



The Secretary-General

Geneva, 27 April 2020

Contact:	Office of the Secretary-General	- ITU Member States
Tel:	+41 22 730 5111	- Sector Members, Associates, Academia
Fax:	+41 22 733 7256	- Permanent Missions in Geneva
Email:	SGO@itu.int	
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Subject: Postponement of ITU Digital World 2020

Dear Sir/Madam,

I would like to inform you that as a result of the ongoing global COVID-19 crisis, **ITU Digital World 2020**, this year's ITU Telecom event originally scheduled to take place in Ha Noi, Viet Nam, from 6 – 9 September 2020, **will now take place as ITU Digital World 2021 in the same venue** in September 2021.

The difficult decision to postpone has been taken jointly by ITU and the government of Viet Nam, the host country for ITU Digital World, in view of the many current restrictions on travel, large-scale gatherings and social contact. We believe this is the best course of action to guarantee the well-being and safety of all event participants and ensure a successful event at a more certain time.

This unprecedented global crisis has highlighted the fundamental role of ICT in economies, societies and individual lives everywhere in combatting the COVID-19 pandemic and providing critical opportunities for work, education, healthcare, entertainment and social connection. The crisis has also, however, revealed the extent of inequalities in access to ICT and the benefits of digital transformation across the world, underlining more than ever the importance of our work as an organization in connecting the unconnected and meeting the SDGs.

[ITU Digital World 2021](#) will provide an important platform for us to come together as the global ICT community to debate and take action on these issues, explore the impact of COVID-19 as the first pandemic in human history where ICT and social media have been used on such a massive scale, and strengthen our multilateral, collective approach. Furthermore, as the 50th anniversary edition of ITU Telecom events, it will be a celebration of half a century of technological advances and cross-sector collaboration.

I therefore encourage all Member States and Sector Members to take full advantage of the opportunities offered by ITU Digital World 2021, and look forward to welcoming you all in Ha Noi next year.

Yours faithfully,

[Original signed]

Houlin Zhao

Annex 1: Joint statement from the Ministry of Information and Communications of Viet Nam and ITU



**Joint Statement from Houlin Zhao, Secretary-General, ITU
and Nguyen Manh Hung, Minister of Information and Communications, Socialist Republic of Viet Nam
on the postponement of ITU Digital World 2020,
the importance of ICT in the COVID-19 crisis and risk of a new digital divide**

As a result of the ongoing COVID-19 crisis, ITU and the Ministry of Information and Communications, Viet Nam have taken the difficult decision to postpone ITU Digital World 2020, the global tech event for government, industry and SMEs. The event will now take place as ITU Digital World 2021 in September 2021 in the same venue in Ha Noi, Viet Nam. We believe this is the best and safest course of action to ensure the well-being and safety of all event participants and guarantee a successful event.

The world is facing an unprecedented threat from COVID-19 and ICT has become a key ally in combatting this threat and helping to prevent, detect and diagnose disease. It has taken on a new importance in connecting us for health, work, education, entertainment, news, public announcements and to our friends and families. For the first time, digital solutions and platforms are being used on a massive scale to help cope with and respond to a pandemic.

The COVID-19 crisis has also, however, highlighted its own digital divide, where many families, workers, businesses and populations are not able to access or afford the benefits of digital technology. Action is urgently needed to ensure a fair access to ICTs, for the benefit of all. Now, more than ever, governments, industry, international organizations, NGOs, academia and other stakeholders must work together to find mutually beneficial solutions. We must set ambitious, measurable goals for ensuring an equitable transition to the digital age. The [SDGs](#) offer an ideal framework for this, and ICTs themselves are essential tools for the achievement of these goals.

The Government of Viet Nam and ITU call upon global leaders, governments and the tech industry to ensure they are present and fully engaged, to rise to the challenge and strengthen the multilateral, collective digital response to this crisis. International events such as ITU Digital World 2021 are more important than ever as a platform bringing together the global ICT community to learn, share knowledge, debate and network.

We must work together to highlight the critical importance of ICT in the wake of COVID-19, address the stark inequalities of access and adopt concrete, urgent measures to accelerate digital transformation across all sectors and to connect all global citizens to digital services. Only by international cooperation and collaborative action will we be able to combat these types of threat, close the digital divide and build strong foundations for the future wellbeing of all.

Houlin Zhao
Secretary-General
International Telecommunication Union

Nguyen Manh Hung
Minister of Information and Communications
Viet Nam