6 May 1996

Note de la rédaction

Nous tenterons dans les prochains jours par le biais de ce billet d'Afrique de vous donner des nouvelles de la Conférence d'Abidjan. Notre correspondante sur place étant anglophone, les informations seront la plupart du temps en anglais.

Que celà ne vous empêche pas de nous lire et de nous faire vos commentaires (tél.: 5239), tant sur l'événement que sur l'information fournie.

The Abidjan Conference opens

Today, the African Telecommunication Development Conference, organized by the BDT, was opened by Ahoua N'Guetta, Minister of State for Relations with Institutions, representing Henri Konan Bédié, President of Côte d'Ivoire.

"As we move into the 21st century, telecommunications have become a key component for economic and social progress in our countries. Telecommunications, as one of the public services which hold our attention today, are often held up as an example for their dynamic role and their development potential. Unfortunately, in developing countries, the sector is afflicted by several problems, notably: low telephone density and accessibility, a very negligible share of the world telecom-munication market, and existing infrastruc-tures concentrated in urban areas, in particular capital cities", declared Ahoua N'Guetta.

He further called on African countries to pool their experiences and share views on the problems they encounter in order to find common solutions through greater solidarity and regional cooperation. Declaring the Conference open, Mr N'Guetta said: "Rest assured that the Ivorian Government will pay very special attention to the resolutions of the Regional Conference, the second of its kind organized by the International Telecommunication Union."

Pekka Tarjanne, ITU's Secretary-General, praised African governments for the considerable investment they have made in their telecommunication development, resulting in a 7% annual growth, on average, over the past decade. He added that, despite that "impressive achievement, the overall impact on the goal of universal access to basic service remains quite modest... The PANAFTEL network has still some gaps while some links need modernization and capacity expansion". He said that a conducive investment environment at the start of the 21st century could allow the entire continent to develop a satisfactory network, which could offer basic and new services to all of the populations.

Pekka Tarjanne mentioned development efforts being made by sister organizations: the UNCTAD IX Conference being held in tandem in Johannesburg (South Africa) with the main theme of globalization and liberalization and where the ITU has an input on the trade-in-services aspect of the theme, the special new initiative on Africa launched by the United Nations System as a whole and in which the ITU is participating in the area of

harnessing information technology for development.

The Secretary-General made three important announcements:

- That the United Nations Secretary-General, Boutros Boutros-Ghali and other executives of the UN System had accepted his proposal that the ITU lead a UN System-wide project aimed at providing universal access to basic communication and information activities – the right to communicate.

- That he will allocate some 80% of the extrabudgetary resources from the TELECOM surplus (some CHF 10 million) to support important regional projects and technical assistance programmes for Africa, the details of which are being worked out.

- That as the global mobile personal communication systems (GMPCS) which are expected to be brought into service in the next two years hold much promise for rural and remote areas, in particular, where the majority of the African population lives, the countries of the region should give due attention to the regulatory aspects of such systems and take part in the first ITU World Telecommunication Policy Forum next October. In this connection, he urged regional and sub-regional organizations to help prepare Africa's position on GMPCS.

Ahmed Laouyane, BDT Director, thanked the Government of Côte d'Ivoire for hosting this second AF-RTDC (the first had been held back in 1990 in Harare shortly after the BDT had been established by the Nice Plenipotentiary Conference in 1989) and declared:

"Information and communication technologies have turned information into the most vital of raw materials. Economies are being radically transformed, and the outcome of political and economic struggles is determined first and foremost by access to information."

Mr Laouyane urged developing countries to extend their information and communication networks outwards if they want to catch up with the developed nations. Developing nations "themselves have to take the initiative in developing viable policies capable of mobilizing their resources, in order to take their place in the information society where information will be the countries' most precious asset and the main lever for development... Africa must reconnect by taking advantage of the new and promising prospects of cooperation that are unfolding", he said.

