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RESOLUTION 37 (REV. Buenos Aires, 2017)

Bridging the digital divide

The World Telecommunication Development Conference (Buenos Aires, 2017),

recalling

a) United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) Resolution 70/1, on transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development;

b) UNGA Resolution 70/125, on the outcome document of the high-level meeting of the General Assembly on the overall review of the implementation of WSIS outcomes;

*c)* Resolution 37 (Rev. Hyderabad, 2010) of the World Telecommunication Development Conference (WTDC);

*d)* Resolution 139 (Rev. Busan, 2014) of the Plenipotentiary Conference, on the Use of telecommunications/information and communication technologies to bridge the digital divide and build an inclusive information society;

e) Resolution 200 (Busan, 2014) of the Plenipotentiary Conference, on the Connect 2020 Agenda for global telecommunication/ICT development;

f) the WSIS+10 Statement on the implementation of WSIS outcomes and WSIS+10 Vision for WSIS beyond 2015, adopted at the ITU-coordinated WSIS+10 High-Level Event (Geneva, 2014) and endorsed by the Plenipotentiary Conference (Busan, 2014),

g) Resolution 23 (Rev. Dubai, 2014) of the World Telecommunication Development Conference (WTDC) on the Internet access and availability for developing countriesand charging principles for international Internet connection;

h) Resolution 20 (Rev. Hyderabad, 2010) of the World Telecommunication Development Conference (WTDC) on non‑discriminatory access to modern telecommunication/information and communication technology facilities, services and related applications;

i) Resoluation 16 (Rev. Hyderabad, 2010)of the World Telecommunication Development Conference (WTDC)on special actions and measures for the least developed countries, small island developing states, landlocked developing countries and countries with economies in transition;

j) Resolution 50 (Rev. Dubai, 2014) of the WTDC on the optimal integration of information and communication technologies,

recognizing

*a)* that the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) highlighted that the ICT infrastructure is an essential foundation for an inclusive information society, and called for the commitment of all States to placing ICTs and ICT applications at the service of development;

b) that the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development recognized The spread of information and communications technology and global interconnectedness has great potential to accelerate human progress, to bridge the digital divide;

c) that UNGA the high-level meeting of the General Assembly on the overall review of the implementation of WSIS outcomes expressed concern that there are still significant digital divides between and within countries and that many developing countries lack affordable access to information and communications technologies;

*d)* that providing assistance to developing countries in bridging the digital divide is one of the strategic goals of the Telecommunication Development Sector (ITU-D) as stated in Resolution 71 (rev. Busan, 2014) of the Plenipotentiary Conference of ITU;

e) that numerous studies endorse the conclusion that investments in broadband infrastructure, applications and services contribute to sustainable and inclusive economic growth for all;

f) that most ITU Member States have adopted integrated connectivity policies with a view to make telecommunication/ICT services more affordable and accessible to citizens, in a bid to reduce the digital divide;

g) that the integration models supported by the ITU Member States are an element that integrates, facilitates and does not exclude, one which takes into account the individual characteristics of all existing projects, respecting their autonomy and independence;

h) that the integration models propose ways to increase the profitability of existing infrastructure, to lower the cost of developing and implementing ICT projects and platforms, to provide for the sharing of expertise and skills, and to foster intraregional and extraregional technology transfers;

i) that it is necessary to coordinate the efforts of both the public and private sectors to ensure that opportunities arising from the information society yield benefits, especially for the most disadvantaged;

*j)* that the telecommunication/ICT environment has undergone significant changes since WTDC‑14;

*k)* that there is still a need to show clearly what the digital divide is, where it occurs, and who suffers from it;

l) that the social and economic underdevelopment of a large part of the world is one of the most serious problems affecting not only the countries concerned but also the international community as a whole;

*m)* that development in information and communication technologies (ICTs) has continued to reduce the cost of relevant equipment;

*n)* that in many ITU Member States regulations have been adopted dealing with regulatory issues such as interconnection, determination of tariffs, universal service, etc., designed to bridge the digital divide at the national level;

*o)* that the introduction of competition in the provision of telecommunication/ICT services has also continued to reduce telecommunication/ICT costs to users;

*p)* that national plans and projects for the provision of telecommunication services in developing countries contribute to reducing costs to users and bridging the digital divide;

*q)* that the introduction of new applications and services has also resulted in bringing down telecommunication/ICT costs;

*r)* that there is still an ongoing need to create digital opportunities in developing countries, including the least developed countries, small island developing states, landlocked developing countries and countries with economies in transition, taking advantage of the revolution that ICTs have witnessed and are currently witnessing;

*s)* that various activities are being executed towards bridging the digital divide by many international and regional organizations, such as, in addition to ITU, , the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), the United Nations economic commissions, the World Bank, the Asia-Pacific Telecommunity (APT), the regional economic communities, the regional development banks and many others, and that such activity has increased following the conclusion of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) and the adoption of the Tunis Agenda for the Information Society, particularly in relation to implementation and follow-up;

