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Consolidating the standards ecosystem

By Malcolm Johnson, Director, Telecommunication Standardization Bureau, ITU

Malcolm Johnson

ITU/P.M. Virot

I look forward to welcoming our membership to Dubai for what promises to be a very interesting and productive event, and I am certain that WTSA-12 will consolidate the position of ITU's Telecommunication Standardization Sector (ITU–T) as the only truly global ICT standardization body: one where all countries have equal rights, and all companies have equal rights, no matter how large or small; where standards can be developed quickly to meet the needs of all countries, whether in remote regions or urban areas; and where products and services meeting ITU–T standards can be used throughout the world; and where ITU–T's diverse membership can rely on an inclusive, consensus-driven approach to international ICT standardization.

The challenge for WTSA-12

An important task for WTSA-12 is to evaluate the progress on actions initiated at the previous WTSA in Johannesburg, South Africa, in 2008. That Assembly took pivotal decisions which now need to be refined and consolidated.

I am sure that WTSA-12 will identify new areas of work for ITU–T by assessing the scope and scale of emerging trends in the ICT industry. One obvious example is the need to respond to increasing industry convergence brought about by technological changes. "Vertical markets" such as the healthcare sector will benefit from ICT-enabled borderless transfer of information and skills; the automotive industry from greener, safer intelligent transport systems; and public utilities, such as electricity and water, from the efficiency gains achieved by smart electricity grids and smart water management.

The future of such innovations depends upon the availability of international ICT standards that are purpose built to meet the needs of vertical markets. The Global Standards Symposium (GSS) that precedes WTSA-12 will focus on this topic and contribute its findings to the Assembly.

The role of world telecommunication standardization assemblies

World telecommunication standardization assemblies (WTSAs) are held every four years. They gather the membership of ITU–T together to evaluate the Sector's structure and working methods, elect the leaders of its advisory and study groups, and decide the strategic path of ITU–T.

WTSAs allow our global, public-private partnership of members to review the state of play in the world of ICT and ITU–T's role in it. In this way we can ensure that ITU–T's standardization work meets the needs of industry and our member countries throughout the world.

WTSA 2012
Dubai, UAE

World Telecommunication Standardization Assembly
20-29 NOVEMBER 2012

Side events

E-health standards, innovation, and network resilience will be the topics of three side events to be held during WTSA-12. The e-health event will build on ITU–T's new collaboration with the World Health Organization. Advancing the roll-out of international standards for e-health and telemedicine services will help to overcome interoperability problems.

The reciprocal relationship between innovation and standardization will be the focus of the ICT innovation event, which will look at how ITU–T can promote the exciting innovations that are emerging from the developing world.

The event on network resilience and recovery will give experts the opportunity to express their views on the various means that are available to bolster the resilience of critical communications infrastructure in the face of natural disasters.

There will also be a showcasing event to highlight current state-of-the-art products that meet ITU–T standards.

Preparing for WTSA-12

We have worked hard to prepare for WTSA-12. We know that standardization requirements differ from region to region, and have therefore held a number of regional preparatory meetings to prepare coordinated contributions reflecting regional concerns. In addition, the Telecommunication Standardization Advisory Group (TSAG) held a special preparatory meeting in July 2012.