Mr Laouyane then announced that the ITU's Management had the firm intention to launch a Special Programme for Africa – Initiative 2000 – structured around:

- the development of human resources, in particular by consolidating regional institutes such as the *Ecole multinationale supérieure des télécommunications* (EMST) and the African Regional Advanced Level Training Institute (AFRALTI) and by participating in the Global Telecommunication University project;

- the consolidation and modernization of national and regional infrastructures;

- the implementation of applied pilot projects, particularly in the areas of telemedicine (six pilot projects are scheduled in six countries), environmental protection, distance learning, tele-working, etc.;

- a special programme for countries hit by conflicts and the least developed countries (LDC).

To conclude, Mr Laouyane said: "May we all be filled with the "spirit of Abidjan"and make this Conference a landmark in the construction of Africa's telecommunications for the year 2000."

Mr Ezan Akélé, Minister for Economic Infrastructures of Côte d'Ivoire and Chairman of the Conference, referred to the strategies

which Côte d'Ivoire had introduced in a bid to forge its own destiny and to "become a pole for transit and a node for communications between the sub-region and the rest of the world, with the advent of the information highways".

He listed the actions which the country was contemplating to implement those strategies: extending the coverage of the national territory, enhancing the quality of service and ushering in greater competition, which should lead to lower costs and ultimately, the establishment of industrial units. "It is with this in mind that a series of institutional and regulatory measures have been adopted with a view to liberalizing and privatizing the sector", the Minister said.

Structure of the Conference

The Conference has set up three substantive and two statutory committees to deal with what looks like a heavy agenda.

Chairman of the Conference:
Ezan Akélé (Côte d'Ivoire)

Vice-Chairmen of the Conference:
Mr Karuma (Tanzania)
Serigne Diop (Senegal)
(One more Vice-Chairman remains to be appointed at the time of going to press.)

Substantive Committees

Committee 1 (Policies and strategies)

Chairman: Patrick Masambu (Uganda)
Vice-Chairman and Rapporteur:
Brahima Sanou (Burkina Faso)

Committee 2 (Development of networks)

Chairman: Gomes Zita (Mozambique)
Vice-Chairman and Rapporteur:
Richard Maga (Cameroon)

Committee 3 (Financing)

Chairman: Barthélémy Agnan (Benin)
Vice-Chairman and Rapporteur:
Mesfin Haile (Ethiopia)

Statutory Committees

Committee 4 (Editorial)

Chairman: Koos Kiok (South Africa)
Vice-Chairmen and Rapporteurs:
Kwaku Boateng (Ghana)
Manana Rakotovao (Madagascar)

Committee 5 (Steering)

This Committee will be chaired by the Chairman of the Conference and will coordinate all matters connected to the smooth execution of the work of the Conference.

The agenda

The Conference will in broad terms:

• evaluate the Development Sector's follow-up and implementation of the decisions of the last African Regional Development Conference (Harare, 1990), the Buenos Aires World Telecommunication Development Conference (WTDC/94) and the Kyoto Plenipotentiary Conference which took place in 1994;

• analyse the changes in the telecommunication sector in Africa since Harare, with particular focus on: policy and regulatory development, services introduced and infrastructure initiatives.

Key issues

Policies and strategies

Here the Conference is expected to examine and approve the *African Green Paper*. Attention will be given to:

– reform and regulatory issues;

– information infrastructure;

– trade-in-services, in the light of the latest developments within the World Trade Organization (WTO);

– the importance of licensing;

– the role of regional and sub-regional organizations in Africa, and the ways and means of strengthening this role;

– the industrialization and manufacturing (including technology transfer).

Development of networks

- Priorities for the LDCs

- Development of national telecommunication infrastructure, in particular in rural areas with particular emphasis on: management, human resources development/management (HRD/HRM), maintenance, planning, management information system (MIS), regional networks, regional projects.

Financing

Mechanisms for financing telecommunication development through national and international resources, regional and sub-regional cooperation and private sector partnerships.

On the side...

Un nouveau menu au goût de chacun...