*t)* that the BYND2015 World Youth Summit participants, in the Declaration of Costa Rica 2013, called for equitable and universal access to ICTs, particularly for women and girls, as well as other groups marginalized by the digital divide, and called for the United Nations, the international community and all Member States to consider their words and put them into action;

u) the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), officially known as “Transforming our wolrd: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”, is a set of 17 “Global Goals” with 169 targets aiming at ending poverty, protecting the planet and ensuring prosperity for all;v) that the declarations of previous world telecommunication development conferences (WTDC) (Istanbul, 2002; Doha, 2006; Hyderabad, 2010; and Dubai, 2014) have continued to affirm that ICTs and ICT applications are essential for political, economic, social and cultural development, that they play an important role in poverty alleviation, job creation, environmental protection and the prevention and mitigation of natural and other disasters (in addition to the importance of disaster prediction), and that they must be placed at the service of development in other sectors; and that, therefore, opportunities offered by new ICTs should be fully exploited in order to foster sustainable development;

w) that Goal 2 in Resolution 71 (Rev. Busan, 2014) of this conference, on the strategic plan for the Union for 2016-2019, continues to declare that the aim is for ITU to assist in bridging the national, regional and international digital divide in ICTs and ICT applications by facilitating interoperability, interconnection and global connectivity of telecommunication networks and services, and by playing a leading role in the process for follow-up and implementation of the relevant goals and objectives of WSIS, and to focus on bridging the digital divide and providing broadband for all,

considering

*a)* the role of the ITU, in particular the specific functions of the ITU Telecommunication Development Sector (ITU-D);

*b)* that many stakeholders in the public, private, academic, non-governmental organization and multilateral sectors are seeking to bridge this divide;

*c)* the continuing disparity between those who have and those who do not have access to ICT, especially in rural areas where telecommunications/ICT and the Internet are still not affordable to the majority of the people;

*d)* that, even with all the developments mentioned above, in many developing countries and especially in rural areas, telecommunications/ICTs, particularly in relation to the Internet, are still not affordable to the majority of the people, as is evident at present;

*e)* that each region, country and area should tackle its own specific issues regarding the digital divide, while stressing the importance of cooperation in this area at regional and international level in order to benefit from experience gained;

*f)* that many developing countries do not have the necessary basic infrastructure, long‑term plans, laws, appropriate regulations and such like in place for telecommunication/ICT development;

*g)* that the use of radiocommunication systems, in particular satellite systems, to provide access for local communities located in rural or remote areas without increased connection costs due to distance or other geographical characteristics, is an extremely useful tool for bridging the digital divide;

*h)* that satellite broadband systems support communication solutions offering high connectivity, speed and reliability in both urban areas and rural and remote areas, and thus constitute a fundamental driver of economic and social development for countries and regions;

*i)* that the development of radiocommunication technologies and deployment of satellite systems enable sustainable and affordable access to information and knowledge, through the provision of communication services with high connectivity (broadband) and wide coverage (regional or global reach), which contribute significantly to bridging the digital divide, efficiently complementing other technologies and enabling countries to be connected directly, quickly and reliably;

*j)* that Programme 1 of the Telecommunication Development Bureau (BDT) under the Hyderabad Action Plan, on information and communication infrastructure and technology development, provides assistance to developing countries in the area of spectrum management and in the efficient and cost‑effective development of rural, national and international broadband telecommunication networks, including satellite;

k) that Bridging Standardization Gap(BSG) is one of the 5 strategic objectives of ITU’sstandardization sector (ITU-T);

l) that, despite the previous decade's achievements in ICT connectivity, many forms of digital divide remain, both between and within countries, that need to be addressed through, among other actions, strengthened enabling policy environments and international cooperation to improve affordability, access, education, capacity building, multilingualism, cultural preservation, investment and appropriate financing, as well as measures to improve digital literacy and skills and to promote cultural diversity,

further considering

*a)* that the distribution of the benefits brought about by the ICT revolution is not equitable between developing and developed countries, and between social categories within countries, taking into account the commitments of both phases of WSIS to bridge the digital divide and transform it into a digital opportunity;

*b)* that equitable access to information and the transition of the countries of the developing world into knowledge economies and into the information age will enhance their economic, social and cultural development, in implementation of the aims of the Geneva Plan of Action and Tunis Agenda and of Goal 2 (Inclusiveness – Bridge the digital divide and provide broadband for all) of the strategic plan for the Union for 2016-2019 in Resolution 71 (Rev. Busan, 2014) of the Plenipotentiary Conference, which is expected to be maintained in the new plan for 2020-2024, taking into consideration that such access shall be affordable;