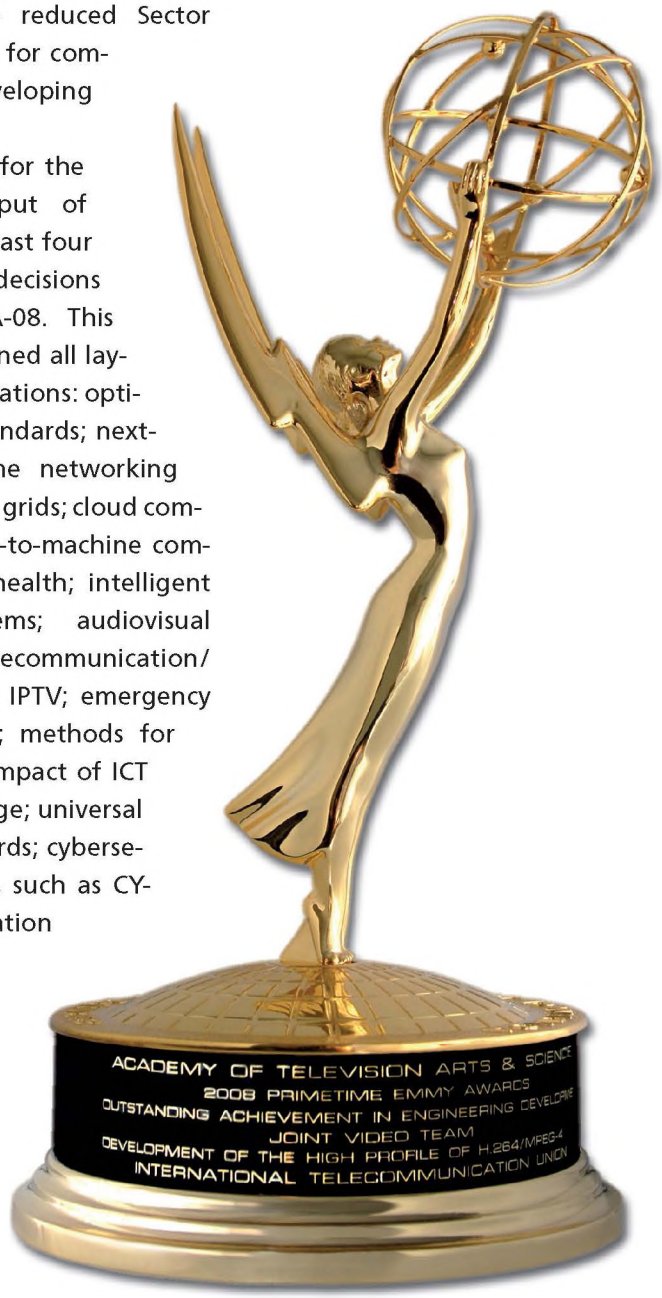
There is great interest in leading specific standardization activities under ITU auspices, and we have received candidatures from 37 countries: 17 for chairmanships and 89 for vice-chairmanships of study groups.

WTSA-08, a pivotal predecessor

WTSA-12 will build on the achievements of its predecessor, the exceptionally productive Assembly held in Johannesburg in 2008. WTSA-08 marked significant changes to ITU–T's structure and initiated many new study areas. A landmark event, WTSA-08 received 768 participants from 99 countries, more than any prior WTSA. It was also the first WTSA to be preceded by a Global Standards Symposium, was the first held in Africa, the first chaired by a woman, and the first in which special accommodation was made for academia.

WTSA-08 called for increased emphasis on areas such as cybersecurity, the deployment of IPv6, conformance and interoperability testing, ICT and climate change, and increasing accessibility to ICT for persons with disabilities, and initiated the creation of the new ITU academic membership category, and the reduced Sector membership fee for companies from developing countries.

The impetus for the substantial output of ITU–T over the past four years was the decisions taken at WTSA-08. This output has spanned all layers of communications: optical transport standards; next-generation home networking standards; smart grids; cloud computing; machine-to-machine communications; e-health; intelligent transport systems; audiovisual media and telecommunication/ICT accessibility; IPTV; emergency communications; methods for measuring the impact of ICT on climate change; universal charging standards; cybersecurity standards, such as CYBEX, on information exchange; and a successor to the Primetime Emmy Award-winning ITU–T H.264 video codec.



Cisco Pics

Bridging the standardization gap

WTSA-08 gave special emphasis to increasing the participation of developing countries in international standardization work. This led to "bridging the standardization gap" being enshrined as one of ITU–T's three strategic objectives by the ITU Plenipotentiary Conference, held in 2010, in Guadalajara, Mexico.

Good progress has been made in meeting this objective by establishing regional groups, introducing a mentoring programme, briefing sessions for new delegates, more meetings in developing nations, making "remote participation" facilities available to those unable to travel to our meetings, and granting of fellowships — as far as has been possible within our budgetary constraints.

These actions have made an appreciable contribution to the Union's mission to "Connect the World". Since 2007, more than 40 countries that had never before participated in ITU–T's work were able to do so for the first time, and in 2011 alone we welcomed 16 new countries as active participants in ITU–T.

Membership

I am pleased to say that the number of Sector Members and their financial contribution is now showing a positive trend for the first time in many years. And it is rewarding to note that, following WTSA-08's initiative, ITU–T's academic membership has become a particular area of success, with 35 new institutions joining since the category was introduced in 2011.