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Author: R. E. Butler

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International co-operation is also the future

On 17 May, the Member countries of the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) are celebrating World Telecommunication Day for the 21st year running.

The theme of the day, which commemorates the founding of the Union 124 years ago, is "international co-operation".

We attach particular significance to this theme: it is through co-operation between nations that our Organization came into being on 17 May 1865.

It is also thanks to such co-operation that telecommunications have undergone such spectacular development over the last century.

The Union has grown from its 20 founding States to a membership of 166 States today. Despite the efforts which have been made, however, many of them do not enjoy a fair share of the vast array of technical facilities now available to mankind. Telecommunications should not be the preserve of a privileged few.

With the help of international co-operation, including the Union's technical assistance programmes, all countries are striving to reduce inequalities that exist among too many of them.

This year, May 17th is of special significance owing to the fact that the 13th Plenipotentiary Conference, the supreme organ of the Union, is to open at Nice the following week, with the task of preparing the ITU to meet the challenges of the 21st century.

For six entire weeks the Plenipotentiaries will be called upon to review the main policy options that will enable the ITU to achieve its objectives of maintaining and extending "international co-operation between all Members of the Union for the improvement and rational use of telecommunications of all kinds".

In this way, they will provide the ITU with the means of better facing up the new telecommunications challenges and contribute to the realization of putting "virtually the whole of mankind within easy reach of a telephone and of all the benefits this can bring by the early part of the next century".

May 17th is a symbol of the Union's promising future: its 124 years of existence are unquestionably a pledge of its future success.

R. E. BUTLER