Official launch of the ITU-Norway partnership on the Digital Transformation Centres Initiative, in cooperation with Cisco and Ghana

VIRTUAL PRESS CONFERENCE
Thursday, 12 November, 10:30 – 11:30 (CET)

Speaker Biographies

Mr Houlin Zhao
Secretary-General of the International Telecommunication Union

Houlin Zhao was re-elected ITU Secretary-General in November 2018 and began his second, and last, four-year term on 1 January 2019.

Mr Zhao is an information and communication technology (ICT) engineer who has served in a variety of senior management positions at ITU.

Prior to first being elected as ITU Secretary-General in 2014, Mr Zhao served eight years as ITU Deputy Secretary-General. In that role, he assisted the ITU Secretary-General, in close cooperation with the other elected officials of the Union, to manage the implementation of the ITU Strategic Plan and the operations of the ITU Secretariat, in particular with a view to increasing the transparency and efficiency of the organization.

He was responsible for implementing important innovations, including the promotion of a new category of membership open to the global academic community, internal efficiency measures such as the move to a near-paperless work environment, the increased use of remote participation systems, and measures to increase revenue from sales and cost-recovery services. In addition, he focused closely on membership-driven priorities including maintaining and extending ITU's commitment to accessibility, to multilingualism, and to broad multistakeholder participation in the work of the Union.

He also served two elected terms as Director of ITU's Telecommunication Standardization Bureau (TSB), which develops technical standards to ensure worldwide ICT interoperability. Before that, he was a Senior Counsellor with TSB for 12 years.

Before joining ITU, Mr Zhao served as an engineer in the Designing Institute of the Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications of China, taking an active role in his country's expert meetings on telecommunication standards and national plans, as well as participating in ITU work as a Chinese delegate. He contributed important articles to a number of prestigious Chinese technical publications, and in 1985 was awarded a prize for his achievements in science and technology within the Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications.

Born in 1950 in Jiangsu, China, Mr Zhao graduated from Nanjing University of Posts and Telecommunications, and holds an MSc in Telematics from the University of Essex in the United Kingdom.

He is married with one son and two grandchildren, and is fluent in three official ITU languages: English, French and Chinese.

Mr Zhao is committed to further streamlining ITU's efficiency, strengthening its membership base through greater involvement of the academic community and of small- and medium-sized enterprises, and to broadening multistakeholder participation in ITU's work.

Mr Aksel Jakobsen
State Secretary of International Development for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs
of Norway

Aksel Jakobsen is State Secretary of International Development for the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Prior to taking up his current post, he worked as an advisor to GAVI, the Vaccine Alliance.

He has previously acted as senior policy advisor to the Christian Democratic Party's Parliamentary group and as political advisor to the former Minister of Health and the Minister of Labour.

Jakobsen has a law degree from the University of Tromsø.

Ms Wendy Mars
President of Cisco's Europe, Middle East, Africa and Russia region

Wendy Mars is President of Cisco's Europe, Middle East, Africa and Russia region.

Her responsibilities focus on driving strategies which deliver on customer requirements and business objectives, in addition to accelerating growth for Cisco in EMEAR. Ms Mars is responsible for over $12billion of annual sales, managing operations across 123 countries with over 13,000 employees in the region overall.

In her previous role at Cisco, Ms Mars led the Partner and Enterprise strategy for EMEAR. She managed teams specializing in technology architecture, scalable consumption and software. Prior to this, Ms Mars led the data center and virtualization teams in EMEAR for several years, after initially joining Cisco as a Systems Engineer Director for the UK and Ireland organization.

Ms Mars is a passionate supporter of women in business, particularly technology, and is the Executive Sponsor of Cisco's Connected Women community. She understands the talent and skills challenges facing the technology industry and firmly believes in culture as a driver of digital transformation and differentiation. Ms Mars is currently leading a number of initiatives designed to encourage the diversity of people, innovation and ideas which will enable Cisco and the industry, respond to and deliver, success for customers.

