Doreen Bogdan-Martin
Secretary-General, International Telecommunication Union (ITU)
Address to the Global Symposium for Regulators (GSR-25)

Minister of Communications and Information Technology, His Excellency Abdullah Amer Alswaha,

CST Governor and GSR-25 Chair, His Excellency Haitham Alohaly,

ITU Telecommunication Development Bureau Director, Cosmas Zavazava,

Former ITU elected officials,

Former GSR chairs,

Excellencies, colleagues, and friends,

A-Salem-a-leykum

And Welcome to the 25th anniversary of the Global Symposium for Regulators!

What a pleasure to be here in Riyadh.

Thousands of years ago, beneath these desert skies, trading caravans moved across the sand, their paths lit by constellations of stars.

Stars were a constant common reference that every traveler from any culture could trust.

Those travelers could never have imagined that one day trade routes would be guided — not by stars — but by artificial satellites, enabled by radio spectrum and carried through global networks.

But like those ancient travelers, we need a common understanding to navigate together, no matter how advanced our systems become.

And that is what we celebrate today: 25 years of collaboration through the GSR.

We are deeply grateful to Saudi Arabia for hosting this special edition of the GSR.

Since 2018, Saudi Arabia has invested 25 billion dollars to expand its ICT (information and communication technology) workforce, helped ITU launch the world's first AI Readiness Framework, and built a regulator whose mandate spans both communications *and* space.

This leadership is exactly the kind of vision that drives our collective progress.

The Chair of our first GSR, Cuthbert Lekaukau from Botswana, said, "*regulators can only be successful if they cooperate with each other.*"

That wisdom still anchors us, 25 years later.

And it is fitting that we mark this milestone in the same year ITU celebrates its 160th anniversary.

Cooperation has been our guiding star from the very beginning.

Excellencies,

Back in 2000, when the GSR began:

The world was still on dial-up Internet; fewer than 7% of people were online; just 12% had a mobile; and fewer than 700 satellites orbited Earth.

Less than half of ITU members had regulatory bodies. Today that number stands at 166.

I remember those early days well.

One of my first tasks at ITU was reviewing regulatory developments around the world — with paper, fax machines, and CD-ROMs!

It was painstaking work, but vital.

Our "Trends in Telecommunication Reform" reports showed how countries were dealing with liberalization; licensing; spectrum; consumer protection, and how they were preparing for the "known unknowns."

Like those ancient caravans, survival — and success — depended on shared knowledge and cooperation.

That philosophy shaped the GSR: Planning for the known unknowns; ensuring equal opportunities for all; and balancing national sovereignty with international collaboration.

Because of that, today we see regulatory sandboxes in over 100 countries; mainstream adoption of G5 regulatory models; and a global community of regulators driving digital transformation together.

Excellencies,

Earlier today, regulators adopted the GSR-25 Best Practice Guidelines.

They reflect lessons from 25 years — and a mindset shift for the future.

Because your role has evolved. It is no longer only about telecom markets. It is about shaping how digital technologies transform every facet of life.

You are not just regulators. You are builders of the digital ecosystem.

Innovation is your mission. Collaboration is your fuel.

And never has collaboration been more important than now — in the age of AI.

Regulators face three defining challenges: speed, scale, and stakes.

The first is speed. (of our actions)

Digital technologies – from AI to quantum – are advancing faster than any regulation can.

The real race must not be to build the biggest or fastest systems, but to make these technologies work for everyone – especially while 2.6 billion people remain offline.

The second challenge is scale. (of our investment and infrastructure)

Earlier today, ITU – with Saudi Arabia – released the *Connecting Humanity Action Blueprint*.

A fresh assessment of what it will take to achieve universal, meaningful connectivity by 2030.

With an estimated $2.6-to-$2.8-trillion (USD) needed to close the digital divide, it's clear that if we don't scale investment and infrastructure everywhere, our goal of universal, meaningful connectivity will remain just that – a distant dream.

The third challenge is stakes.

Digital now shapes our economies, our schools, our hospitals, our information ecosystems.

As the stakes rise, regulation must be smarter: not rules for their own sake, but a foundation for growth, trust and inclusion.

Three challenges with one answer: cooperation.

Excellencies,

Every sandbox, every enabling framework, every community you connect — these are not just technical achievements.

They are acts of trust-building, multilateral cooperation, and bringing us closer to achieving sustainable development.

What if we get this right?

Picture this: It's the year 2050, and we're at the GSR's 50th anniversary.

I may be here with my walking stick.

We now have 8G networks linking people and intelligent machines at the speed of thought; Internet not only on the moon but powering settlements on Mars; affordable access for all, with privacy and cybersecurity embedded by design; communities whose digital needs are not just met but anticipated; and the workforce no longer entirely human. AI digital colleagues work along side us. Machines handle the routine, AND WE humans bring creativity, empathy and purpose.

The Secretary-General of that time (still a human) looks back — 25 years earlier — and says:

"They understood that the future wouldn't be regulated by accident. They shaped it together, through cooperation, foresight, and the courage to embrace change."

Excellencies,

Just as ancient travelers navigated by the same stars from different continents, we now set the same digital standards across different nations; each a point of light in the constellation we've built together.

Our frameworks must remain as constant and reliable as those stars.

This 25th GSR is both a celebration and a recommitment to put people and planet at the heart of digital frameworks, to ensure technology bridges divides, and to make sure our digital future is safe, inclusive, and sustainable — for all.

The next 25 years will be defined by the frameworks we build, the trust we forge, and the choices we make together.

So let us meet the known unknowns with vision.

Let us choose unity over fragmentation.

And let us leave no one behind!