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To: All Member States and Sector Members of ITU

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**Subject: World Telecommunication and Information Society Day 2011 (WTISD):
“Better life in rural communities with ICTs”**

Dear Sir/Madam,

World Telecommunication and Information Society Day, celebrated each year on 17 May, marks the anniversary of the signature of the first International Telegraph Convention in 1865 which led to the creation of the International Telecommunication Union. This occasion was recognized as World Telecommunication Day in 1973. Following the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) in 2005 and the 2006 ITU Plenipotentiary Conference in Antalya, Turkey, 17 May was designated as World Telecommunication and Information Society Day.

Last year on 17 May 2010, ITU celebrated its 145th anniversary. The global celebration of this landmark event was held in Shanghai at World Expo 2010, showcasing the occasion to a worldwide audience.

This year, World Telecommunication and Information Society Day highlights the theme “**Better life in rural communities with ICTs**”, which was adopted by ITU Council in 2009 and follows up on the theme for 2010: “*Better city, better life with ICTs*”.

As the leading specialized agency of the United Nations for information and communication technologies (ICTs), ITU looks towards its Members to raise awareness of the role of ICTs in creating fresh opportunities for a better life through long-term, sustainable development, not least among the most vulnerable and under-served sections of society. Even as the migration of populations to teeming cities deplete rural communities of their youthful vigour, the world’s villages and remote districts face further neglect and deprivation in terms of infrastructure development, applications and services.

ICTs are essential in helping us accelerate progress towards meeting the Millennium Development Goals. In the rural context, ICTs provide enhanced opportunities to generate income and combat poverty, hunger, ill health and illiteracy. Half the world’s population – nearly 3.5 billion people – resides in rural districts and far flung communities, representing the poorer, less educated, and more deprived cousins of the world’s urban citizens. Among them are as many as 1.4 billion of the world’s extremely poor people, who are also among the least connected to the benefits of ICTs. We cannot allow this situation to continue. It is time for Global Action to connect rural communities to the opportunities offered by ICTs.

During this year’s WTISD, ITU calls upon all stakeholders (including policy makers, regulators, operators and industry) to promote the adoption of policies and strategies that will promote ICTs in rural areas to contribute towards a better life. Please see my **Call for Action** in annex.

We invite you to consider organizing programmes in your country to mark WTISD 2011 with a focus on the theme: “**Better life in rural communities with ICTs**”. 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 send us your reports or supporting material, including photographs and videos to be posted on ITU’s WTISD website through the online form at www.itu.int/wtisd/2011/form.

The theme for World Telecommunication and Information Society Day 2011 will influence our work not only on the Day but throughout the year and in the future as well.

With respect to the theme of World Telecommunication and Information Society Day 2011, let us resolve to use ICTs to make our rural communities better, more sustainable and productive.

I join you in celebrating the 146th anniversary of ITU and wish you a very successful World Telecommunication and Information Society Day 2011.

Yours faithfully,

(signed)

Dr Hamadoun I. Touré
Secretary-General

ANNEX

Call for Action

ICTs and related e-applications are key instruments in improving governance and rural services, such as providing community health care, safe drinking water and sanitation, education, food and shelter; improving maternal health and reducing child mortality; empowering women and the more vulnerable members of society; and ensuring environmental sustainability. As ICTs increasingly dictate lifestyles and behaviour patterns and power the growth of trade and commerce, rural communities must not be allowed to fall behind cities in their quest for connectivity.

Broadband connectivity is essential to establish the information and communication highway that will feed both urban centres and rural communities with the means to meet their development goals and aspirations. ITU's Build on Broadband initiative is aimed at increasing the roll out of this state-of-the-art technology. Last September, the ITU/UNESCO-led Broadband Commission for Digital Development, which includes over 50 Commissioners from the highest levels of government and industry around the world, submitted its report to UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon ahead of the MDG Review in New York.

Developing a global partnership for development and using the power of ICTs to meet the MDGs is a goal in itself. ITU calls upon Member States, Sector Members and Associates as well as academia and citizens' groups to pull together every conceivable resource to ensure that rural communities worldwide are fully connected to ICTs. Acting as catalysts, ICTs open the door to myriad solutions in the quest for a more productive and better life in our rural communities.

The World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS), which met in Geneva in 2003 and in Tunis in 2005, called upon countries to consider establishing national mechanisms to achieve universal access / universal service in under-served rural areas in order to bridge the digital divide. ITU is committed to connecting the world and to ensuring that the benefits of ICTs reach the remotest corners as well as the most vulnerable communities.

