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world telecommunication day

17 May 1971

message from the Secretary-General of the ITU

"Space and telecommunications" — this is the theme of the third World Telecommunication Day which we are celebrating on 17 May 1971.

This year, indeed, all the main activities of the International Telecommunication Union might well be classed under this same heading. For, let us not forget that in about three weeks' time, and for a duration of six weeks, the Member countries of the Union will be meeting in Geneva to study the new regulations governing all the services already using or likely to use space techniques.

In fact this Conference — one of the most important in the last twenty-five years — will be called upon to make decisions which will have a considerable impact on the development of telecommunications throughout this decade.

World-wide co-operation is vital if we are to get the maximum benefit from the peaceful use of outer space and ensure satisfactory operation of the radio links which are indispensable to every space mission.

It is evident that the regulations which are valid for terrestrial radio services are equally valid for space, and international telecommunication regulations cannot be divided. They form in effect a coherent whole which must permit each service to operate harmoniously without causing interference of any sort to any other service.

At the same time, without radio links there can be no space activities, since radiocommunications are an absolute necessity for the launching of spacecraft, the transmission of the orders they are to execute or receipt of the data they transmit.

What would become of the astronaut on the moon if he were deprived of links with terrestrial stations and what would be the value of the inter-planetary probe if it could not send us the information gathered in space?

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Satellites have been a part of our daily lives for several years now; they are already an invaluable aid to meteorology and will be very shortly for navigation, for

the study of earth resources and for education. For all these activities, which concern us directly, good quality radio links are essential.

Finally, there is one sector of space activity which has developed so considerably that it is now integrated into terrestrial systems and this is the telecommunication satellite.

You are all familiar with those huge dish antennae — like enormous ears turned towards the sky — which enable us through relay satellites to make long-distance telephone connections and receive intercontinental sound and television programmes.

There is truly a brilliant future for this vital sector provided that we are able to bring about the world-wide co-operation which is essential if each one of us is to occupy his rightful place and assume his responsibilities. In particular, we must all be prepared to live in a world in which television broadcasts reach viewers directly from a broadcasting satellite. The technical problems are already solved and the forthcoming Space Conference in June-July 1971 will no doubt adopt appropriate measures to permit the development and use of such broadcasting.

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All sectors of the world of telecommunications—governments, administrations, operating agencies and industrial companies—have already taken the opportunity presented by the Space Conference and TELECOM 71 (the first world telecommunication exhibition which will be held in Geneva in the framework of the Conference) to co-operate actively in the preparation of the live round-the-world television broadcast on 17 June — an exceptional event in our time but a foretaste of a daily experience for the man of tomorrow in coming decades.

While we already know how important a part telecommunications now play in our lives, it is nonetheless vital for this World Telecommunication Day to help prepare today's young people to face a new world in which telecommunications will hold an even more important place.