

REMARKS OF MR. AHMED TOUMI
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PROMOTION OF COST-EFFECTIVE BROADBAND AND INTERNET SERVICES

Introduction

The “Global Broadband Satellite Infrastructure Initiative” (the “GBSI Initiative”) was a contribution of the Director General of ITSO to the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) that promotes the use of satellite technology to bridge the “digital divide.” The GBSI Initiative recognizes that the existing satellite infrastructure could be successfully used to provide universal, affordable high-speed Internet access to underserved areas where the provision of terrestrial wideband technologies is not cost effective.

The GBSI Initiative is based on the successful GSM (Global Standard for Mobile communications) model that was promoted by European countries for the development of mobile telephony. Like the GSM model, the GBSI Initiative calls for a public-private partnership to facilitate the emergence of a worldwide market for satellite broadband services. The Initiative identifies a set of activities concerning the use of spectrum and orbital resources, standardization and market access to be conducted jointly by governments and the private sector.

The role of governments and regulators

Spectrum issues

Radio spectrum and the geostationary-orbital locations are universal public resources to be used efficiently and economically for the benefit of the public, including the needs of developing countries.

Currently more than 5000 MHz of spectrum has been allocated by the ITU fixed (FSS) and broadcasting (BSS) satellite services. This represents almost 25-times the spectrum used by GSM services worldwide. However, the different national regulatory regimes that govern the use of this spectrum, as well as the current multiplicity of proprietary technical standards, have caused market fragmentation and significantly limited the access to satellite broadband services despite the overcapacity that currently characterizes the satellite industry.

The dedication of a small fraction of this spectrum in C-, Ku-, and Ka bands, which would be available on a worldwide and interference-free basis for consumer-broadband satellite service, is critical for the development of a global market for this service. The identification of these bands would provide visibility to the industry and a guarantee to the services providers and equipment manufacturers that the solutions and products that they develop could be deployed on a global basis. The availability of dedicated spectrum would also stimulate competition among services providers and equipment manufacturers, in a manner similar to the GSM model.

It is anticipated that many of you present here today will play a positive role in identifying these frequency bands.

Regulatory issues

The harmonization of regulations is a key element leading to the emergence of a vibrant and global consumer-broadband satellite market. In fact, more than any other telecommunications service, the international nature of satellite services encourages this regulatory harmonization of such issues as, among others, competition, interoperability, certification of end-user equipments, and cross-border transmissions.

I believe that consideration should be given to creating a joint regulators-industry working group to identify those regulatory components that would positively influence the creation of a worldwide market for satellite broadband and internet access, taking into account the sovereign rights of countries to license national service providers.

Global Standard

Governments and regulators also should encourage the development of an open global standard for consumer equipment as a means to ensure the affordability of broadband and Internet services, which will particularly benefit low-income consumers. This would ensure efficient and economic use of the radio spectrum, as well as equitable access to the spectrum by developing countries.

The role of industry

Global Standard

The private sector, the main beneficiary from a business perspective of a global satellite broadband market, should help governments and regulators in promoting a worldwide satellite broadband market. In particular, satellite operators, equipment manufacturers and service providers should join forces to develop a global open standard for consumer satellite broadband terminal equipment that would operate in the identified global spectrum.

The worldwide availability of dedicated spectrum would attract new and established consumer terminal equipment manufacturers, software and microprocessors designers, and promote mass production. In turn, the availability of radio spectrum that is free from interference from terrestrial transmissions, as well as an open global standard for equipment, would lead to the availability of small, simple and affordable consumer terminal equipment. Within the identified spectrum, the transmission speed that the open global standard would permit could potentially be limited to a specific broadband level to be agreed on by interested parties.

Spectrum Issues

Satellite operators should play an active role in the process of identification by the governments of the spectrum that can be dedicated to consumer-broadband satellite service, as these operators control the down-link transmissions spectrum. These satellite operators should identify the spectrum used by the satellites that already are in-orbit that could be available for consumer-broadband service, and eventually consider redeployment of existing service applications to other parts of the radio spectrum if necessary. In addition, the governments that regulate the use of the up-link transmissions spectrum also may have to consider vacating spectrum from terrestrial interfering services if necessary.

Progress achieved and timeline

The Radiocommunication Assembly, in its meeting in June 2003, decided to undertake the necessary technical studies by 2005 related to the frequency requirements for satellite broadband services. The World Radiocommunication Conference in 2003 put the technical issues related to global broadband services on the agenda for the next WRC conference in 2007. The first phase of the WSIS, at its meeting in December 2003, recognized the relevance of broadband networks, international open standards and spectrum management for an inclusive information society and specifically called upon the ITU to promote access to global high-speed Internet satellite services for underserved, remote and sparsely populated areas.

GBSI MoU

On the private sector industry side and subsequent to the WSIS meeting in 2003, I have availed myself to coordinate cooperation among industry players with regard to the issues previously identified. For this purpose, a ‘Memorandum of Understanding’ (“GBSI MoU”) has been circulated among industry and, so far, has been signed by a significant number of satellite operators, equipment manufacturers and service providers. The first meeting of the GBSI MoU signatories was held in Madrid (Spain) in October 2004, and a follow-up meeting is planned for mid-January 2005 in Rome.