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| Director, Telecommunication Development Bureau | | | |
| Report of the first Inter-Regional Meeting (IRM)  to prepare for WTDC-21 | | | |
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| **Summary:**  As part of the preparatory process for the 2021 World Telecommunication Development Conference (WTDC-21), TDAG recommended 2-3 Inter-Regional Meetings to foster inter-regional discussions and identify common positions and agreement on key issues ahead of the WTDC-21. The key objective of these IRMs is to strengthen the preparatory process, which will focus on defining regional priorities and initiatives, revising or drafting resolutions, addressing study groups and study Questions related matters and developing guidelines and text for the Declaration. Discussions during the IRMs will build on the results of the Regional Preparatory Meetings (RPMs) and on the work of the TDAG Working Group on Resolutions, Declaration and Thematic Priorities (TDAG-WG-RDTP). IRMs will further help make WTDC-21 an action-oriented conference to develop a shared understanding of existing barriers and advancing effective, sustainable and innovative solutions for the expansion of meaningful connectivity for everyone, everywhere.  In line with the TDAG recommendation, three Inter-regional Meetings were scheduled to be held between March and September 2021. This document reports on the key outcomes of the first IRM, held on 11 March 2021.  **Action required:**  TDAG is requested to note this document.  **References:**  TDAG-20/3/5 | | | |

1. **First Interregional Preparatory Meeting to prepare for the World Telecommunication Development Conference (IRM)**

The first Interregional Preparatory Meeting to prepare for the World Telecommunication Development Conference (IRM) took place online on 11 March 2021. It was chaired by His Excellency Dr Ahmedin Mohammed, State Minister, Ministry of Innovation and Technology, Ethiopia and Chairman Designate of WTDC-21. The IRM was attended by 256 participants, including 205 delegates representing 67 Member States, 43 participants representing 30 Sector Member entities, 7 participants from the United Nations and its specialized agencies, and one guest. Of this number, 120 were women and 136 were male participants.

The BDT Director, in her opening remarks, highlighted the importance of the preparatory process to ensure the success of WTDC-21, and to deliver maximum impact in terms of concrete, implementable and measurable outcomes to bring connectivity to everyone, and transform the digital landscape. She further pointed to the continued uncertainty due to COVID-19 and highlighted the close collaboration between BDT and the Government of Ethiopia to develop mitigation and contingency plans for the holding of WTDC-21, scheduled to take place from 8 to 19 November 2021, in Addis Ababa.

Following a presentation highlighting essential measures taken to fight the COVID-19 pandemic in the host country for the holding of WTDC-21, Ethiopia presented the pros and cons of four possible scenarios for the holding the WTDC-21 event: 1) as initially planned 2) in a hybrid way 3) virtually and 4) postponing it to a later time. Most countries expressed their preference for a physical, face-to-face meeting and for scenarios 1) (if possible) or scenario 4). Several delegates expressed the need to take a decision quickly, at least six months before the currently planned dates for WTDC-21. The secretariat was asked to continue working with the Ethiopian administration and with other key stakeholders (such as the UN Offices in Africa) to allow a decision on a way forward to be taken by Council in June 2021. Some delegations stressed that BDT should provide clarity on how and when WTDC would be held before the next IRM by May 2021. Others underlined that if WTDC were to be postponed to 2022, a decision must be taken on what to do with the study Questions and the meetings of ITU-D study groups and their rapporteur groups until 2022. It was clarified that between the two WTDCs, TDAG is the proper venue to decide what the agenda of the study groups would be. It was noted that this matter should be discussed in the upcoming meeting of TDAG.

All Regional Telecommunication Organisations (RTOs) presented an update on preparations within their respective regions, including on preparing common regional proposals and streamlining resolutions, on highlighting regional priorities and reviewing BDT Thematic priorities and study group questions. They also announced their preparatory groups and focal points for the TDAG working groups and interregional meetings.

The IRM also reported on the outputs of the two Regional Preparatory Meetings (RPMs) that had already taken place: the RPM for Europe and the RPM for Asia and the Pacific. This included reporting on progress on the regional initiatives, the regional Digital Trends reports, and on the Generation Connect regional Youth Groups and the Network of Women (NoW) initiative.

A report on the work of TDAG Working Group on WTDC Resolutions, Declaration and Thematic Priorities (TDAG-WG-RDTP) highlighted the progress that this group, through several meetings since July 2020, has made in terms of revising the current BDT thematic priorities, streamlining resolutions, and developing a draft WTDC declaration in line with the WTDC-21 theme of “Connecting the unconnected to achieve sustainable development”. Efforts to streamline resolutions are led by the Russian Federation, which has proposed revisions to 14 resolutions and TDAG-WG-RDTP will examine proposals on resolutions and invited ITU membership to comment, and to propose other amendments. The TDAG Working Group on Strategic and Operational Plans (TDAG-WG-SOP) hadapproved a proposal to assign the task of establishing the ITU-D component of the overall ITU strategic plan to TDAG, paving the way for a one-ITU approach in the production of the strategic plan of the entire Union. Participants were invited to review and follow the proposed workflow, and steps and deadlines for contributions.

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