

ARAB REGIONAL PREPARATORY MEETING (RPM) FOR WTDC-14

OPENING CEREMONY

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MANAMA, KINGDOM OF BAHRAIN

OPENING SPEECH

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Excellencies,
Distinguished colleagues,
Ladies and gentlemen,

- It is a real pleasure to be here with you today in this wonderful city of Manama for the ITU Arab Regional Preparatory Meeting for next year's World Telecommunication Development Conference, WTDC-14.
- On behalf of ITU's Secretary-General, Dr Hamadoun Touré, Let me express ITU's profound gratitude to the Kingdom of Bahrain for hosting this meeting, as well as yesterday's Regional Development Forum. We warmly welcome you to this meeting.
- I have been informed that yesterday's Forum was a source of rich and productive deliberations and discussions.
- It is clear that the RDF theme of 'sustainable development' was carefully chosen and well-covered during the Forum, and I thank you for your active participation and invaluable contributions.

Ladies and gentlemen,

- I am pleased to note the impressive progress achieved in the first twelve years of the new Millennium, in terms of ICT development.
- By the end of this year there will be almost seven billion mobile cellular subscriptions globally, and mobile penetration here in the Arab region, as mentioned by the Director of BDT, will be close to 105%.
- We have seen extraordinary progress in ICT development, but at the same time we need to recognize the enormous challenges facing the ICT sector today, particularly in an era of rapidly growing data volumes; revenues which are static, or even falling; and of endemic under-investment in ICT infrastructure.
- We should also recognize that the digital divide still exists between developed and developing countries; between cities and rural areas; and between citizens at different socio-economic levels.

Distinguished colleagues,

- We need to further develop telecom/ICT services and we need to encourage further investment.
- This is why ITU organized the World Conference on International Telecommunications, WCIT-12, which took place in Dubai, UAE, last December – and I am pleased to see the active and constructive contributions of the Arab region's members in the WCIT process which the Secretary-General and I highly appreciate.
- Early in March 2012, ITU organized the ITU Connect Arab States Summit in Doha, Qatar, and we need to take advantage of the success of the Summit and the recommendations and projects that were adopted there. Their implementation requires the full cooperation of our partners in the Arab region – and certainly, we have to implement the tasks agreed by WTDC-10 in Hyderabad, India.
- Let me also draw your attention to concerns of the affordability – or unaffordability – of broadband, which today is still the biggest challenge to increased broadband uptake both globally as well as in this region.

- The establishment of National, Sub-Regional and Regional IXPs will help contribute to lowering the cost of access, and ITU is working with a number of regional organizations, including the League of Arab States, to address this issue, as per the decisions of their Excellencies, the Arab Ministers of ICTs.
- Furthermore, with the introduction of the 'dot Arab' domain name, the creation and development of local content will help the region in bridging the digital divide between developed and developing countries.

Ladies and gentlemen,

- This regional preparatory meeting gives us a very welcome opportunity to address these issues.
- I am pleased with the contributions to this meeting, which cover a wide range of issues that are critical and particularly relevant to this region.
- As you know, the regional preparatory meetings for the CIS, Asia-Pacific, Americas and Africa regions were held earlier this year, and the reports of these meetings are published as information documents to this meeting. I invite you to study these reports, which will be useful for your discussions.
- We are here to listen, to take guidance from you, and to work with you. I am confident that we will leave here with very fruitful results for the conference next year.

Distinguished colleagues,

- Reviewing the ITU's activities since 2010, I am very pleased to note the remarkable commitment of our Arab Members, whose images and voices are ever-increasing.
- Let me give you a few examples: WRC-12 was chaired by Tarek Al-Awadhi from the UAE; the ITU Connect Arab States Summit was held in Doha last year; and ITU Telecom World 2012, WTSA-12 and WCIT-12 were all held in Dubai.

- You all know that WTDC-14 and GSR-14 will be held in this region; and let me share with you the latest news that the Secretary-General decided just last week that ITU Telecom 2014 will be held in Qatar in December 2014.
- We have also noted that the number of written contributions to ITU Council and other meetings have increased in recent years, and more and more experts from this region have been nominated to take up leading positions in ITU expert groups.
- In the latest ITU statistics, we see that the Arab region has now come close to the Europe and Americas Regions in several areas.
- In this connection I have noted that Bahrain has taken a leading position or in the top three of the region, in the ITU rankings of several statistics, as shown in Document RPM-ARB13.
- I commend these efforts by Arab members; I believe the members of the region will continue their efforts to bring the regional development of ICT to a higher and higher level in the future.
- ITU management has continued its efforts to work with the Members of the Region, and the Secretary-General, Dr Touré, has taken this region as a solid place where many issues can be brought to the table – including difficult issues.
- I myself have endeavoured to take all possible chances to visit the region, in addition to my contacts with the members of this region in Geneva, and elsewhere.
- I note that in his role as Director of BDT, Brahima Sanou has managed to keep good contacts with the members of this region, which both the Secretary-General and myself have very much appreciated and supported. The Secretary-General and I also appreciate the efforts made by the two other Directors to strengthen their cooperation with the regions.

Ladies and gentlemen,

- Before I close, let me express my gratitude to the BDT staff, under the leadership of the Director, Mr Sanou, and to staff from the other parts of ITU, for their efforts in preparing for this RPM for the Arab States. They have all been working hard to ensure the success of this and the other regional preparatory meetings for WTDC-14.
- Let me therefore close my short remarks by wishing you a very successful RPM.

Thank you.