*c)* that the United Nations General Assembly will assess the outcomes and implementation of both the Sustainable Development Goals in 2030 and the WSIS outcomes in 2025,

confirms

the importance of approaches to funding for bridging the digital divide in the Geneva Plan of Action, the Tunis Agenda and the strategic plan for the Union and their translation into equitable mechanisms for action, particularly in respect of issues related to Internet management, taking into consideration the special initiatives for promoting full gender equality, with regard for those with special needs, including the disable and incapacitated and the elderly, the youth initiative, issues related to indigenous peoples, telecommunications/ICTs for disaster relief and mitigation, and the child online protection initiative,

undertakes

to carry out work from which all countries, especially the developing countries, may benefit, with a view to establishing international methods and specific mechanisms to strengthen international cooperation for bridging the digital divide, through connectivity solutions which support sustainable and affordable access to ICTs, and, in parallel, to continue to shorten the time-frames for implementation of the Digital Solidarity Agenda, beginning with the Geneva Plan of Action, the outcomes of the Connect the World summits, the Tunis Agenda and the strategic plan for the Union,

resolves to request the Director of the Telecommunication Development Bureau

1 to continue to follow up its work pursuant to Resolution 8 (Rev. Dubai, 2014) of this conference in creating social connectivity indicators for the digital divide, standard indicators for each country and a single index, in cooperation with the competent organizations in the relevant United Nations agencies, using available statistics so that charts can be compiled to illustrate the current situation of the digital divide in each country and region;

2 to continue to advocate the advantages of developing low‑cost high‑quality ICT-customer equipment, that can be directly connected to the networks supporting the Internet and Internet applications, so that economies of scale can be achieved on account of their acceptability at the global level, taking into consideration the possibility of satellite use of this equipment;

3 to continue to assist in developing a user-awareness campaign in order to build user trust and confidence in ICT applications;

4 to ensure that special programmes under the centres of excellence continue to address the specific issue of ICT training for poverty alleviation, and to give top priority to these centres;

5 to continue to foster the development of innovative models in order to reduce poverty and bridge the digital divide in the developing countries successfully;

6 to continue to identify key ICT applications in rural areas and to cooperate with specialized organizations with a view to developing a standardized user‑friendly content format that overcomes the barrier of literacy and language;

7 to continue to assist in reducing access costs by encouraging manufacturers to develop appropriate technology scalable to broadband applications, this having been adopted as a key objective of the Union as a whole and ITU Telecommunication Development Sector (ITU‑D) in particular, and having a low operating and maintenance cost;

8 to assist and support developing countries in researching and assessing difficulties and challenges in the operation and maintenance of multipurpose community telecentres in rural and remote areas, with a view to advising developing countries on models of multipurpose community telecentres, including digital inclusion, in rural and remote areas adapted to local circumstances;

9 to encourage members to provide ITU with ICT rural experiences, which can then be put on the ITU‑D website;

10 to continue to assist the Member States and Sector Members in developing a pro-competition policy and regulatory framework for ICTs, including online services and electronic commerce, as well as capacity building in connectivity and accessibility, taking into account the special needs of women and disadvantaged groups;

11 to continue to encourage development of broadcast-mode methods for promoting ICT uses in rural areas;

12 to continue to help in promoting greater participation of women in ICT initiatives, particularly in rural areas;

13 to promote the implementation of studies or projects and activities, in collaboration with the ITU Radiocommunication Sector (ITU‑R), with a view, on the one hand, to complementing national radiocommunication systems, including satellite systems, and, on the other, to increasing knowledge and capacities thereof, in order to achieve optimum utilization of the orbit spectrum resource, with the aim of stimulating the development and coverage of satellite broadband for bridging the digital divide;

14 to analyse the adoption of measures for collaboration with ITU‑R, in order to support studies, projects or systems and, at the same time, to implement joint activities which seek to build capacities in efficient use of the orbit/spectrum resource for the provision of satellite services, with a view to achieving affordable access to satellite broadband and facilitating network connectivity between different areas, countries and regions, especially in the developing countries;

15 to continue to encourage adoption of the necessary measures to implement regional projects derived from the non-exclusive integration models which the BDT has acquired, to link all stakeholders, organisations and institutions of the various sectors in an ongoing relationship of cooperation in which information is disseminated over networks, so as to narrow the digital divide in line with the outputs of Phases 1 and 2 of WSIS, and to contribute and work towards the Connect 2020 Agenda;

16 to continue to support and coordinate efforts to connect people with disabilities using ICT services and applications;

17 to continue cooperatingwith ITU-T study groups in bridging standardization gap between developing and developed countries,

invites Member States

1 to consider promoting relevant policies to foster public and private investment in the development and construction of radiocommunication systems, including satellite systems, in their countries and regions, and to consider including the use of such systems in their national and/or regional broadband plans, as an additional tool that will help to bridge the digital divide and meet telecommunication needs, especially in the developing countries;

2 when implementing Resolution 17 (Rev. Buenos Aires, 2017) of this conference, on implementation of regionally approved initiatives at the national, regional, interregional and global levels, to select a project among those proposed for the regions that reflect optimal integration of ICTs with the aim of bridging the digital divide.