Istanbul Declaration (2002)

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2.   ISTANBUL DECLARATION

1   The third World Telecommunication Development Conference (WTDC-02) held by the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) took place in Istanbul, Turkey, from 18 to 27 March 2002. It was attended by delegations from 152 ITU Member States, headed by ministers or senior officials, 79 Sector Members and representatives of 45 organizations and agencies, as well as many private sector representatives.

2   The keynote address at the conference was delivered by H.E. Mr Ahmet Necdet Sezer, President of the Republic of Turkey, and the opening address by Dr Oktay Vural, Minister of Transport and Communications of the Republic of Turkey. Opening remarks were delivered by Mr Yoshio Utsumi, Secretary-General of ITU, and Mr Hamadoun Touré, Director of the Telecommunication Development Bureau (BDT). The conference was chaired by Mr Fatih Mehmet Yurdal, President of the Telecommunications Authority of the Republic of Turkey.

3   In a special session, the conference outlined the importance of bridging the "digital divide", as well as the actions to be taken in order to reduce the information and communication technology (ICT) gap.

4   The purposes of the conference were to:

i)   review the results of global telecommunications since the last world telecommunication development conference;

ii)   review the current major policy issues;

iii)   discuss and determine actions to narrow the digital divide, including with a view to the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS);

iv)   set goals and objectives up to the year 2007 and define and establish a common vision and strategies for achieving balanced telecommunication development;

v)   adopt a strategic plan for the ITU Telecommunication Development Sector (ITU-D), and propose an action plan for 2003-2007 including, inter alia, a special programme for least developed countries (LDCs) and the execution of technical cooperation projects;

vi)   consider financing and innovative forms of cooperation;

vii)   increase the efficiency and effectiveness of ITU-D's structure and working methods.

Istanbul Declaration

5   Taking note of the above, and with a view to setting goals and objectives for the future, the conference declares that:

a)   Achievements aimed at bridging the "digital divide" and providing universal access have been accomplished in the telecommunication sector since the second World Telecommunication Development Conference in 1998. The implementation of the Buenos Aires and Valletta Action Plans has been largely successful thanks to the collaborative efforts of all parties involved. It is noteworthy that the key to this success has been the considerable effort made by the countries themselves and the catalytic inputs of their development partners, including public, private and intergovernmental organizations. The ITU-D study groups have also made a significant contribution to the body of knowledge which has been placed at the disposal of the telecommunication community.

The successes of the past are a great encouragement to all interested parties in the sector to sustain these efforts in the upcoming period from 2003 to 2007. These initiatives will be a key factor for the success of the Istanbul Action Plan.

b)   The "digital divide" needs to be reduced and this brings opportunities to countries, not only to narrow it, but also to create the conditions to derive maximum benefit from the implementation of new services and applications in order to accelerate overall development.

c) New technologies have a significant impact on the expansion of telecommunications and have the potential to close the gap not only between developing and developed countries but also between urban and rural areas and between well-served and underserved areas within a country.

The emergence of a conducive environment and entrepreneurial approaches to providing a rural service, together with more cost-effective technologies, may provide an opportunity for more rapid deployment of telecommunication services in rural and remote areas including using integration of telecommunication and postal communications infrastructures.

The global information infrastructure (GII) and the global information society (GIS) are evolving and should be responsive to the interests of all nations, especially the developing and least developed countries.

Opportunities offered by modern technologies should be fully exploited with the aim of fostering sustainable development through research, development and innovative technological applications for the promotion of quality and a higher standard of living.

d) Telecommunications are an essential component of political, economic, social and cultural development. They fuel the global society and economy and are rapidly transforming our lives and promoting better understanding among peoples. They also play an important role in poverty alleviation, in environmental protection and in the mitigation of natural and other disasters. All interested parties are urged to make their contribution to extend these benefits to all peoples.

e) The convergence of telecommunications, computing and information and multimedia applications is opening up new perspectives for the sector, providing opportunities for e-learning, e-health, e-government, e-commerce, environmental protection, post-war reconstruction and many other applications which are highly beneficial for social, cultural and economic development.

Universal access to ICTs is widely viewed as a key to economic prosperity. Telecommunication and information services permit interaction and knowledge, contributing to greater economic activity, higher productivity and ultimately general welfare. Community access to ICTs is seen as one of the most appropriate ways of achieving universal access in many developing countries.

f) Sector reforms leading to greater private-sector participation and competition are forces shaping the development of telecommunications. These challenges of the information society and the new trade environment place even greater pressure on policy-makers, regulators and operators to acquire the necessary skills to manage the evolving ICT environment.

g) The integration of ICT applications and services into the planning and implementation of national and regional development programmes can serve as a catalyst in achieving their objectives not only faster but also more comprehensively.