Speaking after the opening ceremony, Mr Minemba Mamadou Kelta, Secretary-General of the Pan African Telecommunication Union (PATU), declared: "Les divers points inscrits à l'ordre du jour de la Confé-

rence sont très concrets et requièrent un esprit pragmatique et réaliste pour aboutir à des

décisions qui se devraient d'être tout aussi concrètes, loin de la rhétorique usuelle, où l'Afrique s'est malheureusement souvent enlisée. Me référant par exemple à l'examen du "Livre vert africain", je voudrais souligner qu'il n'est point une carte de menu de restaurant, mais plutôt une réelle offre critique de tous les ingrédients économico-techniques que chacun devra dans une alchimie savante combiner pour obtenir la meilleure sauce conforme à ses goûts et aspirations profondes en matière de télécommunications."

New report on Africa

Another highlight of the day was the release of a new report on telecommunications in Africa. *African Telecommunications Indicators 1996* as this fourth ITU statistical report is called was presented by Michael Minges of the BDT.

Telemedicine: a new technique at the service of the people

A telemedicine demonstration also caught the attention of many of the participants. Doctors in Abidjan and their Italian and French counterparts were able to see live and discuss cardiographic and dermatological images as well as photographs of serious wounds. The satellite link for the demonstrations was provided by INMARSAT. *France Telecom* and *Telecom Italia* provided the terrestrial connections via their land earth stations.

7 May 1996

"All of you have a tremendous responsibility and Côte d'Ivoire (CTI) has a particular responsibility. If you look at CTI, it could mean 'Computers, Telecommunication and Information'. En français, je traduirais de la façon suivante: Convergence des télécommunications et de l'informatique."

Pekka Tarjanne
at the opening ceremony of AF-RTDC

Indeed, as you enter the city of Abidjan you are greeted with household names in computing: IBM, Compaq, Sharp, Toshiba. In fact Microsoft and, in particular, Windows 95 is what you see first. You are left wondering if Bill Gates has been here.

Tirant la leçon de la DÉCONNECTION de l'Afrique, suite à la destruction de Carthage en 202 avant Jésus-Christ, déconnection qui a duré dix-sept siècles, Ahmed Laouyane a déclaré lors de la cérémonie d'ouverture de la Conférence: "L'Afrique doit, et peut, se RECONNECTER à la construction de la nouvelle civilisation de l'information et ce grâce aux télécommunications".

Highlights from Day 2 of the Conference

Three key issues were on the agenda of the second Plenary of the Conference this morning:

Results of the Africa Telecommunications Finance Colloquium

This Colloquium was held under the auspices of the BDT in Abidjan in March 1996 "to address with all partners concerned the critical issue of financing telecommunications infrastructure in Africa", and in response to the demand for the BDT to be involved actively in financial strategies. In addition, with the growing trend to liberalize, those that are liberalizing need new sources of financing and the reallocation of existing resources.

The Colloquium supported the idea of development partnerships and recommended that they be involved in urging multilateral and bilateral financing institutions "not just to give policy advice with emphasis on privatization, regulatory and tariff reforms, but also to continue direct lending". It recommended to both governments and administrations to recognize, *inter alia*, "the vast financial needs required to [bring] African telecommunication operations and services to more acceptable levels in the world-wide context and to encourage the AF-RTDC/96 to take ambitious and practical decisions to stimulate the financial flows for the benefit of telecommunication investments in Africa". Appreciating the role played by the BDT in resource mobilization, the Colloquium had requested that the Bureau:

• take appropriate measures to assist countries in formulating their financial strategies and policies;

• facilitate partnerships with and among public and private entities in line with its

objective to strengthen telecommunication development.

African Green Paper

Introducing the subject, the Director of the BDT insisted on the need for all countries to adapt the structure of their telecommunications sector to the new environment. In particular there is a need for separation of three main fonctions: policy-making, regulation and operation in all cases.

