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Houlin Zhao

Director, Telecommunication Standardization Bureau (TSB)



"My overall goal is to keep the leadership of the Telecommunication Standardization Sector (ITU-T) strong, more dynamic and responsive to the whole telecommunication community."

A new vision for global standardization

Global standards are the "conventions" that enable the many bits and pieces of the complex information and telecommunication infrastructure to be assembled and to function. Standardization therefore plays a key role in making telecommunications accessible to all and, in so doing, fosters development and growth in all domains on a global scale.

Challenges

The end of the 20th century is witnessing a veritable explosion in the communication and information society: the rapid growth of the Internet and mobile telecommunications, the agreement of the World Trade Organization (WTO) on basic telecommunications, the worldwide trends of liberalization, competition, globalization, and the convergence of technology and services.

But that is not all. Another real challenge which ITU-T has to face is the increasing number of consortia, forums and regional and international organizations which have become very active in telecommunication standardization.

While ITU-T has long enjoyed worldwide recognition and competence in telecommunication standardization, in today's rapidly changing environment, it will have to grapple with new market forces. These forces require specifications or standards to be developed quickly in order to respond to growing demands for new services and products.

Today more than ever, the world needs an effective and efficient ITU-T. I will strive to exploit ITU-T's special attributes to strengthen and maintain its pre-eminent position in global telecommunication standardization as we enter the 21st century. I have set five priorities to make this vision a reality.

Priorities for an ITU-T fit for the 21st century

Fine-tune working methods • Strengthen private-sector and developing-country participation in the Sector's standardization process • Foster active cooperation with other ITU Sectors and outside bodies • Introduce new financial arrangements • Provide efficient management to TSB.

■ Fine-tuning working methods

Since 1988, the Standardization Sector has fine-tuned its working methods several times, each time adopting a quicker process for the production of Recommendations (ITU's preferred term for standards). Today, with such a strong market demand, it is necessary to shorten the time required for developing and approving Recommendations, especially those of a non-regulatory nature. To meet this requirement, we in ITU-T have no alternative but to continue fine-tuning our working methods.

In particular, we have to be more pragmatic, relevant but flexible. We must endeavour to find the means to increase market share for our standards. We must find a quicker procedure for adopting Recommendations in order to keep pace with rapid technological progress and respond quickly to market demands.

We must enhance management and promote the use of electronic document handling (EDH) for faster exchange and dissemination of information for the development of, and decisions on, standards.

We must foster the study of urgent, market-driven issues within short periods of time.

We must improve coordination between TSB and the rest of the ITU to provide quality services in a timely manner.

We must continue to seek new and innovative ideas beyond the traditional approaches of developing and approving Recommendations in order to introduce faster processes.

■ Strengthening private-sector and developing-country participation in standardization

Private sector partnership

Sector Members (the private sector) not only play the leading role in the development of Recommendations within ITU-T but also make significant financial contributions to its budget. Amid the growing deregulation and privatization, more and more new network operators, service providers, and software developers are joining ITU-T. However, if we do not respond effectively to the needs of the new environment, we could well lose new players to other consortia, forums or regional standardization bodies, which may be perceived as being better placed to meet those needs.

I will work to ensure that ITU-T remains the focal point for all those involved in developing the global information society, reflecting the view of all partners concerned: governments, regulators, manufacturers, and operators. I will support any study which seeks measures to strengthen the position of the private sector within ITU-T and to attract new players to join our Sector.

Efforts for developing countries

Developing countries must not be left behind. I will, in cooperation with ITU's Telecommunication Development Sector (ITU-D), define measures which allow these countries not only to participate in ITU-T's standards-setting process but also to benefit fully from the results of the process.

As a starting point, I will encourage companies from developing countries to join ITU-T. Another priority will be to find the means to help experts from these countries participate in our Sector's activities. I will use ITU's regional offices as focal points for information dissemination and exchange on our standardization activities. Lastly, I will hold meetings of experts in developing countries.

■ Active cooperation with other ITU Sectors and outside bodies

The ITU-T should continue to play a leading role in promoting cooperation among international and regional standardization organizations, forums and consortia concerned with telecommunications. We must make the best use of the highly qualified but limited human resources in the telecommunication research field to serve the market at a minimum cost. In order to do this, I will spare no effort in convincing other bodies to avoid duplication of work and even share work where possible.

■ New financial arrangements

The financial base of the Union needs to be strengthened. We have to study this issue with great care, bearing in mind the facts that ITU is a specialized agency of the United Nations mandated by governments (Member States) and that there are more and more private sector players in the telecommunication industry.

