

ITU Regional Development Forum for Arab States

Opening speech

Khartoum, Sudan, 29 January 2017

Mr Brahim Sanou,

Director of the ITU's Telecommunication Development Bureau

- Dr Tahani Abdulla Attia, Minister of Télécommunications and Information Technology Sudan
- Dr. Yahia Abdalla, Director of the National Telecommunication Corporation (NTC)
- Ms. Martha Rudeas, United Nations Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator in Sudan,
- Representatives of UN agencies, Regional Organizations and ITU-D Sector Members
- Distinguished delegates,
- Ladies and Gentlemen

It is a pleasure to welcome you to the ITU's Regional Development Forum of 2017 here in Khartoum.

I would like to express my gratitude to the Government of Sudan for hosting the Regional Development Forum (RDF) and the Preparatory Meeting for the Arab States for the World Telecommunication Development Conference (WTDC-17).

Ladies and gentlemen

The ICT sector is evolving very fast. Every morning we get wakeup calls by new changes. Some time we call them disruptive businesses, but we should see them, hear them and understand them just as wakeup calls.

These changes are not happening only in the ICT sector but in the ICT ecosystem. Take for example the FINTECH that is changing the financial landscape using ICTs, how Biometrics is bringing unique identification. Another example is the very blurred frontier between physical and cyber worlds that is making us commute frequently between these two worlds.

As we embark on the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), policy makers, regulators, private sector, development partners and all stakeholders of the ICT ecosystem need more than ever to establish an inclusive, multistakeholder and collaborative dialogue to achieve socio-economic development.

The Regional Development Forum is a perfect platform for such dialogue. During this RDF, we will share our experiences and insights on the role that ICTs play in achieving the SDGs, with a focus on infrastructure development, health, education and, employment and economic growth.

I am particularly happy to recognize and welcome the presence here of the UN Resident Coordinator, the Representative of WHO in Sudan, the Secretary General of Sudan National Population Council and the private sector.

Today we need to establish a structured dialogue with other sectors of life and I am pleased to say that, under my leadership, the ITU Telecommunication Development Bureau has taken the lead in initiating such dialogue.

Last year, for example, the Global Symposium for Regulators (GSR) reached out to the financial sector by organizing a Global Dialogue on Digital Financial Inclusion with the support of the Gate Foundation in Sharm el Sheikh, Egypt.

I do believe in this dialogue. This why last year ITU and the World Health Organization (WHO) organized an inter-ministerial round table between ministers of health and ministers of ICTs in Geneva to discuss the use of ICTs to improve universal health coverage.

We also organized together with UNESCO a Policy Forum which brought together ministers of education and ministers of ICTs for the first time to explore the role that cross-sectoral collaboration can play in fostering innovation and the use of mobile technology to improve the quality, equity and accessibility of education.

Building upon last year's successful event, ITU and UNESCO will organize, on 24 March 2017, a similar event in Paris to examine how innovation can ensure inclusive and equitable education.

ITU also worked with the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) to develop an e-Agriculture Strategy Guide to help Member States to adopt a strategic approach in making the best use of ICT developments in agriculture.

I look forward to your discussions today and I am sure that the outputs of this RDF will inspire the Regional Preparatory Meeting that will start tomorrow.

To conclude let me stress that we are in a new ecosystem where ICTs are less about optical fiber, zettabyte, satellite, 4G, 5G, tablets, smartphones but more about streamlining Government processes, bringing education to people in need, extending health services to rural and remote areas, facilitating trade and business and saving lives when natural disasters strike.

Above all ICTs are about people. So let us make ICTs work for the people.

Thank you.