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**Contribution by The Commonwealth of The Bahamas**

Briefing Document on Improving Fellowships

The administration of The Commonwealth of The Bahamas would like to present this information document on improving fellowship eligibility for Member States in light of Resolution 213 (Dubai, 2018) of the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) Plenipotentiary Conference which instructed Council to review the existing criteria for fellowships and make recommendations to the Secretary General on how to improve it. The purpose of this document is to inform on the benefits and opportunities of the upcoming changes and advise on concerns that The Bahamas shares regarding the ITU’s agenda item on improving fellowships.

**Background & Objective**

Resolution 213 (Dubai, 2018) of the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) Plenipotentiary Conference instructed Council to review the existing criteria for fellowships and make recommendations to the Secretary General on how to improve it. The next step for Council is to consider and endorse a report prepared by the Secretary-General on improving fellowships. A draft report was created and published last year December 2019. CWG-FHR is invited to consider and endorse the draft-revised policy for awarding fellowships for events and activities funded through the ITU regular budget and to also endorse the revised list of eligible countries. Once approved by the Council, the list will be posted on the fellowship website as a link and updated as and when the status of countries change, following decisions of the United Nations (CWG-FHR-11/2, 2019).

One of the key outputs from the proposal was the eligibility, awarding, and selection criteria. Under the proposed criteria, fellowship is being extended beyond least developing countries (LDCs) and now being made available to developing countries which were sub-grouped into least developed countries, small island development states (SIDS), landlocked developing countries, and countries with economies in transition.

As a result, Caribbean nations such as The Bahamas, Trinidad & Tobago, Jamaica, Antigua and Barbuda, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Guyana and other Eastern Caribbean countries have been added to the list of Member States eligible for fellowships funded through the ITU regular budget.

The purpose of this briefing document is to inform on the benefits and opportunities of the upcoming changes and advise on concerns that The Bahamas shares regarding the ITU’s agenda item on improving fellowships. This is also done in a greater effort to gather views from other regional countries.

**Current Framework for Fellowships**

Within the ITU, fellowships are monetary tools that are awarded to delegates from Member States requesting support from the ITU to attend related events or activities.

Prior to Resolution 213, fellowships were prioritized for LDCs and low-income countries which had a per capita gross domestic product (GDP) below 2,000 USD. From a Caribbean lens, this meant that only Cuba and Haiti received for fellowships as of 2018.

It has been over a decade since this stipulation was put in place and given the rise in digital innovations and usage of information and communications technologies (ICTs), a revision was deemed necessary.

**How can the Caribbean benefit?**

For the Caribbean, it is important to take advantage of fellowships because they exist with the purpose to further strengthen regional presence and by extension, help to develop access to ICTs, develop ICT regulatory policy for the

betterment of the population and narrow the global digital divide.

Through the ITU, Member States have access to conferences, building capacity activities, and the opportunity to provide/take contributions (knowledge, human resources) to or from other Member States.

**Fellowships in 2018 and 2019**

Last year, the ITU awarded 509 fellowships valued at a near one million dollars. However, of the 509 fellowships, Member States that qualified for the Americas region (Cuba & Haiti) were only awarded 12 fellowships under ITU-D. The amount represents a mere 2.36 percent of fellowships awarded within that sector. In addition, only nine ITU related events and activities were hosted in the Americas region in the past year; making it the only region with single digit contributions. Therefore, under the new resolution, there is an opportunity to improve the number of fellowships being granted for countries in the region that are now eligible.

Data coming in for fellowships in 2019 will not be finalized until February 2020. Estimated figures received by ITU Fellowships showed that the Americas region received 17 fellowships, five more versus the previous year. The information is not yet available by individual Member State.

**Key Takeaways**

1. Member States now eligible for fellowships increased and the new list provides for inclusion of more Caribbean and Latin American countries.
2. Fellowships will be awarded with the view to maintain equitable geographical distribution and gender balance.
3. Member States wishing to apply for an ITU fellowship must not have any type of debt related to the contributions derived from their contributory unit, except those who have agreed to a repayment plan and are in compliance with their obligations.
4. Fellowship programs will be reviewed to allow for delegates with disabilities and specific needs.
5. Fellowships will not be granted for “treaty-making conferences” such as WRC
6. One full fellowship, or one or two partial fellowships can be granted per eligible Member State/entity with respect to each event
7. A website is expected to be created so that Member States would have access to all information on ITU Fellowships.
8. An annual report on fellowships with information and analysis by ITU Sector (ITU-R, ITU-D, ITU-T) is to be prepared to the ITU council.

