ITU/MIC Japan Symposium on ICTs and Climate Change

Kyoto, 15-16 April 2008

ITU's role in addressing climate change
Opening remarks, Malcolm Johnson, Director, ITU-T

Your Excellency, Mr Satoshi NINOYU, Vice-Minister for Internal Affairs and Communications
Mr Takashi HANAZAWA, Senior Vice-President, NTT, and chairman of this symposium

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the ITU and its membership, it is my pleasure to welcome you to this Symposium on ICTs and Climate Change, co-organized by ITU and MIC Japan.

It is a particular pleasure to be back in the beautiful and ancient city of Kyoto, to which I am returning after an absence of almost 14 years. At that time, in 1994, this city hosted the ITU's Plenipotentiary Conference, which initiated the first ever ITU work programme on ICT and the environment, in Resolution 35. Three year's later, in this very place, Kyoto hosted the conference on climate change that led to the signing of the Kyoto Protocol, which represented a landmark, and hopefully a turning point, in humanity's relationship with our planet.

So, when in December 2007, the membership of ITU endorsed a new initiative on ICTs and Climate Change, it was only natural that we should turn again to this beautiful city to host this meeting. There is nothing to compare with cherry blossom time in Kyoto to symbolize the beauty of nature, but with global warming, the cherry blossom now comes much earlier in the season. This should encourage us all to do what we can to protect our delicate environment.

I would like to thank the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communication for offering, so generously, to host this event and for helping us to organize this event, with more than 250 registered participants, in record time.

In my opening remarks, I wish to address ITU's role in addressing climate change. It may seem strange that ITU, a fairly small and specialized the UN agency, should be tackling this topic. But this would be to misunderstand the threat that climate change poses to all humanity, and the role that technology must play in addressing it. The UN Secretary-General, Ban Ki-moon has called it the "moral challenge of our generation", and has asked all UN agencies to play a part in rising to that challenge.

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In a recent report entitled "High-tech: Low carbon", the UK trade association "Intellect" writes that "*The three most critical environmental challenges facing society today are climate change, resource degradation and pollution. At the heart of all three is energy efficiency and this is the area where the technology sector can make the most positive contribution."* It is now clear that it is humanity's use of technology – primarily for generating energy – that is the principal cause of climate change, as witnessed by the fact that, in 2005, the concentration of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere exceeded, by far, the natural level over the last 650'000 years.

But technology serves a second important purpose – for generating information – which is now overtaking that first task of generating energy, and it is here that our future hope lies. The title of the first session of this

symposium – ICTs to the rescue? – encapsulates this view that technology can solve the very same problems it has caused. ICTs certainly contribute to global warming, but much more important is their role in monitoring, mitigating and adapting to climate change.

What role can ITU play in the battle against climate change? There are four main elements to ITU's strategy:

Our first role is to create a knowledge base and repository on the relations between ICTs and Climate Change. These two symposia – here in Kyoto and in London on 17-18 June –are a first step towards fulfilling this mission. The ITU background paper, which will be presented in the next session, provides an inventory of the most relevant 50 actions that are already being undertaken by the three ITU Sectors and the General Secretariat.

The General Secretariat coordinates our efforts and for example has been actively participating in the work of the UN Chief Executives Board and its subsidiary bodies on developing a unified and collaborative UN strategy to combat climate change, including a matrix on activities of each agency and program. In the Standardization Sector, we have started a systematic review of the more than 3,200 technical Recommendations, or standards, currently in force to evaluate their implications in the light of climate change, and to identify areas for future work.

The Development Sector, for its part, is contributing to this effort by providing information, training materials and assistance on the impact that ICTs have on the environment and climate change as well as their role in helping mankind to mitigate and adapt to these changes, including environmental-related disasters.

The Radio Sector also plays an important role through its World Radiocommunication Conference and Assemblies which, in particular, safeguarded the frequency bands that are used in remote sensing and other science-based applications critical to environmental monitoring.

Our second role is to position ITU as a strategic leader on this topic. This is being done, for instance, by developing a Resolution at this year's World Telecommunication Standardization Assembly, in Johannesburg in October, to identify the role ICTs should play, and hopefully agree some target reductions for the industry. I am very pleased to see some contributions to this symposium with suggestions in this area. We are also developing strategic partnerships with the most important players in this field, including the Global e-Sustainability Initiative (GeSI), whose work will be presented in the first session.

ITU's third role is to promote a global understanding of the relations between ICTs and climate change through international fora and agreements. To this end, ITU will be organizing a special session of its Council on climate change in November and will hold a side event at the UN Climate Change conference in Poznan in December.

Finally, ITU is committed to achieving climate-neutral status within three years. There are a number of ways of doing this. For instance, by holding these symposia in Kyoto and London, with the results being presented at regional development forums in Accra, Brasilia, Damascus, Hanoi and Tashkent, we are bringing the work closer to our membership, rather than expecting the membership to travel to Geneva. Furthermore, by broadcasting the event in a webcast, using *GoToWebinar*, this event can be followed online around the world, and the results recorded for those following the meeting in a different time zone. Also, by the decision of last year's Council to make all ITU-T Recommendations available online free of charge, we are saving more than 100 tonnes of Carbon Dioxide each year compared with the cost of delivering paper copies to our membership.

In concluding my remarks, I wish to thank once more the MIC and the ITU Association of Japan for their role in organizing this meeting. I would like to thank also the sponsors of this event, including NTT, NEC, Fujitsu, Hitachi, NICT and OKI, for making our stay here so comfortable, the contributors for preparing such excellent presentations, and you the participants for making the effort to be here. I am sure you will find it rewarding.

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In order to make the best use of our time at this symposium, we need a capable chairman who is able to steer our discussions and to make an effective and accurate summary of the recommendations that we make, which can be forwarded to the G8 meeting in Hokkaido in July, and to other relevant meetings. It is my pleasure, therefore, to propose, as the chairman of this symposium, Mr. Takashi Hanazawa, the Senior Vice-President and Director of the R&D planning department at NTT. NTT is Japan's largest public telecommunications operator, and therefore the company with the greatest potential for reducing emissions.

Please join me in welcoming Mr Hanazawa as chairman of this symposium.