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The third ITU World Telecommunication Development Conference (WTDC-02) ended on 27 March 2002 with 1150 delegates from 152 countries adopting the Istanbul Declaration and Action Plan to help bridge the digital divide. WTDC-02 was held at the Istanbul Conference and Exhibition Centre from 18 to 27 March 2002 and was attended by 394 government delegates, including representatives from 56 regulatory authorities, 45 operators, 23 scientific and industrial organizations and 22 regional and international organizations.

To many at the Conference, bridging the digital divide means providing access to telecommunications and information and communication technologies (ICT) and promoting their use so that all segments of society can fully enjoy the opportunities of the much-publicized information society. The Conference reviewed current major policy issues and adopted a common vision and strategy for achieving a balanced tele-communication development, setting new goals and objectives for the next four years.

Conference opening

WTDC-02 was opened by ITU Secretary-General Yoshio Utsumi, in the presence of a number of top Turkish authorities including President Ahmet Necdet Sezer; the Minister of Transport and Communications, Oktay Vural; the Governor of Istanbul, Erol Çakir; the President of the Telecommunication Authority of Turkey, Fatih Mehmet Yurdal; the Deputy Under Secretary of Transport and Communications, Selçuk Coskun; and more than 30 ministers and several other dignitaries from around the world.

Mr Utsumi set the tone with some tough questions. "Have we done enough for the development of telecommunications in the world? Have the benefits started to flow to the hardy peasants toiling in the Himalayan ranges of Nepal, the tribes of Papua New Guinea, the Indians of Brazil, or the people of Africa?" The unfortunate answer is "no", he said. "Even though we have made progress since the first WTDC was held in Buenos Aires in 1994, there was only

one fixed telephone line for every 25 developing country citizens. By the time of the Valletta Conference in 1998, there was one line for every 15 citizens and now, in 2002, there is one fixed telephone line for every 10 citizens," he pointed out. "The distance we have travelled is still smaller than the distance we have yet to cover. Some 83 countries still have a teledensity of below 10 lines for every 100 inhabitants; 29 countries still have a teledensity below one per cent. In the case of the Internet, 63 countries have less than one per cent."

Mr Utsumi recalled that many initiatives had been taken to bridge the digital divide: from

life, the information society must be based on the principles of equal opportunities, participation and integration of all. This can only happen if everybody has access to at least a basic set of the new services and applications offered by the information society." He urged the United Nations, ITU and the wealthy nations, in particular the G-8 countries, to be more sensitive to these issues and to allocate more funds to narrow the digital divide as an important step in making the world a better and more peaceful place.

President Ahmet Necdet Sezer delivered the keynote address echoing the same sentiments. "One of the main challenges the new telecom-



From left to right: Erol Çakir, Governor of Istanbul; Oktay Vural, Turkey's Minister of Transport and Communications; Ahmet Necdet Sezer, President of Turkey; Yoshio Utsumi, ITU Secretary-General; Fatih Mehmet Yurdal, President of the Telecommunications Authority of Turkey; and Roberto Blois, ITU Deputy Secretary-General

the Maitland Commission more than 15 years ago to the G8 Dot Force and the UN ICT Task Force. "There is no time to discuss again, in yet another committee... the need of the hour is to launch an offensive, on a war footing, to make sure that every village in the world is connected before the World Summit on the Information Society takes place". He called on the public and private sectors to be driven by their common objectives rather than divided by their different views on how to achieve these goals.

Also speaking at the opening ceremony, Mr Vural said that the widening inequalities in access to information and technology between industrialized and developing nations could be a source of tension. In his words: "To reap both the economic and social benefits of technological progress and to improve people's quality of

munication technologies create is that only certain countries and circles possess these technologies while the other countries are not benefiting from the information society and the opportunities it brings." He told participants that developing countries ought to pursue policies that enhance access to telecommunication services at affordable prices in order to mitigate the negative impact of these differences.

Fatih Yurdal was elected Chairman of the Conference, along with six vice-chairmen (see box on page 15 for details of the presiding officers of the Conference).

At the first Plenary session of the Conference, Hamadoun I. Touré, Director of the ITU Telecommunication Development Bureau (BDT) highlighted the major achievements of the Valletta Action Plan adopted four years ago. ■

Special session on Bridging the Digital Divide

Opening the Special Session on “Bridging the Digital Divide”, Oktay Vural, Turkey’s Minister of Transport and Communications noted that public policy had begun to pay attention to providing Internet access and the corresponding skills on a broad base worldwide.

He expressed the sentiment that the telecommunication community should address the issues of the financial divide, the knowledge divide as well as the confidence divide. At the international level, four elements in dealing with the digital divide should be taken into account: education, electricity, governance and culture.

