

Statement of

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**Minister of Transport, Communications and Tourism of
The Republic of Suriname**

At the second consultation workshop for
Working Group 2 and 3 of the HIPCAR Project

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Paramaribo,

SURINAME

Mr. Philip Cross, Head of the ITU area office of the ITU,
Mr. S. Bazzanella, Project Manager of ITU/EU Project,
Ms. Jetty Olf, Director Telecommunication Authority Suriname,
Mrs. Thelma Douglas–Pinas, Permanent Secretary of the
Ministry of Transport, Communication and Tourism,
Ms. Kerstin Ludwig, Project Coordinator,
Distinguished participants,
Ladies and gentlemen,

It gives me great pleasure to address you this afternoon at the start of the second consultation workshop for working group 2 and 3 as part of the HIPCAR project.

On behalf of the Government of the Republic of Suriname, I would like to welcome you to Suriname and I hope that next to deliberating, you will also get a chance to experience the warmth of Suriname and its people.

Working group 2 and 3 will address the issues of interconnection, licensing and Universal Access and Service.

On interconnection I can recall the period when the 3 companies had to be urged to finalize their interconnection agreement. The interconnection agreement to enable sms traffic became a reality just last month. So, I hope that by deliberating on a harmonized approach on interconnection we will establish bench marks and a method that will and should be applicable in all member states.

I'm convinced that the various initiatives that take place within the Caribbean Region and which this HIPCAR project is one off,

is crucial and timely for the development of Information and Communication services within the various administrations.

The Government of Suriname initially concentrated on transforming the telecom sector into a liberalized sector and did this by first adjusting their legislation and then issuing 2 mobile licenses. This was done 2,5 years ago, and in retrospect it has led to a more balanced sector in which the consumer has a choice.

Apparently, whenever people evaluate the status of our liberalization process they still are of the opinion that the telecom sector in Suriname is not fully liberalized and that there still is a monopoly situation. Those that have worked hard to realize the liberalization of this sector in Suriname differ with others on that viewpoint.

But we must confess, a lot of work still needs to be done. In that sense I want to talk about the development of Information and Communication Technologies.

During my tenure as Minister responsible for this ministry I have participated in several meetings and seminars organized at the regional level but also at the global level. It was a valuable learning process and I have tried to use the experience while developing the sector in Suriname.

The issue of access to ICT, as a most fundamental prerequisite in order for society to make the fullest possible use of information and knowledge. In this connection we continue to believe that universal access is a precondition for the

consolidation of the information society. Access alone, although of crucial importance, is not sufficient, there is also need for the development of the skills required in order to make full use of ICT and to progress from merely accessing information to creating knowledge.

Connectivity has been one of our major challenges given the population density of less than 3 people per square kilometer, whereas 75% of the population lives in urban areas of the 164,000 (one hundred and sixty four thousand) square kilometers sized country.

The Government of Suriname aims as a priority goal, to have the coastal area and in the interior, each village connected by the end of this year with voice Telephony and by the end of 2011 community centers must be set up where citizens will have access to broadband services and as such have access to the internet.

We believe that connectivity is the enabler for economic development of our natural resources, which most often takes place in our sparsely populated hinterland.

These developments include mining, forestry and tourism and in particular eco-tourism. Besides being an enabler for economic developments in the aforementioned fields access to the internet will also serve as an enabler in creating possibilities to improve educational facilities through distance learning as well as distance medicine.

Development in these areas made a quantum leap. So, the first hurdle of communicating has been taken, next step should be an increase in the use of the electronic highway for various purposes.

Education is treated by the administration as a social domain by definition where equal opportunities for all must be guaranteed. In practice, the Ministry of Education must see to it that every child has access to education without any obstructions. In this regard, the child must be offered the resources to study on his own. Children must gain access to computers with Internet much faster and at more affordable prices to do research, process data as well as attend training courses. All of this is possible through the possibilities that information and communication technologies (ICT's) provide. It is also the goal of the Government of Suriname through public and private partnerships to start ICT education in all educational institutes. The current administration did not manage to introduce ICT in the education curriculum. It is imperative that the next administration will make this a priority

By means of this project, ICT education in schools is promoted at the lowest possible costs for the user. Without ICT education the benefits ICT's as enabler for economic development will not be fully utilized and for this reason our government fully support this initiative of Telesur.

The Government and people of Suriname are very anxiously looking forward to the implementation of the submarine cable system which will connect Guyana and Suriname with Trinidad

and Tobago. I'm convinced that it will give a boost to the economic developments in Suriname.

The government of Suriname is serious about integrating ICT and to provide e-government services. A national ICT commission comprised of members from the government, the private sector and the Anton de Kom University of Suriname was given a mandate to initiate a national ICT strategy. This has not materialized, but we hope that through regional projects and efforts enough know how and information will be available, in order to finalize and work towards the national ICT strategy.

As was put so eloquently by Bernadette Lewis at a Ministerial Seminar, the time is now; all administrations should get on board, because the development of ICT is on a fast track train.

Ladies and Gentlemen, small steps but big tangible results have been achieved over the past years.

In closing, I want to wish you productive deliberations over the next couple of days. As experts and representatives of the various member states of Caricom and the Dominican Republic, we must make the most of this initiative and work towards a harmonized policy concerning legislation, interconnection and universal access and service.

Thank you for your attention.