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

World Telecommunication and Information Society Day,

17 May 2011

BETTER LIFE IN RURAL COMMUNITIES WITH ICTS

ICTs are constantly reshaping the way the world communicates while creating opportunities for a better life through long-term, sustainable development, not least among the most disadvantaged sections of our society.

This year, as we celebrate ITU's 146th anniversary, we focus our attention on the world's rural communities in our quest to connect the remotest corners to the benefits of ICTs.

Today, ICTs are the powerhouses of the global economy and offer real solutions towards generating sustainable economic growth and prosperity. ICTs also act as catalysts in accelerating progress towards meeting the Millennium Development Goals.

In the rural context, ICTs provide enhanced opportunities to generate income and combat poverty, hunger, ill health and illiteracy. ICTs and related e-applications are key instruments in improving governance and rural services, such as providing community health care, safe drinking water and sanitation, education, food and shelter; improving maternal health and reducing child mortality; empowering women and the more vulnerable members of society; and ensuring environmental sustainability.

Half the world's population — nearly 3.5 billion people — resides in rural districts and far flung communities, representing the poorer, less educated, and more deprived cousins of the world's urban citizens. Among them are as many as 1.4 billion of the world's extremely poor people, who are also among the least connected to the benefits of ICTs. We cannot allow this situation to continue. It is time for global action to connect rural communities to the opportunities offered by ICTs.

ITU is committed to connecting the world and to ensuring that the benefits of ICTs reach the remotest corners as well as the most vulnerable communities. I am proud to say that our work at ITU in developing the standards for ICTs, managing vital spectrum and orbital resources, mobilizing the necessary technical, human and financial resources, and strengthening emergency response in the aftermath of devastating natural disasters has met with unprecedented success as we enter the second decade of this millennium.

Although mobile penetration has spread rapidly with over 5.3 billion subscribers worldwide, the thrust now is to drive content through enhanced broadband access aimed at establishing the information and communication highways — networks that will feed both rural communities and urban centres with the means to meet their development goals and aspirations. ITU's leadership role in the Broadband Commission for Digital Development is aimed at increasing the roll out of this state-of-the-art technology to firmly establish a universally accessible knowledge-based information society.

I urge you to celebrate World Telecommunication and Information Society Day this year by focusing on connecting people around the world and harnessing the full potential of ICTs so that we can all enjoy a more productive, peaceful and — in every way — a better life, particularly in rural areas.

Hamadoun I. Touré
ITU Secretary-General

<http://www.itu.int:80/wtisd/2011/messages/toure.html>