Prior to joining Cisco, Ms Mars was the Global CTO at ThruPoint for 11 years, working with primarily with its enterprise and service provider customers. She began her career at Morgan Stanley, where she lived abroad working on a variety of IT programmes in Europe, the US and Asia.

She has a BEng(H) in Electronic Engineering from York University and an MSc in Operational Research from Lancaster University.

Ms Ursula Owusu-Ekuful
Minister of Communications of Ghana

Ursula Owusu-Ekuful is the Minister of Communications of Ghana, and Member of Parliament for the Ablekuma West Constituency within the Greater Accra Region in Ghana.

Ms Owusu-Ekuful is a lawyer and advocate for women's and children's rights.

She previously served as Managing Consultant at N. U. Consult Legal, Governance and Gender Consultants, and as Director at Ghana Telecom (now Vodafone Ghana).

From 2005 to 2008, Ms Owusu-Ekuful was the Acting Managing Director of Western Telesystems (Westel) and the first female CEO of a telecom company in Ghana.

She is a former President of the International Federation of Women Lawyers (Fida Ghana) and Africa Regional Vice President of Fida International. She is also a member of African Women Lawyers Association (AWLA), Ghana.

She was the Co-Chair of the EU-AU Digital Economy Task Force and currently plays a pivotal role in the management of the COVID-19 pandemic in Ghana through the introduction and supervision of various technical solutions for social and health continuity management.

She was also installed as the development queen (Nkosuohemaa) of Akyem Asuom in the Kwaebibirem District of the Eastern Region of Ghana.

Ms Owusu-Ekuful holds an LLB from the University of Ghana and was called to the Ghana Bar Association in 1990. She also holds a Master's degree in Conflict, Peace and Security from the Kofi Annan International Peacekeeping Training Centre.

In addition, she earned a certificate in Government Integrity from the International Law Institute, Washington DC, as well as a certificate in Project Management and Planning from the Ghana Institute for Management and Public Administration (GIMPA).

She is married to a UK-based Ghanaian ophthalmologist, Dr Sam Ekuful, with one child.

Ms Doreen Bogdan-Martin
Director of the ITU Telecommunication Development Bureau (BDT)

Doreen Bogdan-Martin was elected Director of the International Telecommunication Union's (ITU) Telecommunication Development Bureau (BDT) on the 1st of November 2018. She took office on the 1st of January 2019.

She is a strategic leader with 30 years' high-level experience in international and inter-governmental relations and a long history of success in policy and strategy development, analysis and execution. She has advised governments around the world on policy and regulatory issues, and is a regular presenter at high-level international forums and summits.

Prior to her election, Ms Bogdan-Martin oversaw the organization's Membership, Corporate Communications, External Affairs and UN Liaison teams, and was instrumental in establishing the Broadband Commission for Sustainable Development, on which she continues to serve as Executive Director.

She was one of the principal architects of the annual Global Symposium for Regulators, directed ITU's first global youth summit #BYND, oversees ITU's contribution to the EQUALS Global Partnership for Gender Equality in the Digital Age, and is leading ITU's collaboration with UNICEF and others on the GIGA project to connect the world's schools.

Prior to joining ITU, Ms Bogdan-Martin was a Telecommunications Policy Specialist in the National Telecommunication and Information Administration (NTIA), US Department of Commerce.

She holds a Master's degree in International Communications Policy from American University in Washington, DC, post-graduate certification in Strategies for Leadership from the Institute for Management Development in Lausanne, Switzerland, and is certified in Accountability and Ethics by the United Nations Leaders Programme.

She is an affiliate of the Harvard University Berkman-Klein Center for Internet and Society, and a Generation Unlimited Champion. She serves on a number of advisory bodies, including the Geneva-Tsinghua Initiative, the SDG Lab Advisory Board, and the UN Technology Innovation Labs. She is also an amateur radio operator. She is married with four children.