



International Symposium: "ICTs and Climate Change"

London, United Kingdom,
17-18 June 2008

Welcoming statement by Malcolm Johnson, ITU Director Telecommunication Standardization Bureau

On behalf of the ITU and its membership, it is my pleasure to welcome you to this ITU Symposium on ICTs and Climate Change, supported and hosted by BT.

Today, the earth's climate is under severe and growing threat from man-made causes. Only a few weeks ago, a new study by an international team of scientists – published in the journal *Nature* and based on a greater range of data than any other study to date – concluded that there is now virtual certainty that the rising level of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere is man-made, and not the result of natural phenomena. This study, which builds upon last year's fourth assessment report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), states that climate change is having "a significant impact on physical and biological systems globally".¹

Despite the efforts that are being made to limit the extent of climate change, it is foreseen to have a significant impact on humanity and on our natural environment for many decades to come. The expected changes in global climate are likely to make environmental disasters both more common and more severe, through cyclones and hurricanes, flooding and drought. We have all seen, in the recent cyclone in Myanmar, what devastating effects such disasters can have on human life and livelihoods.

If humanity's use of increasingly powerful technology has caused such a significant threat, then we must look to our technology to find a solution. This is ITU's second international Symposium on ICTs and climate change, following an earlier event co-organised with MIC Japan and held in Kyoto, April 15-16. We are here because we are seeking together to find the best ways to make information and communication technologies (ICTs) a critical element in addressing global warming, and to identify the necessary work that must be carried out in standards development, environmental monitoring, climate change mitigation and adaptation.

ICTs can help in a number of ways:

- First, ICTs are needed to monitor and to better understand what is happening, as a basis for taking immediate and long-term actions.
- Second, we can use ICTs to improve the energy efficiency of our own industry, through "learning by doing". It is estimated that ICTs contribute between 2-3 per cent of total greenhouse gases, if the contribution from broadcasting is included. We must ensure that this percentage does not increase and, if possible, is reduced;

¹ <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/73fc674e-2215-11dd-a50a-000077b07658.html>

- Third, we may use ICTs to reduce the emissions in other industry sectors, for instance in the energy and transport sectors and in buildings. Estimates for potential reductions through the use of ICTs range from 40-60%;
- Finally, we can use ICTs in helping economies, particularly developing ones, to adapt to the threats that will be created by man-made natural disasters, for instance through the development of emergency communications and through improved environmental monitoring.

ITU is working to create a knowledge base to promote better understanding of the links between ICTs and climate change, and on related actions, as part of the concerted United Nations strategy to combat climate change.

- As part of this process, in the standardization field we are carrying out a systematic review of all three thousand of our ICT standards (known as Recommendations) in the light of climate change, and we will be creating a Focus Group to standardise methodologies for evaluating the direct and indirect impact of ICTs on the emission of greenhouse gases;
- ITU's role in radiocommunications, through the World Radiocommunication Conferences and Radio Assemblies, serves to allocate the radio spectrum and secure the frequency bands that are used in remote sensing and other applications critical to environmental monitoring in general and climate change in particular;
- In the ITU's development work we are contributing by providing information, training materials and assistance on the beneficial impact that ICTs can have on the environment and climate change as well as on their role in helping to mitigate and adapt to these changes, including environmental disasters.

We also aim to position ITU as a strategic leader in the ICT and climate change field and to participate actively in the UN process. This is why at the next ITU Council in November we will be organizing a special session on climate change, and will hold a side event at the UN Climate Change conference in Poznan in December. In this effort, we will continue to build strategic partnerships with other players in this field, including the Global e-Sustainability Initiative (GeSI).

Finally, ITU is committed to achieving climate-neutral status itself within three years, for instance by bringing its work closer to our membership rather than expecting the membership to travel to Geneva, by using webcasts to broadcast events, including this one, and by making all ITU-T Recommendations and other key documents available online free of charge, instead of on paper. Last week, ITU initiated a carbon audit of its secretariat activities.

I would like to thank you all for participating in this event and especially BT for hosting it and for providing the required facilities and support. I would also like to thank all the presenters for their contributions and being with us this week. On behalf of all of us I would like to thank the UK Government's Business Enterprise and Regulatory Reform department for offering us a reception this evening.

Finally, we must remind ourselves that this is only a first step on the long road to finding and implementing global solutions to the challenge of climate change through the use of

ICTs. What is important is not so much what we say this week, but how we act and follow up on this momentum.

Thank you.