The *African Green Paper* is an important reference and was prepared on the inspiration of similar papers elsewhere, the European Commission's *Green Paper* being one such source of inspiration. The Commission in 1987 issued guidelines to the governments of its member countries in an effort to harmonize national telecommunication sector policies within the framework of European economic integration. The BDT's presentation made clear that the "African Green Paper" is intended to be a thought-provoking, flexible tool for reflection, at the highest level, on future policies for African telecommunications. It offers the continent potential options for defining and bringing about harmonious restructuring of the telecommunication sectors. In particular, it will help African countries to define explicit policies to:

• "shift government responsibility away from the ownership and management of public companies towards the establishment of a policy, legal and regulatory framework;

• restructure the telecommunication network operators as fully autonomous corporations and make them more market-oriented;

• involve the private sector in the management and implementation of the national telecommunication;

• introduce some form of competition".

In practical terms the Green Paper seeks among other things "to initiate dialogue among all the actors concerned in designing and creating legal and regulatory frameworks that strengthen the sector's economic, socio-cultural and technical contribution". Other similar approaches like the Africa's Information Society Initiative (AISI) – an African framework to build Africa's information and communication infrastructure launched by the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) could eventually form part of the "Green Paper". AISI calls for the formulation and development of a national information and communication infrastructure plan in every African country. It lays emphasis on the need to support decision-making at all levels and to provide information and communication infrastructure for governments, business and society to enlighten the development process. Both the Green Paper and the UNECA Initiative give special attention to communications for rural and remote areas.

General Agreement on Trade in Services

One major concern of the country field studies has been the lack of coordination between as well as among the various national ministries. In most cases, the Ministries of Trade or Commerce and the Telecommunications Ministries have little dealing with each other. This could spell disaster, as some countries may find themselves committed under (or over committed to) the GATS negotiations. Pekka Tarjanne urged African governments to coordinate their efforts in order to make realistic assessments of what they can or cannot achieve under the GATS process. In their presentation UNCTAD/WTO pointed out that the WTO's Negotiating Group on Basic Telecommunications that was to conclude its negotiations on 30 April 1996 has pushed the deadline to 15 February 1997. Perhaps a chance for African countries to coordinate their positions?

Committees 1 (Policies and strategies) , 2 (Development of networks) and 3 (Financing) are in session as we go to press.

Information session on GMPCS

Tomorrow (Wednesday 9 May), Henry Chasia, ITU's Deputy Secretary-General, will lead the discussion during an information session on the Global Mobile Personal Communi-cation Systems with the particip-ation of the Bureau Directors: Ahmed Laouyane (BDT), Theodor Irmer (TSB), and Bob Jones (BR), followed by presentations on the activities of the TSB and BR on questions of particular concern to developing countries.

Party time!

Iridium's party – a dinner we are told – is tonight.

Yesterday, our hosts threw a very pleasant cocktail party and we think of you as the weather here is nice and warm, but cloudy!

8 May 1996

Highlights from Day 3

GMPCS: the challenges

Today's events opened with an information session on ITU's forthcoming World Telecommunication Policy Forum (WTPF) which will address the controversial issue of global mobile personal communications systems (GMPCS). Henry Chasia lead the discussion with interventions from Bob Jones (BR), Theodor Irmer (TSB) and Ahmed Laouyane (BDT), from the perspective of their Sectors. This was followed by two information seminars with a focus on BR and TSB activities including preparations for the the World Radiocommunication Conference to be held next year (WRC-97), and the World Telecommunication Standardization Conference to be held in October 1996 (prior to WTPF).

While the imminent GMPCS systems may offer unprecedented capabilities to serve emerging markets, extending communications to remote and rural areas particularly in African countries, their introduction raises many questions. The speakers touched on such issues as international frequency coordination, bypass, numbering, security, transborder operation and integration with terrestrial networks as well as issues associated with licensing gateways, for instance, interconnection with public networks.

Radiocommunication Sector

In the Radiocommunication Sector (ITU-R) successive Conferences have been held (MOB-87, WARC-92, WRC-93 and WRC-95), and resulted in decisions to provide additional mobile satellite service (MSS) allocations in the 1-3 GHz range and develop or update regulatory provisions for coordination of MSS satellite networks. WRC-97 is expected to consider yet again certain MSS allocations and regulatory issues.

