

6 June 2023 – Sharm El-Sheikh, Egypt

ITU Secretary-General's Remarks at the Opening Ceremony of the Global Symposium for Regulators 2023

Doreen Bogdan-Martin

Good morning,

Excellency, Minister Talaat,

Executive President Hossam El Gamal,

ITU Development Bureau Director Cosmas Zavazava,

ITU Radiocommunication Bureau Director Mario Maniewicz,

ITU Telecommunication Standardization Bureau Director Onoe-san,

Excellencies, Members of Parliament, ladies and gentlemen,

It's great to be back in Sharm el-Sheikh.

ITU has so many good memories here, including our last World Radiocommunication Conference almost four years ago.

I want to thank the Egyptian Government for hosting our Global Symposium for Regulators for the second time in less than 10 years.

That's a real testament to your commitment to digital transformation.

Ladies and gentlemen,

This is our first in-person GSR since 2019.

This is also the first GSR where we focus our energy and attention on sustainability.

This is also the first GSR with a gala dinner that included a fire show. What an amazing show that was.

We often represent the image of our GSR with a lighthouse, as regulators light the way.

Well, last night you brought a whole new meaning to this, by lighting up the sky. And we thank you.

We are meeting at a time when technology is accelerating at a pace we have never seen before – and amid louder calls for regulatory action.

As we look back to when the NTRA [Egypt's National Telecom Regulatory Authority] was created 25 years ago, it was also the same time that we presented for the first time, to our 1998 World Telecommunication Development Conference, our analysis on “Trends in Telecommunication Reform.”

Everyone was waiting for this.

We were in the middle of the Internet and mobile revolutions – and what regulators wanted more than anything was to share and understand what others were doing.

Two years later, in 2000, we had our very first Global Symposium for Regulators.

Then, like now, regulatory strategies to boost connectivity were on the top of the agenda.

How could it be otherwise, when one third of humanity is still offline?

I will always remember the message of solidarity sent by our first chair, the late Mr. Lekaukau, founding Executive Chairman of the Botswana Telecommunications Authority.

He stood in front of all us in Geneva and said clearly: “The problems that we experience in regulation are similar across the world, and regulatory decisions taken in one part of the world often have implications for other parts of the world.”

He couldn't know that exactly 20 years later, COVID-19 would give his words a new resonance – and regulators newfound powers.

As COVID hit, we almost overnight saw countries innovate, open up spectrum and streamline licensing, authorizations and renewals, among other unprecedented measures.

We accomplished so much in so little time.

It was born out of necessity, and it had a huge impact on connectivity. We called it the “COVID connectivity boost.”

With the pandemic now in the rear-view mirror, it's time to apply the lessons learned.

We can't wait for the next crisis to make that next jump.

Not when 2.7 billion people worldwide are offline.

Not as the world has entered a new inflection point.

We're facing a triple planetary crisis. Climate change, pollution and biodiversity loss have pushed us to the brink.

Experts are warning about the risk of extinction posed by AI, while at the same time we recognize the immense benefits that AI could have for humanity.

And then, there are the UN Sustainable Development Goals: just 12% of SDG targets are on track; we've stalled or gone into reverse on the others.

We have to rescue the SDGs. We need to do this now.

I firmly believe that digital can help move us forward on all fronts.

The question before us is simple, yet profound:

What can regulators do to build a sustainable digital future for all, before it's too late?

Let me offer three thoughts:

First – tech won't wait. Regulators need to move faster.

The pandemic proved that we can.

I mentioned AI, but there's also space technologies. We're just at the beginning of the space economy.

A new resolution from the ITU Plenipotentiary, PP-22, instructed us to work with you – including through this Symposium – to ensure the sustainability of the radio-frequency spectrum and associated satellite-orbit resources used by space services.

Your role has always evolved with technology.

Tomorrow's regulator is a catalyst for responsible innovation – effective but flexible, and always putting the public good first.

Second – humans and nature are one and the same. Technology is a means, not an end.

We need to redefine how we understand and measure economic prosperity and progress, to capture and address the true human and environmental costs of our actions.

And third – international, regional, and inter-governmental collaboration and cooperation are paramount.

That's the very essence of this symposium – and the only way to adapt regulatory frameworks to the realities of our ever-changing digital world.

We won't stop until we can bridge every last silo in national institutions and policy implementation – and until every country has harnessed the full potential of digital.

The next few weeks and months will be decisive in shaping digital development well beyond this decade, with our World Radiocommunication Conference (WRC-23) coinciding with the UN Climate Change Conference, COP28, at the end of the year in Dubai.

Before that, on 17 September, ITU and partners will convene the SDG Digital Day in New York to contribute to the SDG Summit.

It will be an opportunity to bring data and digital technologies front and center of the broader effort to create a shared vision for our common digital future, including through the Global Digital Compact.

Ladies and gentlemen,

This year marks the 20th anniversary of the GSR Best Practice Guidelines.

Let's use this milestone – and tap into our collective knowledge and shared commitment – to drive universal connectivity and sustainable digital transformation.

Let's be brave. Let's be bold.

Brave and bold enough to keep pace with tech as we step into the unknown.

And let us align the promise of innovation with the long-term growth and stability of a global digital ecosystem that is inclusive, secure, and sustainable.

Thank you.