ITU Regional Standardization Forum for Africa

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*Opening Address*

Hiroshi Ota

On behalf of Malcolm Johnson

Director, Telecommunication Standardization Bureau  
International Telecommunication Union

Distinguished delegates

Ladies and gentlemen,

I am very pleased to welcome you to this ITU Regional Standardization Forum for Africa on behalf of Malcolm Johnson, Director of ITU’s Telecommunication Standardization Bureau (TSB).

I would like to begin by thanking our hosts, the Uganda Communications Commission, and, in particular, Helen Nakiguli and her team for their excellent collaboration with ITU in organizing this event.

As many of you will know, ITU has a prestigious history stretching back almost 150 years. We are the United Nations specialized agency for information and communication technologies (ICTs) and we are headquartered in Geneva, Switzerland, with twelve regional and area offices around the world.

International standards are one of the most important tools to address the digital divide as they increase competition and reduce costs, enabling companies in emerging markets to access global markets. They are an essential aid to developing countries in building their infrastructure and encouraging economic development.

Increasing the participation of developing countries in ITU’s standardization work will ensure that ITU produces standards to meet their particular requirements. Participation also builds an improved understanding of what can be very complicated standards, translating into more informed choices of standards and greater knowledge of how to implement them.

ITU’s Standardization Sector (ITU-T) has introduced a number of initiatives to increase the participation of developing countries in our standardization work.

Making ITU-T Recommendations available to download free of charge from the ITU website was one of the first initiatives. ITU previously sold around 5000 copies of standards a year; now downloads are running at over 2.5 million copies a year.

Fellowships were previously available for only one of our study groups, ITU-T Study Group 3. Today, eligible countries are granted one full fellowship or two partial fellowships for meetings of all ten ITU-T Study Groups.

We have increased the number of meetings in the regions and we have created Regional Groups within ITU-T Study Groups. We also offer online ‘remote participation’ in all of our study group meetings, which allows delegates to avoid costly airfares and hotel expenses.

I am pleased to say that these efforts have been effective: since 2008 we have seen 41 countries participating in ITU-T meetings that had never done so before.

Other significant steps forward have been the establishment of a reduced membership fee for companies from certain developing countries and the formation of a new membership category for academic and research institutes.

Academic and research institutes are eligible to become members of ITU at a greatly reduced fee. Uganda’s universities, for example, are able to join ITU for just CHF2000 per year.

Since this new academic membership category opened its doors at the beginning of 2011, 63 institutions have joined ITU, of which 45 are members of ITU-T.

WTSA Resolution 44 on Bridging the Standardization Gap was reviewed at WTSA-12 in Dubai, providing for TSB to develop guidelines to assist developing countries in establishing a national standardization secretariat.

Creating a standardization secretariat is crucial to driving ICT standardization at the national level and ensuring effective participation in international standards work. The Korean government supported an ITU research study to assess the standardization capabilities of developing countries. This study found that the absence of a national body responsible for the coordination of ICT standardization activities was the main factor determining the level of a country’s standardization capacity.

Responding to WTSA Resolution 44 as well as the findings of our research study, ITU-T recently finalized and published guidelines on the establishment of a national standardization secretariat. These guidelines will be presented in the session beginning at 11:00 today. This interactive session will also see presentations given on ICT standardization in Morroco, Uganda and Ghana, and I am sure that the discussions of this session will be very useful in determining future ITU actions to enhance ICT standardization activities in the African region.

This Forum will address a wide variety of key issues: human exposure to electromagnetic fields, combatting climate change and tackling e-waste, end-to-end Quality of Service (QoS) for broadband and mobile services, and regulatory aspects of ICT and associated experiences in the region.

With respect to human exposure to electromagnetic fields, ITU provides technical frameworks for the responsible management of the ICT systems that underpin wireless communications.

ICTs are also capable of playing a key role in addressing major global challenges related to climate change and sustainable development. ITU has led the way in this arena, developing standards to increase the environmental sustainability of ICTs and the extent to which they enable emissions-savings in other industry sectors.

ITU-T Study Group 5 develops international standards that address ICTs’ relationship with electromagnetic effects and climate change. The group also raises awareness of ICTs’ role in tackling climate change and assists in the development of ‘green ICT’ strategies by organizing dedicated symposia, workshops, and training and capacity-building activities.

QoS is addressed by ITU-T Study Group 12 and this is an area where ITU has had a long history of success. Thanks to ITU-standardized performance criteria and measurement methods, people can enjoy high-quality telecommunication services all around the world.

Today, ITU’s QoS work spans the full spectrum of terminals, networks and services, ranging from speech over fixed circuit-switched networks to multimedia applications over mobile and packet-based networks.

The evolution from circuit-switched to packet-based networks has introduced new challenges to the assessment of QoS, in large part stemming from the emergence of new multimedia services and applications. ITU-T standards thus work to achieve the end-to-end performance levels required to support adequate QoS in an IP environment characterized by a wide array of user applications.

Finally, the ITU-T Focus Group on Smart Water Management (FG-SWM) is holding its third meeting on 27 June. The Focus Group will lay the foundation for standardization work on the topic in ITU-T Study Groups. Part of its work will be to showcase smart-water initiatives and associated standardization activities occurring around the world, and the group’s final Technical Reports will pay particular attention to the role of the Internet of Things in smart water management.

I am sure that the presentations and discussions of this Forum will trigger new ideas to progress the work of Study Groups 5 and 12 and FG-SWM. And I certainly hope to see many of you participating in the work of these groups in the near future.

Thank you. I wish you all a most productive and enjoyable meeting.