

INTERNATIONAL TELECOMMUNICATION UNION TELECOMMUNICATION DEVELOPMENT BUREAU

WORLD TELECOMMUNICATION DEVELOPMENT CONFERENCE (WTDC-98)

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For information

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PLENARY MEETING

AFRICA ONE

AFRICA ONE (AFRICA Optical NEtwork) is a project for an optical fibre submarine cable forming a ring around the African continent. The concept was launched by ITU/BDT at the end of 1993. The project enjoyed the support of joint efforts by the Pan-African Telecommunications Union (PATU), the Regional African Satellite Communications Organization (RASCOM), the ATT Submarine Systems company (recently taken over by TYCO SSI), ITU and the African countries, through the Coordination Committee set up by the Consultative Meeting of African ITU Member States held in Tunis on 20 and 21 November 1995. The membership of the Coordination Committee was subsequently expanded and endorsed by the African Regional Telecommunication Development Conference held in Abidjan from 6 to 10 May 1996 (AF-RTDC-96 Resolution 5). The submarine cable will form a 39 000 km ring encircling the African continent, directly connecting 30 landing points in coastal countries. Inland countries and the remaining coastal countries will be connected to the AFRICA ONE network, via the submarine cable landing points, using the terrestrial radio-relay network, terrestrial optical fibre cable, or satellite.

The aim is to integrate the AFRICA ONE submarine cable with existing or planned terrestrial and satellite systems and other emerging subregional submarine cable systems in the different parts of the continent, with a view to reducing to a minimum the transit costs incurred by African countries to route their intra-African traffic via international transit centres abroad. The anticipated saving to be achieved by improving direct interconnectivity between African countries amounts to some 300 million dollars per year.

AFRICA ONE is designed using the latest optical fibre submarine cable technology, so as to achieve a high level of efficiency. A fibre-optic pair will provide over 240 000 circuits at 64 kbit/s. The undersea cable will contain two pairs, one for providing the primary traffic path and the other for automatic restoration of communications in the event of a break in the cable, by virtue of its configuration in a ring around the continent.

The feasibility study has been completed, through a series of subregional and regional meetings of experts, under the supervision of the Coordination Committee chaired by the Director of BDT/ITU.

The latest estimates put the cost of the submarine cable at 1.3 billion US dollars, to which must be added some 300 million US dollars to meet the cost of connecting inland countries and coastal countries without landing points.

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A two-pronged approach has been adopted for the initial financing strategy for AFRICA ONE. First, the initial purchase of capacity by carriers on AFRICA ONE is to be maximized, securing the support of financing organizations to mobilize concessional funding or any other type of financing for carriers which do not have the necessary resources to purchase or finance the purchase of capacity. Several commercial banks have also expressed an interest in contributing to the investments that countries would be required to make. Second, the additional capital needed to finance the cost of the network is to be obtained from private investors in Africa and abroad. Private investors would be reimbursed through the sale of surplus capacity, income from the provision of services for the restoration of other submarine cable systems and occasional services.

The last conference of Ministers and Managing Directors organized by ITU in Tunis from 16 to 18 September 1997 reviewed the situation in terms of African countries' commitment to the AFRICA ONE project. To date, just over 30 countries and European and American carriers have signed the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU). That meeting also discussed the principle of implementing the project on a Build-Operate-Transfer (BOT) basis, and adopted it as a possible alternative financing solution. A map of the AFRICA ONE system, a revised map showing the signatory countries and a revised list of signatories of the MoU are attached.

Negotiations are currently under way with several sources of financing interested in implementing a BOT arrangement which should speed up implementation of the project. At the invitation of Tunisia, a meeting of the African countries participating in the AFRICA ONE project is scheduled for February 1998 in order to take a decision on the proposed financing arrangements and establishment of the AFRICA ONE company.

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AFRICA ONE SIGNATURE OF THE MoU AT 11 DECEMBER 1997

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AFRICA ONE MoU SIGNATURE STATUS

African countries which have signed

- 1 ALGERIA
- 2 ANGOLA
- 3 BENIN
- 4 BOTSWANA
- 5 BURKINA FASO
- 6 BURUNDI
- 7 CAMEROON
- 8 COTE D'IVOIRE
- 9 DJIBOUTI
- 10 EGYPT
- 11 ERITREA
- 12 ETHIOPIA
- 13 GAMBIA
- 14 KENYA
- 15 LIBYA
- 16 MALAWI
- 17 MOROCCO
- 18 MAURITANIA
- 19 MOZAMBIQUE
- 20 NIGER
- 21 CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC
- 22 REPUBLIC OF CONGO
- 23 RWANDA
- 24 SUDAN
- 25 CHAD
- 26 TOGO
- 27 TUNISIA

Non-African carriers

- 28 PORTUGAL
- 29 UK BT
- 30 US TSSL
- 31 US AT&T