-schools' project aims to connect all African high schools to the internet before year 2008 and all African primary schools before year 2013.

Each school will have a minimum set of ICT equipment and provide teaching of IT skills to its students.
It is our intention to connect the African schools to the internet using satellite links. The Commission is setting up an e-school partnership that, in addition to the pedagogic requirements, will bring together companies and other entities that will provide the skills, resources, organization, equipment etc which are necessary to realize this project.

There are of the order of 500,000 schools in Africa of which about 50,000 are high schools. At the present time, these schools represent potential (but not yet actual) customers for the satellite companies. However, when the NEPAD e-schools project is completed, we expect these schools to have been converted into actual rate-paying customers for the satellite companies and other vendors.

What happens between now and the time when the schools become customers, is a matter that the Commission and the satellite companies must discuss, plan and implement together.

Obviously, if we assume that each primary school will install a 5-meter C-band dish powered by grid power or a large diesel generator and pay thousands of dollars in air time charges, then, of course, the project will not even take off.

However, there are solutions based on small antennas, solar or other non-conventional power sources, air time charges that would ramp up over a period of time to fully economic levels when the schools are able to afford such costs.

One aspect to consider is that many of the satellites with footprints on the continent of Africa have transponder capacity that is not being used and probably will never be used during the lifetime of these satellites. Could not this capacity be used to educate African children while at the same time developing the market for satellite services?

In summary, I believe that satellites will play an important role in the realization of the NEPAD e-schools and other projects of the e-Africa Commission. We are very happy to welcome as partners, any satellite company that wishes to play its part in this endeavour. I will also be happy to provide more information as required.

To conclude, I would say that the advent of NEPAD with its targeted development agenda presents an opportunity, which if embraced by the satellite industry could create new opportunities and new markets in Africa as well as contributing to the development of the African people.

Thank you for your kind attention

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