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Subject: World Telecommunication and Information Society Day 2009 (WTISD)

Dear Sir/Madam,

17 May marks the anniversary of the signature of the first International Telegraph Convention in 1865 and the creation of the International Telecommunication Union. In 1973, this occasion was recognized as World Telecommunication Day. Following the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) in 2005 and the 2006 ITU Plenipotentiary Conference, 17 May was designated as World Telecommunication and Information Society Day.

As the leading ICT agency of the United Nations, ITU looks towards its members to raise awareness of the role of ICT in reducing poverty and creating opportunities for long-term and sustainable development, not least among the most vulnerable sections of our society. This year, to mark World Telecommunication and Information Society Day, ITU Council adopted the theme: "Protecting children in cyberspace".

At WSIS, ITU was entrusted by leaders of the international community with Action Line C5: "building confidence and security in the use of ICTs". The WSIS outcomes also specifically recognized the needs of children and young people and their protection in cyberspace. The Tunis Commitment recognized "the role of information and communication technologies (ICT) in the protection of children and in enhancing the development of children" as well as the need to "strengthen action to protect children from abuse and defend their rights in the context of ICT".

ITU's Child Online Protection (COP) initiative is in line with its mandate to establish the foundations for a safe and secure cyberworld for future generations. The need for COP is clear. A decade ago, there were just 182 million people using the Internet globally – and almost all of them lived in the developed world. By early 2009, however, there were over 1.5 billion Internet users worldwide, and more than 400 million of them had access to broadband. With over 600 million users in Asia, 130 million in Latin America and the Caribbean, and 50 million in Africa, the Internet is a growing common resource – vastly increasing the dangers online, especially for children. According to recent surveys, over 60 per cent of children and teenagers talk in chat rooms on a daily basis. Three in four children online are willing to share personal information about themselves and their family in exchange for goods and services. And one in five children will be targeted by a predator or paedophile each year.

The COP initiative – an integral part of ITU's Global Cybersecurity Agenda – was presented at the High Level Segment of ITU Council 2008, where it was endorsed by Heads of State, Ministers and heads of international organizations from around the world.

The theme of this year's WTISD aims at ensuring that children can safely access the Internet and its valuable resources without fear of falling prey to unscrupulous predators in cyberspace.

## World Telecommunication and Information Society Day 2009: Call for Action

During this year's WTISD, ITU calls upon all stakeholders (policy makers, regulators, operators and industry) to promote the adoption of policies and strategies that will protect children in cyberspace and promote their safe access to online resources. This will not only lead to the building of a more inclusive information society, but will also enable Member States to meet their obligations towards protecting and realizing the rights of children as laid out in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, adopted by UN General Assembly resolution 44/25 of 20 November 1989.

Among other issues, the Convention, which entered into force on 2 September 1990, requires that "States shall take appropriate measures to:

1. Recognize the important function performed by the mass media and ensure that the child has access to information and material from a diversity of national and international sources
2. Recognize the right of the child to education
3. Recognize the right of the child to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts
4. Recognize the right of the child to be protected from economic exploitation
5. Protect the child against all other forms of exploitation prejudicial to any aspects of the child's welfare, including
  - (a) The inducement or coercion of a child to engage in any unlawful sexual activity
  - (b) The exploitative use of children in prostitution or other unlawful sexual practices
  - (c) The exploitative use of children in pornographic performances and materials
6. Take all appropriate measures to protect children from the illicit use of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances

In order to address issues related to protecting children in cyberspace, ITU calls upon Member States to:

- **Create public awareness** on the issues related to protecting children in cyberspace and to identify policies, best practices, tools and resources for adaptation/use in their countries.  
**Call for action:** ITU Member States and Sector Members are encouraged to actively participate in ITU events to enhance cybersecurity and protect children in cyberspace and, where possible, provide experts and resources in order to share experience and best practices for mainstreaming cybersecurity in their policies, regulations and laws.
- **Support ongoing work** aimed at developing Guidelines on protecting children online for policy makers and regulators.  
**Call for action:** ITU Member States and Sector Members are encouraged to participate in ITU activities, in particular to support ITU's Global Cybersecurity Agenda and the COP initiative.
- **Identify risks and vulnerabilities to children in cyberspace** as the Internet and other online resources continue to expand.  
**Call for action:** ITU Member States and Sector Members are encouraged to partner with ITU, share experiences and contribute experts and resources to develop practical tools to help minimize risk to children.
- **Build resource repositories for common use**  
**Call for action:** ITU Member States and Sector Members are encouraged to share knowledge and experience while facilitating international strategic partnerships to define and implement concrete initiatives in protecting children online.
- **Promote capacity building** aimed at strengthening global response in protecting children as they venture into cyberspace.  
**Call for action:** ITU Member States and Sector Members are requested to build expertise and develop alerting mechanisms to tackle the growing threats to children as they browse the Internet and access information online.

We invite you to consider organizing programmes in your country to mark WTISD 2009 with a focus on the theme of *Protecting Children in Cyberspace*. It would be useful to involve all sections of society to

formulate awareness and consensus on the issues underlying the theme. We would appreciate it if you will send us by e-mail at [cop@itu.int](mailto:cop@itu.int) your reports or supporting material that will be posted on ITU's WTISD website.

This year, the theme for World Telecommunication and Information Society Day, "Protecting children in cyberspace" will influence our work not only on the Day but throughout the year and in the future as well. In Geneva, the event will be marked by a high-profile ceremony to present the World Telecommunication and Information Society Award to eminent personalities who have contributed to protecting children in cyberspace. Round table discussions on promoting and safeguarding the rights of children in cyberspace will also be organized along with a cluster of events aimed at reviewing the implementation of WSIS objectives.

ITU will post all promotional material related to WTISD on the website: [www.itu.int/WTISD/2009](http://www.itu.int/WTISD/2009). The information and material will help you organize activities and events on 17 May. In particular, it will include messages from UN Secretary-General Mr Ban Ki-moon and from me along with high-resolution files of a poster in Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish that you are invited to reproduce locally. A neutral poster will also be available for use with other languages. If you would like to receive a copy on CD-ROM please send a request to [pressinfo@itu.int](mailto:pressinfo@itu.int) and provide a complete postal address, including name of the addressee.

With respect to the theme of World Telecommunication and Information Society Day, let us resolve to protect children in cyberspace and promote their inalienable rights to access information and knowledge in a safe and secure environment.

I wish you a very successful World Telecommunication and Information Society Day 2009.

Yours faithfully,

*(signed)*

Dr Hamadoun I. Touré  
Secretary-General