DRAFT STATEMENT BY DIRECTOR, BDT

ITU's pre-conference Event for the Fourth United Nations Conference on Least Developed Countries (LDC IV)
Venue: ITU Headquarters (Room K), Geneva, Switzerland
Dates: 8 – 9 March 2011
Title: Digital Inclusion For LDCs: Innovation · Growth · Sustainability

Excellencies,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is an honor for me to share this platform with a distinguished panel to discuss how we could make the *Millennium* Development Goals (MDGs) come true for the Least Developed Countries (LDCs). As we all recall, the MDGs were endorsed in 2000 by Member States of the United Nations in response to the declining development scenario of most developing countries. At the time, the LDCs were facing many challenge and the future was not looking so bright for the least developed countries.

Before proceeding any further, I want to take this opportunity to congratulate all the Women in this room, in ITU, and across the globe as we commemorate the centenary of International Women's Day. This day has come at the right time when we are discussing issues that also address the importance of equality and access to opportunity for all girls and women throughout their lives.

Today, one of the most compelling reasons why I would like to speak on the role of information and communication technology (ICT) in LDCs is the natural link between these technologies and socio-economic development. Since the category of the least developed countries was established by the United Nations General Assembly in 1971 with a view to attracting special support for countries with the most disadvantaged economies, we have witnessed a phenomenal growth in Information and Communication Technology. In 1971, most of the initially identified 25 countries had very limited access to telecommunications. Today, the average number of people with access to telephones in the 49 least developed countries has gone beyond our expectation. We may all recall that the Third

United Nations Conference for the LDCs set a target of increasing the average telephone density to 5 main lines per 100 inhabitants and Internet connections to 10 users per 100 inhabitants by the year 2010. I am pleased to inform you that the target of increasing the number of telephone lines to 5 per 100 inhabitants has been already surpassed - in some cases, the increase has been ten-fold. In 2001, the number of telephone lines per 100 inhabitants were 1.17% while Internet penetration per 100 inhabitants was 0.2%. By 2009, the number of telephone lines per 100 inhabitants went up to 27.2% and Internet penetration went up to 2.8%. When the statistics for end of 2010 are released, the results are going to be even more positive. Though lagging behind, Internet penetration continues to grow at an unprecedented rate. The introduction of low-cost wireless technologies, broadband, regulatory reforms, demand for mobile services and political will, in part account for these positive developments.

Mr. Chairman,
Excellencies,

Information and communication technology (ICT) has been recognized as one of the key enablers of human development and poverty alleviation advocated by the MDGs both by being part of the MDGs themselves (MDG 8, Target 18) and for its role in strengthening MDGs monitoring and evaluation systems. I am pleased to inform you that as of today, Goal 8 and Target 18 of the MDGs on ICTs are the most advanced. This is despite the recent financial and economic meltdown that badly impacted other sectors. The ICT Sector continued to grow despite the global financial and economic meltdown of the past few years.

ICT can play a catalytic role in helping other sectors attain those MDGs associated with their mandates (eradicate extreme poverty and hunger, achieve universal primary education, promote gender equality and empower women, reduce child mortality, improve maternal health, combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases, ensure environmental sustainability, and develop a global partnership for development).

As we make efforts to promote universal access to ICT in developing countries and LDCs in particular, we are forging partnerships with the private sector and other development partners with the aim of attracting investment into the ICT sector. Our aim is to develop infrastructure in semi-urban, remote, and rural areas

so that all people could play an active role in nation-building and socio-economic development. This explains why ITU launched a number of key initiatives that include the Connect the World Series. Africa is home to most of the LDCs. In 2007, ITU held in Kigali, Rwanda a very successful Connect Africa event. Development partners pledged over 55 billion dollars in terms of investment into the ICT sector. At the time, I was in the fore-front of the organization of this event as I was the ITU's Regional Director for Africa. ITU has also launched the Broadband Commission which seeks to promote the uptake of broadband that will change the way people live, work, and do business. I recognize Mr. Check Sidi Diarra here, who is one of the Commissioners of the Broadband Commission and thank him for his active contribution and commitment to this initiative.

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I strongly believe that ICT can make the MDGs come true for the LDCs. These technologies can reduce the vulnerabilities of countries to natural disasters through effective environmental monitoring, improve literacy through e-education, improve yields through weather monitoring, enhance social inclusion of people in rural areas and special groups such as people with disabilities, women and children, and improve healthcare through e-health. The promotion of decent work, social protection and gender equality policies play an essential role in reducing poverty and enhancing social inclusion.

The ITU approach is that:
- LDCs must be allowed to initiate and play an active role in whatever projects that we embark on so as to ensure that they own the process;
- We must find innovative ways and financing mechanisms at the international and domestic levels to boost growth in the ICT Sector as it has been widely acknowledged that this Sector has the potential to help other Sectors meet their MDGs ;
- LDCs must be assisted in developing development-oriented policies that could fuel the building up of their own capacities in mobilizing their economic, natural and human resources in support of poverty reduction strategies.

Finally, the United Nations Charter carries the pledge leading to "the promotion of the economic and social advancement of all peoples." I believe that ICT is

contributing to the fulfillment of this pledge and will continue to do so in the future. I call upon all the Member States here present, to ensure that the Istanbul Programme of Action to be adopted at the Fourth United Nations Conference for the LDCs will once again recognize the importance of ICTs.

Thank you.