The mainstreaming of ICTs is a vital component of the global strategy designed to meet the Millennium Development Goals in general and the goal of reducing by half the number of people living in extreme poverty by 2015. This can also be a significant factor in the global efforts aimed at building firm foundations for sustainable development.

Accordingly, and given the lack of adequate infrastructure in most developing countries, the development of ICT infrastructure, applications and services need to be treated as one of the priorities in national and regional development agendas.

h) Governments play a key role in development of telecommunications, and are urged to establish an enabling environment which promotes reasonable and affordable access to basic telecommunication services for all.

Such an environment should also create a stable and transparent framework and promote fair competition, while protecting network integrity and guaranteeing the rights of users, operators and investors. Policies and strategies for the development of telecommunications should reflect the trend towards multiservices utilizing a common infrastructure platform.

i)   ITU and its Telecommunication Development Sector have a special role to play in strengthening communication channels, by ensuring effective coordination and cooperation with other international, regional and subregional organizations, and other entities engaged in activities related to development of ICTs and services, such as the UN ICT Task Force. This would be undertaken in order to create a proper framework needed in the application and development of services and applications, ensuring that ITU and its role and mission are understood. On this basis, new sources of funding and new partners could be identified to tackle the problems posed by the digital divide.

j)   BDT should sustain the current momentum of promoting and enhancing the participation of the private sector in the activities of ITU-D, and it should continue to coordinate and facilitate the creation of partnerships between governments and private enterprises and between the private enterprises in developed countries and those in developing countries.

k)   Global, regional and national financing and investment institutions are urged to attach high priority to the growth of telecommunications, particularly in developing countries. ITU should seek to establish strong relationships with those financial institutions.

l)   WTDC-02 drew the attention of all ITU Member States and Sector Members to prepare for the forthcoming World Summit on the Information Society in 2003 (Geneva, Switzerland) and 2005 (Tunis, Tunisia). In this regard, the Istanbul Action Plan will be an important input for the preparation of the Summit.

m)   ITU-D should continue to support the Youth Forums and advance the interests and capabilities of youth in ICTs.

n)   The marginalization of Africa from the global community has received special attention from many in the international community and the UN system in particular. In this regard, ITU-D has a special role to play, particularly with respect to assisting with the partnerships necessary for successful implementation of the ICT Programme of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD).

o)   The programmes summarized below, which are part of the Istanbul Action Plan, developed in a spirit of encouraging awareness and actions on gender issues and groups with specific needs, including indigenous peoples and communities, and implemented under the leadership and coordination of ITU-D, become important and relevant tools for Member States and Sector Members in their efforts to narrow the "digital divide":

   •   Regulatory reform: Develop and implement policies, legislation and regulations aimed at sustained development, access and use of telecommunications, including broadcasting, and ICTs.

   •   Technologies and telecommunication/network development: Maximize the utilization of appropriate new technologies in the development of telecommunication/ ICT networks.

   •   E-strategies and E-services/applications: Use of ICTs and telecommunication networks to enhance access and use of secure, cost-effective and socio-economically beneficial value-added ICT services to ensure sustainability and affordability in the development of telecommunications and ICTs and to harness the potential of ICTs to contribute towards reducing the social divide, improving quality of life, good governance, better access to health services, distance learning and universal access, taking into account the requirements and conditions in rural areas and underserved communities, the potential of multipurpose community telecentres (MCT) and Internet protocol (IP) for the delivery of a wide range of services.

   •   Economics and finance, including costs and tariffs: Develop and implement financing policies and strategies appropriate to the economic situation, including cost-orientated pricing, with a view to fostering equitable and affordable access to innovative and sustainable services.

- Human capacity building: Strengthen the human, institutional and organizational capacity through human resource management and development activities, so as to facilitate a smooth transition to the current telecommunication and ICT environment.

- Special programme for least developed countries: Seeks to accelerate the pace of telecommunication and ICT development in LDCs in order to achieve easy access to these services and integrate these countries into the world economy. This effort should take into account the needs of countries in special need.

6   As a result of the deliberations of WTDC-02 – mainly those reflected in the ITU Istanbul Action Plan – it is expected that all humanity, in particular developing countries, and especially LDCs, will strongly benefit from information and communication technology services and applications, transforming today's "digital divide" into a veritable "DIGITAL OPPORTUNITY".