

Regional Development Forum for the Arab States

25-26 November 2020

Closing Session (26 November)

Deputy to the Director's Talking Points

- As we conclude the Regional Development Forum for the Arab States this year and as we approach the end of 2020, it is important to reflect on the unprecedented challenges that emerged throughout the year and affected ITU's activities in the Arab Region. 2020 began with the retirement of the previous Regional Director and by midyear, the senior advisor in the office also retired. In the midst of this, COVID-19 hit the world and region. ITU's normal working practice halted globally and regionally with travel restricted, events cancelled or postponed and staff forced to work from home. All our regional activities had to be replanned to be organized virtually, including this RDF.
- They say that challenges bring opportunities for growth. Our first step in turning these challenges into opportunities was to swiftly appoint a new quite capable regional director. In addition, reform efforts in the BDT that had started before the pandemic were accelerated as a result. While these reform efforts were presented in the previous session allow me to highlight that regionally, we increased capacity building trainings for staff, helped facilitate change via a network of change champions, reoriented activities to be results driven, empowered regional activities through close coordination with global thematic clusters, and established closer contact with member states to address their needs.
- As we continue evolving it is important to look ahead and realize that one of the significant priority areas that emerged as a result of the pandemic is digital transformation. Countries around the world and regionally, have accelerated digital transformation plans in an effort to extend meaningful connectivity and digital services to the unconnected segments of society. As presented during the RDF, the SDGs are expected to be highlight influenced by ICTs in the coming decade of action. Ministries of ICT and Telecom Regulators are at the heart of these efforts and naturally the ITU is positioned to lead the global and regional efforts to help members regionally and around the world. In order to do so, we must continue changing to become fit for purpose.
- And so I would like to draw your attention that next year the World Telecommunication Development Conference will take place in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. The WTDC will bring together all the stakeholders working globally to utilize ICTs to achieve the SDGs. I would like to seize this opportunity to extend an invitation to all stakeholders to join us in the preparations for WTDC that will commence at the beginning of 2021.
- In conclusion, I would like to thank you the distinguished speakers and participants for enriching the discussions throughout both days of the regionally development forum. We hope that you join us next year as we prepare for the WTDC. I would also like to thank the team within ITU who organized the RDF this year in spite of the many challenges. I am hopeful that we the ITU family will be in a stronger position in 2021 and together set course in the right direction towards the digital decade for action.