Standardization Sector

In the Standardization Sector (ITU-T) work is in hand to address issues which relate to the assignment of numbering resources to global MSS systems and to develop guidelines to ensure that this limited resource is equitably managed and utilized. In this connection Mr. Irmer pointed out that in view of the growing need for a global solution for numbering arrangements, the Sector was contemplating the allocation of a single country code (to be shared by all service providers) as a possible solution.

Development Sector

In the Development Sector (ITU-D) there is on-going work to consider the impact which new technologies and services such as GMPCS will have on the developing world from regulatory, technical and economic standpoints. Mr. Laouyane described the major attraction of GMPCS and the likely scenario of their utilization in developing countries. He also explained the main concerns of these countries.

Regulatory, licensing and spectrum challenges

The deployment of global MSS services in each country will require national licensing and authorization. WRC-95 developed Resolution 2, which provides assurances that such systems will have to respect national sovereign rights in terms of conditions of access. By and large, the question of GMPCS will require much international cooperation and harmonization of regulatory approaches. African countries have urged that their specific national requirements, priorities and concerns should be recognized and addressed in the context of their current and emerging national regulatory policies.

Another concern that has been voiced is that in some countries, the frequencies used by new satellite systems are those being used by other services. Who will 'foot' the bill of migrating existing services to new bands? Many developing countries are also concerned about the impact these new systems will have on **accounting rates and international settlement mechanisms**. These countries fear that global mobile systems would drastically disrupt accounting rates — a significant hard-currency earner for them.
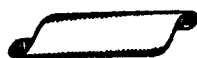
Security concerns

Some countries fear that new satellite systems are becoming so complex that it is virtually impossible to know whether a customer is operating a terminal in one's country. While it is the prerogative of national administrations to license transceivers, as Radio Regulation 2020 makes clear, handheld terminals make it possible to circumvent national licensing requirements. As one delegate put it, "If it fits in the pocket of your jacket, why bother? In this way, again, we face the prospect of revenue loss and the upsetting of national regimes".

The fact that the WTPF can neither make recommendations nor pass resolutions is considered a serious shortcoming by some African countries. "Is it any coincidence that the strongest opposition to a Policy Forum with more teeth came from the country with the strongest regulator?", the same delegate quizzed.

"The ITU is impartial, neutral, respected by all countries. Many of us have fears that the national regulators have national agendas which do not always coincide with the interests of the emerging markets - and it is surely the emerging markets which will be the most appealing in the decades to come. Before we are hit by the tidal wave, the ITU Policy Forum should be there to protect us, to inform us and guide us".

Committee meetings will continue their work through Thursday. We will bring you the conclusions.

An

African Beautiful Interactive Delicious Joyful And Necessary

Conference

(Pekka Tarjanne at the closing ceremony)

9-10 May 1996

The closing of a successful conference

The African Telecommunication Development Conference ended on 10 May after a week of intensive work. As reported in earlier issues of *"Nouvelles d'Abidjan"*, much of the work of the Conference was carried out in Committees.

The five-day Conference was attended by 337 delegates from administrations, recognized operating agencies and scientific and industrial organizations from 56 countries (of which 40 were from Africa) 20 sub-regional, regional, and international organizations and financial institutions.

The Conference has taken decisions on key agenda items:

Policies and strategies

"Le livre vert a mûri"

The adoption of the *African Green Paper* is an important milestone in the history of African telecommunications. In a world characterized by structural reforms and liberalization, this instrument could not have come at a better time. It will guide and help African countries to avoid pitfalls.

General Agreement on Trade in Services

The Conference paid much attention to the issue of trade-in-services, in the light of the latest developments within the World Trade Organization (WTO) where this topic is at the heart of the debate. The study, carried out by two African experts from Burkina Faso and Tanzania, as part of a collaborative effort between UNCTAD's Coordinated African Programme for Assistance in Services (CAPAS), is an invaluable reference on the on-going talks in WTO's Negotiating Group on Basic Telecommunications (NGBT) and which hinge on multilateral liberalization within the framework of the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS). The study shows, *inter alia*, how the development of and regional integration needs of some ten countries associated with CAPAS could be met.The Conference has recommended that field studies be carried out for other countries.

