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TELECOMMUNICATION DEVELOPMENT BUREAU

WORLD TELECOMMUNICATION DEVELOPMENT CONFERENCE (WTDC-98)

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PLENARY MEETING

REPORT ON SPECIAL SESSIONS ON GENDER ISSUES

Malta, WTDC-98, 22, 25 and 27 March 1998

1   Opening address by Mr. Ahmed Laouyane, Director of BDT

The BDT Director invited the Special Session to consider ways of constructing an *Information Society* which would recognize the rapid pace of change in the Sector and which would devise policies and programmes for infrastructure development, financing strategies and skills-building which take account of differentials between men and women. He stressed that one of the major impacts of telecommunications development was in terms of far-reaching alteration in employment patterns. The Director urged the Session to undertake steps to achieve a gender balance in employment of professionals and support staff in telecommunication administrations, Government and the private sector.

2   The Special Session elected the following individuals as officers:[1]

–   chair, K.S. Maluki (Kenya);

–   vice-chairs, Tara Hennessy (Canada), Valerie D'Costa (Singapore), Pius Griffiths (Ghana);

–   Rapporteur, Gillian Marcelle, (INTECH);

–   Secretary to the Special Session, Patricia Faccin, BDT.

3   Executive summary

•   Support for the establishment of a task force which would carry out a range of activities aimed at ensuring that the benefits of telecommunications in developing countries and the emerging information technologies were made available to women and men on a fair and equitable basis.

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[1]   Officers for the Special Session elected in their individual capacities.

- Acceptance of the concern that women and other groups who have been traditionally disadvantaged should be provided with opportunities to participate fully in and have access to telecommunications services and infrastructure. The group recognized that making better use of human resources and skills of women significantly would add to the pool of talent which will be needed in the new information society.

- These programmes would also bring the work of the BDT in line with that of United Nations bodies and its Member States which have endorsed support for inclusion of a gender perspective in all the programmes and projects of the UN system.

- A number of specific proposals were suggested as to how the ITU-D programme might be engendered, these include:

  - Inclusion of a gender perspective in the campaign for a universal right to communicate.

  - Support for inclusion of a gender perspective in policy, work programmes and projects of the ITU-D including study groups, seminars, conferences and workshops. The priorities of the task force would include, but not be limited to, policies, projects and programmes relating to: rural telecommunications networks, universal access, broadcasting, telecommunications as a social service, development of telecentres, telemedicine, tele-education, telecommunications and trade, telecommunications and the environment. It was agreed that increasing the number of women specialists from administrations, Sector Members, and the UN system in these activities would assist the ITU-D in tackling these relevant and important issues.

  - Extension of the ITU's data collection activities, including the telecommunications indicator series to provide gender disaggregated statistics.

  - Comprehensive programme of action to increase the number of women who are employed in the telecommunication sector at varying levels of responsibility. The Special Session heard evidence that in the majority administrations, women are under-represented at professional and technical levels. This situation is similar for senior policy-making levels in government and regulatory bodies and in the private sector. Actions which can improve this situation include technical and management training for women, recruitment and employment policies which take account of women's needs, improving utilization of available human resources and finally, activities to encourage and support women's involvement in private sector activities.

4 Presentations during the sessions

Contributions were presented during the first two sessions from:

- Marilyn Carr and Swasti Mitter, UNIFEM/UNU-INTECH, "Gender and Telecommunications; an Agenda for Policy" (Document 38)

- Geetha Paul, Department of Telecommunications, India, "Gender Issues during WTDC-98" (Document 41)

- K.S. Maluki, Kenya Posts & Telecommunications Corporation, "Gender Issues in Telecommunications" (Documents 79 and 142)

- Ali Habsou, SONITEL, Niger "Women and Telecommunication Development" (Document 40)

–   Tara Hennessy, Industry Canada, "Women in the Global Knowledge Economy" (Document 88)

–   Tony Zeitoun, CIDA, Canada, "Gender Equity, Telecommunication Development and the ITU", (Document 128)

–   Christine Pech, France Telecom, "A Brief Statement on Gender Issues related to Telecommunications", (Document 81)

–   Elizabeth Nzagi, Tanzania Communications Commission, "Gender Issues", (Document 136)

–   Iris Struiken-Wijdenbosch, TELESUR, "Contribution on Gender Issues", (Document 171)

5   Adoption of a resolution

At the third meeting on Friday, 27 March, the Session discussed and passed a proposal for the adoption of a resolution addressing Gender and Telecommunications Policy in Developing Countries. The draft resolution and the terms of reference for the task force (annexed) were submitted to the Plenary Meeting of the Conference.

The Session also asked for volunteers to serve on the task force to cover the six programmes in the Valletta Action Plan ensuring that all the regions are represented.