To cope with the new environment, the current financial contribution system needs to be re-evaluated. The ITU must find ways and means of attracting new Members. It should be noted that the increase of contributions from Sector Members has already led to their request for more power. However, this is not the only approach to be envisaged. The increase of contributions goes along with wider and more efficient services provided to Members. In fact, even a reduction of contributions would not attract new Members if ITU's pre-eminent role is not maintained.

For my part, I would like to see a transparent budget which incorporates financial management principles and techniques, including cost recovery and sponsorship for specific projects within the Sector. I will continue to improve ITU-T's budget transparency so that Study Groups and indeed other working groups of the Sector (such as focus groups or project teams) can organize their work with greater accountability.

In the case of cost recovery, TSB has already gained some experience in applying this new

Election results

Houlin Zhao (China) was elected by the Eleventh Plenary Meeting of the Minneapolis Plenipotentiary Conference in the third ballot with 97 votes in the race with Michel Feneyrol (France), who obtained 51 votes. In all, 150 votes were cast in this third and final ballot. With two ballots blank, the required majority was 75. Before this final round of voting took place, the Australian delegation announced the withdrawal of their country's candidate, Bob Horton.

In the first ballot that opposed four candidates, the votes were split as follows: Mr Zhao 65, Mr Feneyrol 42, Mr Horton 25, and Pierre-André Probst (Switzerland) 19. In all, 151 votes were cast, the required majority in this round being 76.

Before the second ballot took place, the Swiss delegation announced the withdrawal of their country's candidate, Mr Probst. The results of this ballot were as follows: Mr Zhao 75, Mr Feneyrol 55, and Mr Horton 20. In all, 150 votes were cast, the required majority in this round of voting being 76.

Mr Zhao took up his duties on 1 February 1999.

concept to the universal international freephone numbering (UIFN) registration function. We will examine other services to which cost recovery can be applied.

I will introduce a plan to support any urgent and unexpected activities demanded by the market-place.

■ Efficient management of TSB

Our role in TSB is to coordinate and organize ITU-T's work by providing appropriate services, information and support to the Sector's Study Groups and its entire membership.

The ever-increasing workload and severe resource constraints have constantly put pressure on TSB in its daily operations. With nearly half of the TSB key staff about to retire in the next few years, the situation will become even more critical. I believe that the creation of a strong team-spirit and an environment in which all the skills and potential of the entire TSB staff can be realized are fundamental elements in overcoming these difficulties and will ultimately bring maximum benefits to all ITU-T constituents. With the good relationship which I have established with my TSB colleagues during the last twelve years, I am convinced that I can create this environment.



Houlin Zhao congratulated by Thomas L. Siebert, Chairman of the Conference, when taking the oath of office

Photo: Allen Brisson Smith (ITU 980128)

mission, telephone switching and mobile networks. He took an active part in his country's experts meetings on national telecommunication standards. He received a second prize in 1985 for his science and technology achievements in the Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications. In addition, his work in the Departments of Planning, Capital Construction and Network Maintenance in the Ministry earned him an engineering project prize for his outstanding performance and contributions in the planning, designing and construction of a number of major national network projects. Between 1982 and 1983, he participated in CCITT Study Group meetings and joined the CCITT Secretariat (now TSB) in 1986.

Since 1993, he has served as TSB Counsellor for ITU-T Study Group 7 (Data networks and open system communications) and Study Group 8 (Characteristics of telematic systems). He is ITU-T's coordinator with the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) and the International Electrotechnical Commission (IEC) and their Joint Technical Committee 1 (JTC 1). His record of maintaining excellent collaboration with these bodies, where he has combined technical expertise, diplomacy, firmness and flexibility, has ensured that ITU-T's interests are safeguarded in the development of joint standards.

On the human resources front, Mr Zhao has been TSB's official representative on the Appointments and Promotions Board for posts of grade G.1 to G.7 since 1994.

He served as Secretary to the IXth CCITT Plenary Assembly in Melbourne (Australia) in 1988 and to the first World Telecommunication Standardization Conference (WTSC) in Helsinki in 1993 and the second WTSC in Geneva in 1996.

I will see to it that the TSB structure, working methods and staff training are kept up to date in order to respond to the needs of our Members who operate in a constantly evolving environment. It is vital for TSB to fulfil the ever-challenging duties required of it and maintain, at a level of excellence, the services it provides to its constituents.

Career highlights

Born on 7 March 1950 in Jiangsu (China), Houlin Zhao graduated from Nanjing Institute of Posts and Telecommunications in 1975. Between 1979 and 1980, he studied as a visiting scholar in Switzerland. He joined the University of Essex (United Kingdom) in 1984, where he obtained a Master of Science degree in Telematics in 1985.

From 1975 to 1986, he worked as an engineer in the Designing Institute of the Chinese Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications, responsible for projects in the areas of telex, data communication, non-voice trans-