Network development

The Conference passed several resolutions in the following areas:

Special measures for the least developed countries.

It requests the Director of the BDT to continue reviewing the state of telecommunications in the 33 African LDCs and to implement activities which can accelerate the pace of development in the rural areas of these countries.

The role of telecommunication and information technologies in the protection of the environment.

It requests the Director of the BDT to develop and implement a comprehensive plan of action which takes into account the specific characteristics and needs of the different regions and sub-regions concerned.

Africa ONE.

To encourage initiatives aimed at providing Africa with a modern telecommunication infrastructure, the Conference has concluded that the study of the Africa ONE project should be continued to ensure that the proposed submarine fibre-optic cable system is effectively integrated within planned and existing networks, in particular the PANAFTEL terrestrial network and the RASCOM satellite network.

Telemedicine in Africa.

In view of the overwhelming need for medical and health care services, notably in remote areas, the Conference has requested the Secretary-General to ask the European Commission and other appropriate funding bodies to support and fund large-scale telemedicine trials.

Other resolutions

Other resolutions address : Revitalization of the PANAFTEL network, Telecommunication policy in the rural and isolated areas, Improvement of human resources management and development (HRM/HRD) in African Telecommunication administrations, etc.

Financing

Five series of recommendations and resolutions have been adopted based partly on the outcome of the Africa Telecommunications Finance Colloquium. They deal with mechanisms for financing telecommunications development using national and international resources, regional and sub-regional cooperation and private sector partnerships.

The Conference has requested the BDT to, *inter alia*:

• analyse the financial feasibility and economic implications of projects and disseminate these data concurrently with policy and technical discussions and studies in various ITU forums, in particular those of the ITU-D.

• implement "Initiative 2000" aimed at four areas: human resource development and the strengthening of training institutions, infrastructure development, the implementation of new technologies and applied pilot projects, and a special programme for countries confronted by conflicts and for the least developed countries. The BDT Director has invited ITU Development partners to join this historic initiative and indicated that this is the start of an innovative resource mobilization campaign which will continue to be highlighted in Midrand next week at the ISAD meeting and amplified beyond.

Closing ceremony

At the closing ceremony, Mr Laouyane said that the "spirit of Abidjan" which prevailed throughout the Conference had contributed immensely to the success of the event. He added that the many recommendations and resolutions passed by the Conference and the vision of progress shown by the ministers from African countries would certainly speed up telecommunications development in the region. He stressed the need for African economies which are still fragile, as far as telecommunications is concerned, to understand the rules of the game in this new environment of liberalization and competition.

Dr Tarjanne remarked that while it was too early to evaluate the results of the Conference perhaps one day, in retrospect, one could describe it as "serious, creative, constructive and forward-looking". He announced that the next big ITU event for the region was Africa Telecom which will be hosted by South Africa in 1998 and urged African countries to prepare themselves. Referring to the Harare Conference, he said that much had changed in the last six years. The rebirth of South Africa and its return to the international community is significant for the continent. The results of the Abidjan Conference give cause for optimism: they provide a strong backbone for the region's preparation of the World Telecommunication Development Conference to be held in Malta in 1998, and the Plenipotentiary Conference in Minneapolis in the same year, the Secretary-General said.

Mr Akélé hailed African countries and international organizations for their new approach towards interconnectivity. The decisions taken on network management, on the integration of new, existing and planned networks such as the Africa ONE project, and on mechanisms for financing telecommunications development in Africa, and the adoption of the African Green Paper as an official reference document, will impact positively the development of telecommunications in Africa. He requested that the ITU accord greater assistance to the Third World, and in particular to African countries.

Another highlight at the closing ceremony was the the award of the ITU silver medal to Mr Akélé, by Pekka Tarjanne.