**More Opportunities**

*Gender Balance*

In 2018, fellowships awarded for ITU-D related events and activities by gender revealed that 78 percent were male recipients and 22 percent were females. This data speaks to the disparity in gender regarding fellowships being awarded.

The Global Gender Gap Report (World Economic Forum, 2018) showed that there is still a 32 percent average gender gap that remains to be filled and that it would take 74 years in the Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) region to close this gap. In fact, the only country from the LAC region that closed at least 80 percent of this gap was Nicaragua.

In addition, the report also points out that with digital innovations such as Artificial Intelligence (AI) making more of an impact in the labor markets, only 22 percent of AI professionals are female compared to 78 percent who are male.

In our region, achieving gender parity can be implemented by balancing the female to male participation ratio in activities such as business and management of telecommunication technical issues, IoT communication protocols, LTE radio access technologies, radio spectrum, cybersecurity, emergency communication, satellite communications, digital TV, ICTs and climate change, IXPs and optical access in network communications.

**Concerns on Criteria: Who gets what?**

The extension of Member States for fellowships is a great first step in supporting ICT initiatives for Caribbean countries. However, some concerns exist around the classification method for developing countries and how that could potentially impact prioritization of fellowship distribution.

Developing countries were grouped by: Least Developing countries, SIDS, Landlocked developing countries and economies in transition. A further breakdown for each of these groups was done on a gross national income (GNI) per capita basis.

**Table 1.1**

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| **Classification** | **GNI per Capita (USD)** |
| Low-Income | < 995 |
| Lower-middle income | 996 to 3,895 |
| Upper-middle income | 3,896 to 12,055 |
| High-Income  | 12,056 > |

Most Caribbean nations fall under high or upper-middle income within the Americas region given its current GNI per capita results except for Haiti, Bolivia, El Salvador, Honduras, and Nicaragua. This raises a concern for The Bahamas because it is proposed that consideration to grant fellowships to high-income developing countries would be made “subject to available resources and after first fulfilling requests from other eligible Member States listed as low-income, lower-middle-income, and upper-middle-income developing countries”.

This could potentially mean missed opportunities for fellowships based on this condition. While it is important for lower and low-income countries within the region to receive fellowship, some of the countries listed below in Table 1.2 have made great strides in developing the ICT sector and it is important to receive fellowships to further assist with those efforts.

 **Table 1.2 (Table does not include full list of countries)**

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| **Country** | **Classification**  |
| Belize | Upper-middle income |
| Cuba | Upper-middle income |
| Guyana | Upper-middle income |
| Jamaica | Upper-middle income |
| St. Lucia  | Upper-middle income |
| The Bahamas | High-Income  |
| Trinidad and Tobago | High-Income  |
| Antigua and Barbuda | High-Income  |

*N.B: Tables are a summary extract of the ITU’s Council document on Improving, Promotion and Strengthening ITU Fellowships (April, 2019). The text notes that it used the United Nations report: World Economic Situation and Prospects (January, 2019) to classify the different GNI per capita groups. These groupings were a joint product of standards coming out the World Economic Situation and Prospects (WESP) report and other development indices.*

The reality is that for many SIDS, particularly Caribbean countries, is that governments are operating at a deficit and are faced with budgetary constraints. In addition, some countries now spend more on climate change resilience and preparedness while accounting for the millions of damage and losses by hurricanes and other natural disasters. While medium to long term fiscal efforts are put in place, cutting costs effectively and where necessary in controlling debt levels and managing revenue is a part of that process. It may be difficult for the government of a Member State to support ITU related activities when there are several other issues at hand that need to be addressed. Governments in this region tend to be limited in terms of spending since revenue is often allocated to controlling debt levels, reducing interest costs and maintaining a positive investor outlook (IDB, 2019).

It can be argued that GNI per capita may not be enough to make sound statements about the development of a certain country (Lochner, 2005). This is not to say that GNI per capita is a poor measurement of a country’s performance and it is widely used by reports coming from the United Nations and the World Bank. However, GNI per capita should also be used in relation to the inequality of income distribution which essentially helps to determine why some countries are rich while others are poor. An IDB regional bulletin (June,2019) also pointed out that income per capita in the Caribbean is still below 2007 levels in several countries.

Therefore, what could be considered is a social and welfare statistic that highlights income distribution, like a Gini coefficient or some other measurement. This will make certain that even as GNI per capita continues to be used, there will be some measure that accounts for inequality. In using the proposed UN list, SIDS and other land locked developing countries can then be prioritized once the fellowship budget reaches upper and high income.

