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Message from Dr Hamadoun I. Touré, ITU Secretary-General

World Telecommunication and Information Society Day
17 May 2009

PROTECTING CHILDREN IN CYBERSPACE

Cyberspace is the nursery for young minds to grow and expand their horizons. It is the font of knowledge and information in the digital age and the incubator of fresh ideas and new innovations. It is a cornucopia of all that is good and wonderful in the virtual world of entertainment where one can conjure, almost with magical ease, anything the mind desires at the click of a finger. Its menu offers an infinite mosaic of cultures, languages, literature, science and technology, music and theatre, games and sports — and much more.

Yet, cyberspace has its challenges. As children and teenagers venture into the wide open world of cyberspace, surfing the Internet, imbibing its encyclopaedic breadth of content, accessing video libraries, entering chat rooms and building social networks, they are exposed to certain elements of society that we would shun in the real world. Three in four children are willing to share personal information about themselves and their family online in exchange for goods and services. One in five is targeted by a predator or paedophile each year.

Protecting children in cyberspace is clearly our duty. That is why we launched the Child Online Protection (COP) initiative — an integral part of ITU's Global Cybersecurity Agenda. It is in line with our mandate to strengthen cybersecurity and to establish the foundations for a safe and secure cyberworld for future generations. We take this very seriously at ITU, and this year the theme for World Telecommunication and Information Society Day is Protecting Children in Cyberspace. It will influence our work not only on the Day but throughout the year and in the future as well.

The Internet and the growing convergence in online applications and mobile devices are global resources that must be allowed to flourish for the common good. We must endeavour to make cyberspace a safe, healthy and productive environment for our children. We have to create a global network to protect our children online by enacting national legislation, strengthening capacity building, increasing public awareness and improving national cyber responsiveness. Only then can we say that we have created a universally accessible information society where human dignity is respected and where everyone — especially children — can benefit from the opportunities accorded by ICTs to attain higher levels of development.

We celebrate World Telecommunication and Information Society Day 2009 in the knowledge that we have set forth a strong momentum to make cyberspace a safe place for our children where every child can harness the full potential of ICTs, and where every citizen on this planet can exercise the right to access, use, create and share information.

Let us resolve to protect our children in cyberspace and promote their inalienable rights to access information and knowledge in a safe and secure environment.

Hamadoun I. Touré
ITU Secretary-General

https://www.itu.int/wtisd/2009/messages/toure.html