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**WORLD TELECOMMUNICATION
DEVELOPMENT CONFERENCE**

(21-29 March 1994)

Buenos Aires, 21 March, 1994

**INAUGURATION OF THE FIRST
WORLD TELECOMMUNICATION DEVELOPMENT
CONFERENCE (WTDC-94)**

Address by

*Mr. Carlos Saul Menem
President of Argentina*

Secretary-General of the International Telecommunication Union,
Vice-President of the United States of America,
Governors,
Ambassadors,
Ministers,
Special Guests,
Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,
Friends,

On behalf of my people and my government, I should like to express the honour and satisfaction it is for us to welcome to Buenos Aires those of you who have come from all over the world to Buenos Aires to attend the FIRST WORLD TELECOMMUNICATION DEVELOPMENT CONFERENCE.

We Argentines are doubly proud, in the first place for the honour of having been chosen as hosts for this meeting, but also for the opportunity we have been given to show the world what we have achieved, in the difficult task of transforming the state and in particular of privatizing and deregulating the communication sector.

An essential stage of our policy has been to modernize the country's structures, so that the next generation can face the challenges of the 21st century better prepared.

The transformation process we have undertaken has avoided dogmatic considerations and ideological limitations. Our pragmatic approach has managed to break the vicious circle in which the economy was caught up. We have removed the root causes which had led the state to monopolize more than half the gross national product and to stifle the initiatives of the private sector, draining the scarce resources of the financial system.

From an inefficient public sector, we have been able to recover for the state the ability to fulfil basic functions such as justice, education and security. In the particular case of public services which have passed into private hands, the regulatory entities arbitrate disputes and protect users, especially in situations where monopolies or oligopolies restrict the moderating influence of

competition.

The first results have precisely been achieved in telecommunications, which have been growing at a vertiginous rate, stimulated by investments and technology from the industrialized countries.

State-of-the-art networks and exchanges serving hundreds of thousands of new users have emerged from the old structures, under the thrust of a process of transformation which in little more than three years has produced astonishing changes.

Mobile telephony is another example. Its growth has exceeded the most optimistic forecasts of operators in the metropolitan area many times over. And in the course of this conference, we shall be signing a contract to extend the cellular service to the whole of the country.

Meanwhile, rural dwellers have benefited from the expansion and modernization of rural telephony.

An Argentine domestic satellite, installed and operated by venture capital, has begun coverage of the South of the continent.

We are also about to issue a call for international tenders, one of the few such cases in the world, to tackle the structural problem of controlling the radio spectrum. We shall do it in such a way as to combine the advantages of using the resources, technology and management skills of the private sector on the one hand, with a full exercise of the state's powers of control and of national sovereignty and security on the other.

This very intensive experience shows that the growth of telecommunications requires more than mere science and resources. It needs firm political convictions among leaders and the backing which is to be found in mature public support, in order to build up a simple, feasible system which can ensure the continuity of an established legal framework.

All those who wish to wage battle against hunger, against disease and against cultural backwardness will increasingly need to resort to imaginative, bold solutions, consolidating political continuity, ensuring economic stability and securing an attractive field for investors, who still constitute an essential factor of prosperity. There can be no sustained social progress without the backing of a flourishing economy.

Telecommunications lie at the heart of these problems. The General Secretariat and the professionals of the Union's Development Sector are well aware of this fact, submitting some very useful suggestions in their thoughtfully and responsibly prepared conference documentation.

The ITU has been fulfilling both its responsibilities of administering the scarce resources of the international community, such as the radio spectrum and satellite orbits, and its objective of undertaking the complex task of working out international standards for equipment and systems.

It should now adjust to the current pace of change in the Telecommunication Development Sector, going beyond the limited actions of awarding fellowships and providing technical advice.

The BDT is already envisaging loftier responsibilities, in the search for answers to structural growth problems. The solutions are not simple. Some proposals are bound to emerge from this very conference.

Among its new objectives, there is an increasingly apparent need for the BDT's effective participation in the process of bringing closer together the holders of financial, technological and management assets and the countries which most need them for their growth.

This conference shows clear signs of the success of the BDT's first steps. It is satisfying to see a meeting taking place with the participation of the administrations of Member States, represented by their most distinguished authorities, alongside private companies of every origin. And they are here not only to contribute technical suggestions but also to find political and economic solutions to development problems.

Nevertheless, we must not forget the difficulties still outstanding and the challenges which will need to be met, before the dream of generalized access to the benefits of telecommunications becomes a reality for all mankind.

Nobody can fail to be aware, although it is worth mentioning the fact, that communications constitute an irreplaceable tool for the integration of remote populations, in order to bring them the benefits of culture, to give them access to medical care or to guarantee their right to participate in democratic decisions.

But improving standards of living goes beyond the needs of rural populations. It is not too fanciful to think of profound changes in the way of life of urban populations, once fibre optic networks have been introduced, and when asphalt highways will be replaced by a new link between man: the electronic superhighway.

Communications have been the window through which men have been encouraged to hope for access to a better world. The irrepressible explosion of communication media, led by radio and television, has had the effect of constantly increasing these legitimate expectations. The desire for greater democratic participation has also been a factor in this process.

But telecommunications are not limited to encouraging a shared desire for progress. They also constitute an active, often indispensable instrument in the task of meeting these unsatisfied demands.

Just like prayer, that invisible link which since time immemorial has opened a dialogue between man and God, communications now link man with man, in more understandable ways, though no less important for his spiritual fulfilment. They are the new instrument which the Creator has given us and which we must use for the common good, for the benefit of all and in particular of those who are most in need.

Telecommunications, which hold a privileged place in world interest alongside other values such as the protection of the environment, human rights or efforts to overcome poverty, have also become an indispensable instrument in the struggle for effective control against the pollution of land and sea, in reporting violations of human rights, however far away such violations are committed, and in providing invaluable support in the effort to increase the efficiency of food production in the continuing campaign against hunger.

Lastly, we feel sure that all leaders of the world are already aware of the importance of telecommunication development, as a necessary requirement in any process of economic and social growth. And we have no doubt that this fact will be highlighted even more positively by this conference.

While reiterating its most cordial welcome, my government joins you in calling on all world rulers to apply whatever efforts and resources are needed in the sector to ensure unrestricted access to all the benefits of telecommunications for all nations and all people.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I have the honour of declaring open the first World Telecommunication Development Conference.
Thank you very much.