 **ICT IDI Index and Fellowship Distribution**

The ITU’s ICT Development Index (IDI), a composite index combining 11 indicators that tracks ICT development within and between countries (ITU IDI, 2019), plays a key role in prioritizing fellowship distribution among the region. The index has three sub-indices: access, use and skills. When combined, the index is used as a benchmark to ensure that all Member States achieve ICT milestones within a sound timeframe.

The IDI index could be used to determine fellowships from a low to high rank, within their respective income classification. For instance, upper-middle and high-income countries can be qualified with consideration to their IDI ranking.

After collecting and verifying the data in 2019 for reference year 2018, it was found that, despite two rounds of capacity building workshops in all the regions, the amount of data received for the revised set of IDI indicators did not improve significantly (ITU IDI, 2019). Therefore, for the purpose of this research, 2017 figures versus prior year were used.

Ikrame, Belabbes & El Moustafid, Said (2015) found that studies show that ICT development induces economic growth where 1 percent growth in telecommunications services corresponds a 3 percent growth in the economy, especially in developing countries. Other studies have also showed that ICT Development requires qualified and abundant human resources, low costs, and favourable environments for ICT firms. Therefore, developing ICT is hinged on a country’s economic conditions, financial arrangements and hazards.



(Prepared by URCA using ITU Data)

Lastly, it could also be suggested that if the current state of ICT is known via index, then perhaps when topics have direct applicability to countries (depending on their immediate articulated plans), the fellowship could be given priority.

**Support: How can you help?**

The Bahamas welcomes comments or suggestions on improvements that can be made to strengthen access to fellowships for the SIDS, LDCs, and Landlocked Developing Countries within the region.

Access to fellowships should be given a closer look to help push for successful implementation of country specific ICT development. This can only be done if fellowship resources are properly allocated based on a comprehensive classification method for developing countries.

**How to Apply for Fellowships**

1. Applicants must pre-register online for the meeting before applying for a fellowship. Fellowship will be granted only if your registration is approved by your focal point.
2. Submit official fellowship request form within the deadline indicated in the announcement letter of related event/activity
3. It is recommended for applicants to complete the form electronically. The form should then be printed and signed by the applicant and signed and stamped by an official authorized to do so by the Administration.
4. The form should then be scanned and emailed to fellowships@itu.int - or alternatively sent by fax (+41 22 730 5778) - in order to be received by ITU before the submission deadline.

 **Decision Criteria**

1. Available within ITU budget
2. Active participation, including the submission of written contributions
3. Equitable distribution among countries and regions
4. Gender balance
5. The candidate’s professional background, current position and the practical use the beneficiary intends to make of the knowledge and experience to be gained
6. The long-term commitment of a candidate to the country’s national capacity development needs

**Useful Further Reading**

Council (2019), *Strengthening The Regional Presence,* [Document C19/25](https://protect.mimecast-offshore.com/s/LRYyCW70qxhGmxUxZ7V8?domain=itu.int)

Council (2019), *Improving, Promoting, And Strengthening ITU Fellowships,* [https://www.itu.int/md/S19-CWGFHR10-C-0002](https://protect.mimecast-offshore.com/s/lEl6C2vNWysOz6iXmZPl?domain=itu.int)

Document CWG-FHR-11/2 (December, 2019) Contribution by the Secretariat:*Draft Revised Policy for Awarding Fellowships for Events and Activities Funded Through The ITU Regular Budget and Revised List Of Eligible Countries*.

Hausmann, Ricardo & Tyson, Laura & Zahidi, Saadia & Economic Forum, World. (2009). Global Gender Gap Report. <https://www.weforum.org/reports/the-global-gender-gap-report-2018>

Ikrame, Belabbes & El Moustafid, Said. (2015). *ICT Development Index (IDI) as a statistical tool for measuring ICT uptake and assessing ICT policy: Morocco case*.

Lochner, M. (2005), *Are GDP/GNP appropriate measures of development?* Munich, GRIN Verlag, <https://www.grin.com/document/90290>

[PP Resolution 213 (Dubai, 2018)](https://protect.mimecast-offshore.com/s/UDkWCVPjQwT9oXCGOgRP?domain=itu.int)

Schmid,P. et al. (June, 2019), [*Caribbean Region Quarterly Bulletin: Volume 8 Issue 2: June 2019*](https://publications.iadb.org/en/caribbean-region-quarterly-bulletin-volume-8-issue-2-june-2019)*.* Inter-American Development Bank (IDB).

 <https://publications.iadb.org/en/caribbean-region-quarterly-bulletin-volume-8-issue-2-june-2019>

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