Table 1 — Presiding officers of the Conference

<p>Conference Chairman Fatih M. Yurdal (Turkey)</p> <p>Conference Vice-Chairmen Terry Jeacock (United Kingdom) David Gross (United States) Leonid D. Reiman (Russia) Ridha Guellouz (Tunisia) Justin Thiombiano (Burkina Faso) Shri Shyamal Ghosh (India)</p> <p>Committee 2 — Budget Control Chairman Ulrich Mohr (Germany) Vice-Chairmen Mark Landsmann (Ukraine) Cleveland Thomas (Trinidad and Tobago) Frédéric Riehl (Switzerland)</p> <p>Committee 3 — Editorial Chairman Mrs Marie-Thérèse Alajouanine (France) Vice-Chairmen Les Barclay (United Kingdom) Luis Sanz Gadea (Spain) Hassan Lebbadi (Morocco) Andrey Svechnikov (Russia) Qian Jin Qun (China)</p> <p>Committee 4 — Planning and Programming Chairman Nabil Kisrawi (Syria) Vice-Chairmen Ms Layla Macc Adam (Venezuela) Momcilo Simic (Yugoslavia) Yasuhiko Kawasumi (Japan)</p>	<p>Committee 5 — Procedures and Working Methods Chairman Tony Zeitoun (Canada) Vice-Chairmen Idrissa Samake (Mali) Ms Han Xia (China) Javad Rouhbakhsh (Islamic Republic of Iran)</p> <p>Working Group of the Plenary on the Least Developed Countries Chairman John Nasasira (Uganda) Vice-Chairman John Tandoh (Ghana)</p> <p>Working Group of the Plenary on Gender Issues Chairman Edgar Borg (Malta) Vice-Chairman Ms Elizabeth Nzagi (Tanzania)</p> <p>Working Group of the Plenary on the Role of the Private Sector Chairman Ms Walda Roseman (CompassRose International, Inc.) Vice-Chairmen Sami Al Basheer (Saudi Arabia) Vassilis Cassapoglou (Greece)</p> <p>Working Group of the Plenary on the Strategic Plan and Istanbul Declaration Chairman Luíz Francisco Perrone (Brazil) Vice-Chairmen Maurice Ghazal (Lebanon) Samuel Chepkong’a (Kenya)</p>
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In the remarks that followed, ITU was recognized as the leader in increasing the efficient use of limited resources such as the radio-frequency spectrum and in keeping pace with the tremendous transformation in technologies. But while ITU has done much to bridge the digital divide, it should become more involved and serve as a focal point for information about digital divide initiatives.

The digital divide should not be accepted as an irreversible marginalization of the knowledge

International cooperation needs to be strengthened to combat cybercrime in all forms, in a bid to protect and preserve the security of the network and information

“have-nots”. Rather, it should be seen as a cloud with a silver lining, and must be dealt with from the perspective of globalization with a view to promoting the concerted development of the telecommunication industry worldwide. With will, more importantly, politi-

cal will, intractable obstacles could be overcome.

Multilateral institutions have a role to play in creating a balance in access to Internet at a reasonable price. There were calls for a concerted information strategy, based on applications such as e-health and e-education.

Rural areas suffered from lack of reliable, modern equipment and the problem of isolation. ITU was asked to continue its work in technical assistance to ensure sustainable development. Furthermore, ITU should help to strengthen national regulatory bodies, but at the same time, remove the “regulatory underbrush” that hampers investment inflows.

Many speakers also raised concerns and hopes about the development of Internet content. Multiple cultures and languages require that every country take effective measures to gradually redress the imbalance in the Internet content and making the Internet a more accommodating space culturally.

International organizations have a role to play in bringing about “digital justice” or “digital equity” through strengthening regional initiatives, enhancing cooperation between developing countries and through “government push”. International cooperation also needs to be strength-

ened to combat cybercrime in all forms, in a bid to protect and preserve the security of the network and information.

Among the many concrete ideas to combat the digital divide were proposals to include digital broadcasting in the agenda of the Istanbul Action Plan, deploy digital radios with computers and printers in projects intended to bridge the digital divide; and promote the creation of local content to drive development agendas. On a national level, community awareness, educational empowerment, development of professional skills were other means of transforming the “2Ds” (digital divide) into “3As” (awareness, accessibility and affordability).

Russia’s Minister for Communications and Informatization, Leonid Reiman; Cameroon’s Minister of Posts and Telecommunications, Maximin Paul Nkoue Nkongo; United States FCC Commissioner, Kevin Martin; Syria’s Minister Basheer Mohammed al-Munajed; Minister of Tunisia, Ahmed Friaa; Vice-Minister of China, Jiang Chun Zhang; France’s Minister, Christian Pierret; and a spokesperson for Egypt’s Minister of Telecommunications and Information Technology, Ahmed Nazif, led the roster of ministerial-level speakers at the special session. France’s Regulator Jean-Michel Hubert, Shyamal Ghosh from the Indian Department of Communications, Pakistan Telecommunication Authority’s Shehzada Alam Malik and Malaysia’s Suriah Abdul Rahman also added remarks.

Jan Mutai, Secretary-General of the African Telecommunications Union (ATU); José Pileggi-Veliz, Chairman of Com-Citel (a committee of the Inter-American Telecommunication Commission — CITEL); Maya Shankar Verma, Chairman of the Telecommunication Regulatory Authority of India; Noah Samara, CEO of WorldSpace; Ahmed Toumi, Director General and Chief Executive Officer of International Telecommunications Satellite Organization (ITSO); and Arthur Reilly, Senior Director of Cisco made presentations.

The strategic approaches recommended by both ITU Member States and Sector Members at the special session were later presented to a full Plenary session of the Conference and some of them are reflected in the Istanbul Action Plan, and the Istanbul Declaration. ■