

**ITU Secretary-General Houlin Zhao's Opening Remarks at the Broadband Commission
Annual Spring Meeting 2022**

05 JUNE 2022 – KIGALI, RWANDA – 14:00-17:00 CAT

Your Excellency, Paul Kagame, President of the Republic of Rwanda,
Your Excellency, Aminata Zerbo/Sabane, ICT Minister of Burkina Faso
Your Excellency, Yankhoba Diatara, ICT Minister of Senegal,
Your Excellency, Emma Inamutila Theofelus, ICT Deputy Minister of Namibia,
Mr. Carlos Slim Helú, Co-Chair of the Broadband Commission,
Dr. Tawfik Jelassi, Assistant Director-General for Communication and Information of UNESCO,
Dear Commissioners,

Let me begin by saying what a pleasure it is to meet face-to-face again here this afternoon... back in one of Africa's great cities.

When we last met here 4 years ago, Kigali had just witnessed the signature of the African Continental Free Trade Area Agreement... and was about to host the Transform Africa Summit 2018.

It is fitting that this meeting is happening right between the first Generation Connect Global Youth Summit and the ITU World Telecommunication Development Conference. Both events will help spread the benefits of broadband, in Africa and the rest of the world.

One of the challenges we need to overcome is reducing the cost of broadband subscriptions and digital devices, especially in low- and lower-middle-income economies.

Affordability of broadband services in developing countries is also one of the Commission's 2025 targets. I do hope that we can use this moment to accelerate the achievement of these targets and break down these last barriers to connectivity.

As I look around this room, I see commitment... men and women of values and leadership. The Partner2Connect (P2C) Digital Development Roundtable at WTDC will start on Tuesday. I want to take this opportunity to thank the Commission and all the individual Commissioners who have already submitted their pledges and commitments.

Thank you also to those whose financial support allows the Commission's work to carry on, including this year's funding Commissioners:

- Mr. Ziyang Xu, Executive Director and CEO of ZTE Corporation,
- Mr. Hans Vestberg, CEO of Verizon,
- Dr. Hessa Al-Jaber, Chairperson of Qatar Satellite Company at Es'hailSat
- Mr. Pekka Lundmark, President and CEO of Nokia,
- and our Co-Chair, Mr. Carlos Slim Helú, Founder of the Carlos Slim Foundation and GRUPO CARSO.

Before I conclude, I would like to thank President Kagame for bringing the Youth Summit and WTDC to Rwanda.

The last two days were special. We heard from young people about their hopes, challenges, and vision for the future. It reminded me of the importance of education... the great work done by the Commission in this area, from digital learning to school connectivity... and key upcoming events like the UN Transforming Education Summit in September.

Tomorrow, we will come together for WTDC. There will be many opportunities to put affordable access to fast broadband front and center, including at the P2C Roundtable sessions.

For now, I wish you a productive meeting and look forward to continuing our work to accelerate digital transformation for all.

Thank you.