Message by Mr. Yoshio UTSUMI, ITU Secretary-General

World Telecommunication Day

17 May 2000

MOBILE COMMUNICATIONS

To celebrate its first World Telecommunication Day of the new millennium, ITU members have chosen the theme of mobile communications. It's an apt choice, considering the explosion in popularity of mobile services, and particularly mobile cellular, in the past decade.

With a phenomenal and unprecedented growth of more than forty fold in just ten years, strong demand for mobile cellular services has created an industry which now accounts for more than one-third of all telephone lines. That growth, which remains far higher than even the exponential growth in Internet connections, is expected to continue at this rate well into the first decade of this century, when access to telecommunications services over mobile phones will soon exceed access via traditional fixed line networks.

At the same time, a number of other forms of mobile communication, such as paging and trunked radio systems, are also experiencing rapid growth, while newer technologies, such as mobile satellite systems offering both voice and data services, are now beginning to be deployed. These systems, which complement the convenience of mobile cellular, are destined to play an increasingly important role in a wide range of industries, from transport and distribution to emergency services and humanitarian aid.

The advent of wireless communications has already had a profound effect on the way many of us live and work. The ability to stay in contact, regardless of our physical location, is helping us work more efficiently, while bringing us greater freedom and security in our personal lives.

But even more importantly, mobile technologies are now playing a key role in enhancing access to basic telecommunications services, particularly in the nations of the developing world which, for reasons of economics and geography, have long suffered a lack of fixed-line services.

Mobile systems are not only cheaper and quicker to install than traditional wireline networks, they can often be used to provide service in areas where it would not be feasible to lay ordinary copper lines – for example, in mountainous or difficult terrain, or in remote, inaccessible regions.

But while wireless technologies have enormous potential to create a connected global village encompassing peoples of all nations, a number of problems still need to be addressed if this potential is to be fully realized.

Pricing of mobile services, for example, is often still too high to encourage widespread use, particularly in poorer communities. While the introduction of prepaid tariffs is helping, operators and regulators need to find new ways to bring down the cost of wireless access so that a greater number of people can benefit from this increasingly important technology.

Other issues, such as the environmental impact of mobile antennas and correct "mobile etiquette" are also becoming important concerns, as mobile networks grow ever larger and an increasing proportion of people use mobile phones as their principal means of voice communication.

One nagging problem that has long prevented mobile cellular technology from reaching its full potential has been the incompatibilities inherent in the second generation systems currently in use around the world. It therefore gave me great pleasure to have led industry's efforts that resulted in a global agreement on the ITU's IMT-2000 wireless interface standard.

This standard, which aims at serving as the foundation of third generation mobile cellular networks, can ensure that mobile phone users everywhere can at last enjoy seamless global roaming in any country around the world. However, to deliver IMT-2000 compliant systems and therefore materialize the promises of IMT-2000, regulators must allow for all five radio interfaces to be accessible to their network operators, and manufacturers must offer migration solutions that will preserve the mission-critical features of the agreement.

But IMT-2000 brings much more than global roaming and spectrum efficiency. In this new millennium, the future of mobile systems will be ever more closely tied to the use of the Internet. The ability of IMT-2000 systems to support megabit data rates will soon provide mobile users with fast access to the World Wide Web and a huge range of multimedia information, as well as to important new applications such as electronic commerce soon to become "mobile commerce". Combined with the power of new GMPCS satellite systems and other wireless technologies, IMT-2000 third generation cellular systems will finally deliver telecommunication users around the world access to the information and services they need, anywhere, anytime.

When we combine mobile communications with the huge potential of the Internet, we have perhaps the most powerful technology combination ever developed. Our task, as we work to build and develop tomorrow's networks and services, is to empower humanity by ensuring that mobile communications are accessible and affordable to all people, in every nation around the world.

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