

World Telecommunication and Information Society Day 2020

"Connect 2030: ICTs for the Sustainable Development Goals"

WTISD Virtual Celebration

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Speech (full version)

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Good afternoon,

It is a pleasure to be speaking to you on this date, when we celebrate the signing of the first International Telegraph Convention in 1865.

Since then, much has changed with regards to communication!

Already in 1906, the first Radiotelegraph Convention gathered 30 States and adopted the first regulations governing wireless telegraphy. It established the principles of communication mainly between maritime vessels and in-land stations.

Last year, the World Radiocommunications Conference counted with over 3,400 participants representing 163 Member States and 129 organizations. The international treaty, that is now called the Radio Regulations, governs the use of radio-frequency spectrum and satellite-orbits. And it applies to around 40 radiocommunication services, some of which billions of people use on a daily basis.

Comparing the numbers of both conferences gives us a dimension of the changes that happened in telecommunications and ICT sector during the last century.

In fact, radiocommunication evolved to different domains. What begun with a mostly State-owned infrastructure of tens of countries, has now expanded throughout the globe and is within the reach of almost all the world's population.

The regulatory framework established over the years not only ensures that radiocommunication services can coexist, but also provides the stability required to attract investments and enable the exponential growth of telecommunications and ICTs.

Furthermore, to allow for the introduction of new technologies, World Radiocommunication Conferences are held periodically to update and improve the Radio Regulations, the international treaty that governs the use of radio-frequency spectrum and satellite-orbits.

The agenda of these Conferences opens up the opportunity for introducing innovative and advanced services in the field of telecommunications. From connecting unmanned aircrafts, to connecting cars, planes, ships, machines, and all things that can be connected using wireless communications.

The agenda of Radiocommunication Conferences also includes new technologies that aim at bridging the digital divide.

Although around 90% of the population is within the reach of at least a 3G mobile network, currently, 49% percent of the world's population is still not connected to the Internet – and great part of the unconnected world lies in developing and least developed countries.

New fixed, mobile and satellite technologies promise to cover the unconnected by providing more affordable broadband services.

In addition, the development of globally harmonized spectrum and standards allows for economies of scale that reduce the cost of network equipment and consumer devices. Allowing, therefore, a wider penetration of services also within the lower income population.

Naturally, global harmonization requires a collective effort of countries, service providers, manufacturers, academia and standardization bodies. The cooperation between all stakeholders is what allows us to come to common agreements that are then adopted by countries throughout the world.

Finally, the telecommunications and ICT sector need to face the challenges that result from their own success. How can the industry innovate and grow without increasing its carbon footprint? The answer is to focus on significantly increasing spectrum efficiency of wireless networks, which makes it possible to cover larger service areas, such as rural communities, while simultaneously driving down energy consumption and the creation of e-waste.

While telecommunications have the potential to make other industries and verticals more efficient and more sustainable it also needs to become more sustainable itself.

And when all people in the world are connected and the telecommunications system is sustainable, **yet** more needs to be done. Having access to radiocommunications is not an end in itself. The main objective is for technology to be used as an enabler to achieve all other sustainable development goals.

Thus, while the first Radiotelegraph Convention ensured safety on the sea, our current Radio Regulations and standards go further. They aim at:

- ensuring safety on the sea, air, roads and railways;
- enabling e-agriculture for a more sustainable food production;
- promoting financial inclusion;
- enabling e-learning, e-health, and teleworking – all shown to be vital during these COVID times;
- enabling accurate weather prediction, climate monitoring; and
- providing us the means to monitor the Earth and hopefully prevent the degradation of rain forests and marine life in the near future.

Therefore, after 155 years, evolving from the telegraph towards the radiocommunication services we know today, the contribution of the Radio Regulations has always been paramount towards the achievement of the Connect 2030 goals, and more importantly, towards the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.