



THE FUTURE OF VOICE

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Opening Remarks

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Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my honour to open this event entitled "The Future of Voice" within the framework of the ITU New Initiatives Programme. On behalf of Secretary-General Dr. Hamadoun Touré, and myself, we welcome you to this meeting.

My pleasure at being with you today is two-fold. This is the first high-level meeting I am opening as the new ITU Deputy Secretary-General. Secondly, I have full confidence that the issues to be discussed over the next two days correspond to the expectations of our Member States. During the recent Plenipotentiary Conference, our Member States confirmed the broad mandate of the Union and expressed their interest in projects of strategic value for the expansion of the telecommunication/information technology sector. In this respect, I look forward to the outcomes of this event as an important contribution to the work of the Union.

Why this subject, and why now?

For many years, voice services have played a key role as the principal driver of telecom operators' revenues. Nevertheless, this situation is now changing rapidly, meriting closer investigation of the issues and challenges facing the industry as a whole.

Migration to the all-IP infrastructure is progressing very fast and IP-enabled ubiquitous networks are gradually replacing older infrastructures worldwide. Thanks in part to this migration, convergence is also becoming a reality at every level -- for example, between voice and data, fixed and mobile, and telecoms/internet/TV industry. Delivery of

multiple different services over one network is no longer a technical challenge. In fact, in many countries, it is now regarded as the new standard.

However, migration to an all-IP environment is not only a technical issue. It significantly impacts the performance of the sector, market structure, competition and regulation. The advantages made possible by IP-enabled technologies represent a new source of competitive environment and have driven network operators to invest in multibillion dollar modernization programmes, re-engineer their existing business models and introduce new services with the potential to generate future streams of revenue.

Innovation and new technologies offer prospects of enhanced economic growth. Nevertheless, policy-makers, regulators, and users groups around the globe have to seriously consider how to best protect and promote public interest in a converged IP-enabled communications environment, as traditional concepts of “voice” as a universal service continue to evolve. Indeed, it is in fact questionable whether voice communication will remain a marketable commodity over the near future and whether network access will be affordable for everyone.

In these new circumstances, existing regulatory paradigms need to be adjusted to the requirements of this new, converged telecommunication/information technology sector, where boundaries between the telecommunications, internet or TV industry are blurring and seem likely to disappear, changing the structure of the traffic over the networks. Sensitive to the complexity of the issues and polarization of viewpoints, policy-makers and communication regulators have to date taken a cautious approach. And this brings us to why we are here, to exchange views as to how the future of the voice will develop in an ubiquitous IP-enabled environment in different regions around the globe and how best to respond to these developments.

ITU has commissioned various background papers which will be presented during the workshop, which we hope will be of assistance in shaping an improved understanding of the complex issues before us.

As to the nature of this event, I would like to emphasize that this meeting is informal and we seek to encourage an open and frank debate among the many experts present today.

I should like to also mention that this event is being webcast live over the internet and video archives will be available on the website, along with all presentations and materials

presented during these two days. The main output of the event will be a Chairman's Report which will attempt to summarize the different perspectives put forward during the event.

Having checked the programme I have found a very good team of speakers of high competency. I would like to express appreciation for having accepted our invitation to participate in this event.

Now, I would like to introduce to you the Chairman for this event, Dr. Glenn Woroch. He is doubtless well-known to many of you, but by way of a brief introduction, Dr. Woroch is a Professor and Executive Director at the Center for Research on Telecommunications Policy, a university-based research center focusing on strategy, management and policy issues in telecommunications, computing and electronic mass media in Berkeley, USA. Dr. Woroch has had an impressive career in the telecom policy debate. He has been an economic advisor to government agencies including the U.S. Department of Energy and Justice and the Office of Technology Assessment. Dr. Woroch has published numerous articles in the fields of industrial organization, antitrust and regulation in scholarly journals.

Dr. Woroch, I am wondering if I could invite you to consider some other important topics. For example, how we can encourage worldwide operators and other agencies to invest in infrastructure while incomes and revenues are decreasing from the current infrastructure under current business models. I hope in the future we could organize a workshop to address these new challenges.

Dr. Woroch, let me wish you success in chairing this high level meeting.