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Protecting children in cyberspace

Dr Hamadoun I. Touré
ITU Secretary-General



We are honoured and delighted that Her Majesty Queen Silvia of Sweden agreed to be Patron of World Telecommunication and Information Society Day 2009, celebrated under the theme “Protecting children in cyberspace”. Her Majesty is the founder of the World Childhood Foundation and has a grand vision of the future of children in the digital age.

I am also delighted to announce that this year’s ITU World Telecommunication and Information Society Award went to three distinguished winners: President Luiz Inácio Lula Da Silva of Brazil; Rob Conway, Chief Executive Officer of GSMA, and Deborah Taylor Tate, internationally renowned advocate for ICT child safety issues. All have devoted themselves to spreading the benefits of Internet connectivity while protecting the interests of users, especially children who are among the most prolific users — and the most vulnerable. We will report on the laureates’ many achievements in the next issue of *ITU News*, as well as on celebrations from around the world marking 17 May.

Cyberspace offers an almost infinite mosaic of culture and learning, and is a nursery in which young minds can grow and expand. It is a fount of knowledge and the incubator of fresh ideas. It is a cornucopia of wonderful entertainment in a virtual world,

where one can conjure — with what seems like magical ease — almost anything at the click of a finger. And yet, cyberspace presents serious challenges too, especially for children and teenagers. As they venture into the wide-open online world, view what has been posted there, visit chat rooms or join social networks, they are exposed to elements of society that we would shun in the real world.

Protecting children in cyberspace is clearly our duty. That is why ITU launched the Child Online Protection (COP) initiative, jointly with international partners. It is in line with our mandate to establish the foundations for a safe and secure cyberworld for future generations.

The Internet is a global resource that must be allowed to flourish for the common good. But at the same time, we must endeavour to make cyberspace a safe, healthy and productive environment for all who use it. This means that we must create a global system for protecting our children online, by enacting national legislation, strengthening capacity building, increasing public awareness and improving national responses to cyberthreats. Only then will we have created a universally accessible information society where human dignity is respected and where everyone — especially children — can benefit from the opportunities it brings.