The theme of this year's WTISD, "Better life in rural communities with ICTs", aims to ensure that ICTs will contribute to a better future for rural populations. As a means of bringing global attention to this theme, ITU will present the annual World Telecommunication and Information Society Award to eminent personalities who have contributed to connecting rural communities to the benefits of ICTs.

ITU will post promotional WTISD-related material available for downloading at: www.itu.int/wtisd/index.html in order to help organize activities and events on 17 May. Messages from UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and ITU Secretary-General Hamadoun Touré will be posted online along with high-resolution files of the WTISD poster in Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish that can be reproduced locally. A neutral poster will also be available for use in other languages.

World Telecommunication and Information Society Day 2011: Call for Action

- **Promote sustainable national policies** enabling the deployment of telecommunication/ICT networks and services for rural, isolated and underserved areas.

Call for action: ITU Member States are encouraged to:

- Actively participate in ITU events to enhance policies that will promote rural connectivity and lead to equal opportunities for all humankind, with especially perceptible improvement for the most vulnerable sections of society in rural and remote areas, contributing to the inclusive growth of society, including the use of universal access / universal service funds.
- Adopt national broadband strategies, recognizing that in the information age, broadband – like water, electricity, and roads in the industrial age – is not just a tool for communication, but a social asset that provides one of the most cost-effective and efficient means for delivering services to citizens and comprises a nation's core functions, provides a variety of services, and should be made available to all members of society, in their own languages.
- Build inclusive knowledge societies where all citizens have the skills and confidence to create, share, and preserve information and knowledge to improve their lives. Governments need to ensure that universal access / universal service policies include broadband access as an essential element of their definitions.
- Special consideration should be given to the direct application of broadband solutions to address the cross-cutting and cross-sectoral aspects of the MDG agenda. Specifically, evidence pertaining to impact, new business and social models, and sustainability is essential in demonstrating the benefits of broadband diffusion for scale-up and replication across all eight MDGs.

- **Support ongoing work aimed at developing standards** that will help the deployment of telecommunication/ICT infrastructure and services in rural, isolated and underserved areas.
Call for action: ITU Member States and Sector Members are encouraged to establish global standards on rural telecommunication/ICT networks and services, including broadband backhauling and satellite connectivity, participate in ITU activities by hosting events, identifying thought leaders in the area and offering expertise in support of ongoing work.
- **Promote frequency spectrum** allocations which facilitate the deployment of radiocommunication systems in rural areas.
Call for action: Administrations are encouraged to promote the adequate allocation of spectrum to provide coverage of large rural areas by means of the most efficient radiocommunication systems.
- **Encourage the use of wireless systems** designed to provide the most efficient coverage and service to rural areas, including satellite and terrestrial solutions.
Call for action: Administrations are invited to choose efficient solutions based on satellite and terrestrial radiocommunication systems appropriate for coverage and service requirements specific to rural areas.
- **Develop broadband connectivity and inclusion for all**, in particular in rural areas, through broadband backhaul, wireless or wireline, and including satellite communications.
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 establish a framework plan of action.
 - Renew efforts to mobilize public and private support for a significant improvement of basic ICT infrastructure in rural and remote areas.
 - Undertake economic analysis to determine sustainable business models for adequate returns on broadband investment at minimum income levels with maximum spill-over benefits across multiple sectors of the local society and economy in rural and remote areas; the innovative use of ‘digital dividends’ should be considered.
- **Support ongoing work on the deployment of efficient and cost-effective infrastructure**, in particular mobile telephony, in under-served and rural areas.
Call for action: Invite Member States to promote ITU’s work in overcoming the digital divide and the disparities between and within countries, in particular between urban and rural areas, by providing stable and alternative electric power supply for telecommunication/ICT facilities in rural and remote areas, upgrading their existing networks and integrating relevant and affordable new technologies.
- **Connect all institutions**, in particular schools, in rural areas. Schools are community hubs, places of learning and accessibility. By connecting schools we connect youth as well as others in the community to knowledge and information, leading to employment and social and economic development. Connected schools can serve as a point of service for under-served groups in the community. They may become vectors for e-applications, including agriculture, meteorology, health, education and commerce.
Call for action: ITU Member States, Sector Members and partners are urged to help connect all schools by 2015:
 - Make connecting schools a priority or formal requirement in the disbursement of Universal Access / Universal Service Funds.
 - Include school connectivity requirements directly in Universal Access / Universal Service Obligations.
 - Allocate radio-frequency spectrum for school connectivity and reduce or eliminate spectrum fees for schools.
 - Include school connectivity a condition to obtain operator licenses to ensure that a given percentage of schools are connected by a specific date.
 - Provide incentives for operators to connect schools and to offer special tariffs for schools, such as tax breaks, or reduced Universal Access / Universal Service Fund contribution levies.