

Opening address

Sixth annual Global Symposium for Regulators (GSR) Yasmine Hammamet, Tunisia, 14-15 November 2005

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my pleasure and privilege to welcome you here on the occasion of the sixth Global Symposium for Regulators, which is being held by the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) in collaboration with the Tunisian Regulatory Authority. It is also a pleasure to welcome you to Hammamet, this beautiful city of Tunisia, the land of tolerance, security and openness; the cradle of civilizations and place of encounter.

It is also an honour to welcome among us today H.E. Mrs Khadija Ghariani, Secretary of State to the Minister of Communication Technologies, and to thank her for graciously accepting our invitation to sponsor the opening session of this meeting.

The new technological developments have, in a relatively short time, transformed the world into a global village. Digital networks, the internet, seamless connectivity, enhanced and new applications and protocols, together with liberalization of the communication market, globalization of trade and the adoption of a market economy by many countries, have, aided by the rapid dissemination of, and access to, information, created a tremendous impact and new challenges throughout the world. We have embarked upon an era in which virtual reality is progressively becoming the actual reality for conducting transactions in almost all fields.

Thus, the information revolution that the world has been witnessing for over a decade now has generated major changes that have transformed communication among individuals and groups, deeply affecting the nature of interrelations and creating new cultural, economic and educational patterns based on knowledge. All indications show that this is no longer a temporary phenomenon, but rather a turning point in the path of humanity, creating a new society: the **information society**.

According to many experts and forward-looking authorities, it is not just a matter of technological innovations and new tools enhancing the competitive power of institutions, but rather a genuine revolution affecting the whole range of human activities and social relations. It is similar to, but even more rapid and extensive than the industrial revolution that humanity witnessed at the end of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth centuries, which ushered in considerable changes in the economic, social, cultural and political arenas as a result of the transition from tribal, rural societies to industrial urban societies with new characteristics.

Knowledge, with all its components of control, management, operation, security, storage, access regulation and content production, has increasingly become the mainstay of the information society. Its share in the cost of almost all products has increased tremendously in many instances. Just as the production of agricultural and industrial machinery was the main driver of the economy during the industrial revolution, the information industry and consequent development of the service sector are now an additional driver, if not the main driver, of today's economy.

However, an overview of the developments in the field of ICT and their applications reveals that the benefits are not shared equitably either between the developed and developing countries or within the same communities.

In the context of this new reality, the digital divide has emerged as a new concept. There are different positions and points of view vis-à-vis the digital divide as a yardstick for measuring the developmental divide between the developed nations that control new technologies and the poor and underdeveloped nations that have not been able to keep pace with technological progress.

New ICT technologies and applications have provided an opportunity to build the information society and imbue it with new economic concepts and contents that are capable of undoing the legacy of the wide gaps between countries and peoples that are associated with traditional economic patterns. The potential is now there for developing countries to rise to the traditional standard of developed nations, but in order to do so they must adapt, both speedily and effectively, to the changes brought about by this technological revolution.

It is within this context, and in recognition of the instrumental role of the regulatory bodies in securing a favourable environment for the development of the ICT sector and applications, that the annual GSR initiative was launched. This year's meeting has special significance since it coincides with the second phase of the World Summit on the Information Society in Tunis, which will be addressing the different options and challenges. The holding of such fora in our country is a source of gratification to us. The international community's selection of our country to hold such important meetings is a mark of recognition of our achievements in the fields under consideration and of our capacity to host such important events, thanks to our relentless efforts and a strong political will to provide an appropriate environment for Tunisian society to assimilate such fundamental changes with confidence. We have made it a top priority to develop our national skills and self reliance, especially in regard to the development of human resources as the driving force for achieving development objectives through efficiency and inspiring innovation.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is against this backdrop that we have come together here to discuss a number of important issues relating to high-speed broadband communications, spectrum management, VoIP and the efforts being made by the international community to combat spam.

A major objective of this meeting is to agree on best practice guidelines for spectrum management to promote broadband access. Because of the increasing importance of radio technology, it is our responsibility as regulators to create an appropriate environment for promoting the use of such technologies as a tool for improving the economic and social life of all people worldwide, thereby minimizing the digital divide between the developed and most of the developing countries.

The holding of this annual meeting will, as usual, provide an opportunity to exchange views and experiences and a space for discussion of the main issues that are of concern to us all. You are all encouraged to contribute to this important debate, and I should like to acknowledge the contributions that many of you have made in preparing the main topics for this meeting. I have had the honour of editing the contributions that you now have before you, in cooperation with the Telecommunication Development Bureau of the International Telecommunication Union.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Two important events have taken place prior to our meeting today:

The first was the Executive-Level Training for Regulators, ably directed by Professor Wigglesworth. We hope that all those who attended have benefited from the comprehensive seminar.

The second event was the third meeting of the Regional Regulators' Associations that was held yesterday and which provided an opportunity for all participants to exchange views and share experiences.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Before I hand the podium over to Mr Hamadoun Touré, Director of the Telecommunication Development Bureau, I should like to reiterate my appreciation for your presence here and for your having supported the Tunisian Regulatory Authority's proposal to hold this event in Tunis. It is a personal honour for me to preside this meeting, and I am confident that you will lend me your support and understanding in order to achieve a successful conclusion of our symposium. I should also like to take the opportunity to express my thanks to ITU officials and staff, and especially to Mr Hamadoun Touré, for their excellent preparatory work for this symposium, as well as to the media for covering this important event. Finally, on behalf of all participants, I wish to thank the interpreters for their patience and professionalism. We recognize that the nature of their work requires strenuous efforts, special skills and a high degree of concentration.

I wish you all a pleasant stay with us and a successful symposium. Thank you for your attention.

Ali Ghodbani

President, Instance Nationale des Télécommunications de Tunisie
