CLOSING STATEMENT

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AT

ITU ARAB REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT FORUM

Manama, Bahrain (31 October 2013)

Honorable Ministers,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am addressing you at the end of what was a lively Forum. I want to thank all the participants for making this event so special for me. Whenever I go to a region where stakeholders are passionate about working together**, share** a common vision, and are **open** to new ideas, I feel rejuvenated and inspired. This is how I feel right now r**ejuvenated and inspired!**

Forums of this nature are about bringing together people with multi-disciplinary backgrounds, and providing a platform for sharing experiences and for debating ways of ensuring sustainable futures for the ordinary people. I am pleased to say that this RDF has just done that. It has indeed lived to its theme: **I C** TOMORROW.. Listening to the various speakers today, left me with one big idea. Why don't we get all these experts who all eloquently spoke today, tell their story through a joint publication that we could produce and use for information-sharing

with individuals and development partners who could not join us here in Manama for this RDF? **It is just food for thought for us all.** I feel it would be a pity not to capture all this interesting information under one cover and let the panelists expand their contributions which had to be shortened due to time constraints.

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Matters of **knowledge building** for development are critical as they open doors for organizations to work together collaboratively to advance knowledge. If we are successful in doing so, the knowledge age society in which knowledge and innovation thrive, would no doubt become reality.

In the 21st century, coordinated efforts are needed as no single organization could single-handedly develop society, particularly those in our field of competency – ICTs. Equally important, is the fact that no individual, no community, and no nation should be left out of the information society. Universal Access for equal opportunity for all should be our guiding principle. This region is already doing very well in terms of the ICT Sector. Mobile cellular penetration in the Arab region stands above the global average. The private sector is very active across the region. The regulatory regime is quite impressive too. All these factors point to the fact that the aspirations expressed in this forum are possible, attainable, and achievable. Of course, like in any other region, challenges are to be expected. But again, we must remind ourselves

that **it is those who accept challenges in what they do, who ultimately get much satisfaction and pleasure when they succeed**.

A decade ago, the loudest message was to develop infrastructure in order to provide and improve access. In that, this region has done very well. ITU estimates that the Arab States region will have a total of 71 million mobile-broadband subscriptions by end 2013, about 18 million more than the year before. At 18.9 per cent, regional mobile-broadband penetration is below the global (29.5%) and the developing country (19.8) average. It is less than half the penetration reached in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and the Americas.

 However, while broadband infrastructure development remains a priority today, we are also focusing on making sure that ICTs are used as a delivery vehicle for health, education, banking, and business. But again, this has to happen in a safe environment. Securing the information highway remains a big challenge for us all. This is why I have prioritized cybersecurity. We are working hard to support countries across the globe in their efforts to establish Computer Incident Response Teams (CIRTs).

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me give you some assurances. As Director of the Telecommunication Development Bureau, I have in place mechanisms to support you as you work towards the establishment of the Knowledge Society. My team is at an advanced stage in mapping existing infrastructure across the globe. This is with the aim of identifying gaps to be filled. The outcome of that work is vital for both

policy makers and the private sector. In the same line, we are also providing technical support to countries in the design of broadband plans.

For those who were with us at the Global Symposium for Regulators 2013 in Poland, you must have seen the commitment of regulators in keeping pace with technology and their desire to continue to create a level playing field.

I know and am committed to strengthening capacity building efforts of countries. I also believe in partnership building. For there to be a truly all-inclusive Knowledge Society, the public and private sectors must work together closely. Academia and industry must closely cooperate. ITU is fortunate in that respect. We are the only United Nations Organization with a membership comprising both Member States, and Private Sector. To add **sugar** to that, we now also have a vibrant Academia as part of our membership.

I therefore, would like to thank all the speakers and participants for such exciting exchange of ideas. You can count on my support in ensuring that this region continues to make progress not only in the area of ICTs but in poverty alleviation and economic growth. Your valuable ideas coming out of today's Forum will be submitted to the Regional Preparatory Meeting that will start tomorrow morning. I count on the Chairman of the RDF to present the final report for two reasons: to benefit those who did not participate and equally important, to

ensure that the report becomes part of an input to the preparatory process towards the next World Telecommunication Development Conference in 2014.

I thank you.