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<p>INTERNATIONAL TELECOMMUNICATION UNION</p> <p><i>Telecommunication Development Bureau</i></p>	
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OPENING STATEMENT

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**THE UNITED NATIONS INTERNATIONAL MEETING TO REVIEW THE
IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PROGRAMME OF ACTION FOR THE
SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF SMALL ISLAND DEVELOPING
COUNTRIES (SIDS)**

Port Louis, Mauritius, 10-14 January 2005

Secretary-General of the International Meeting, Under-Secretary-General and High Representative Anwarul Chowdhury,

Excellencies,

Distinguished delegates,

Ladies and gentlemen,

From the outset, allow me to thank the Government and the people of Mauritius for the warm welcome and excellent hospitality extended to all of us - the participants. I was here in July last year to run a Global ICT Forum for the Least Developed Countries, and as you can see, I have wasted no time in returning.

I also wish to thank the Secretary-General of this International Meeting, his staff and colleagues who have been involved in the preparatory work leading to this meeting.

Distinguished Guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I can say in all sincerity that I am pleased to have the honour of speaking at this International Meeting. This is not merely because it is being held on this beautiful Island –

although I certainly appreciate it. But the thing that makes it more pleasurable a task is simply that you, who are all assembled here share with me one great thing — **the insatiable passion to integrate the marginalized into the world economy.**

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I have chosen **Vision, Innovation, Policing and Networking all** within the context of ICTs, as four key themes that can adequately address the subject before us — **Smart Solutions for promoting Sustainable Development for Small Island Developing States.**

You **will all** agree with me that we have come a long way peddling past a host of development challenges for this group of nation states. Sometimes we have moved fast and sometimes we have not been able to move as fast as we would have wanted. Notwithstanding all the constraints that we have encountered, we have all the same made significant progress. What is needed now is a renewed forward-looking vision that goes beyond this Meeting, a vision that is realistic, pragmatic and easily transformed into

tangible **Activities** and **Projects** for the benefit of the Small Island Developing States.

Riding on this high visionary tide, our creative minds must continue to generate ideas on new affordable and effective ICT tools that will collapse distances and time, making it possible for everybody irrespective of their geographical location participate actively towards the sustainable development of these Island States.

Information and Communication Technologies serve as a bloodstream to sustainable development as they permeate into every facet of human life and play a pivotal role in poverty reduction thus contributing to sustainable development through a bouquet of services and applications such as healthcare delivery, trade facilitation, environmental sensing and monitoring for disaster mitigation and relief, e-governance, e-agriculture, distance education delivery, and knowledge dissemination.

Today, the rapid growth of wireless technology and the low cost associated with its development and deployment serve as tangible evidence that smarter and more appropriate technologies are still yet to come if only all of us –

researchers, policy makers, industry, civil society, and multilateral agencies are committed to the philosophy of continuous innovation.

Paradoxically, this group of countries suffer from lack of access to these technologies yet, empirical evidence has demonstrated that the deployment of these technologies is easier and faster in Island States than elsewhere because of their small sizes and high demand for ICT services boosted in part by their attractiveness to foreign tourists who spend many hours making long distance calls. One can look at the impressive Internet penetration rate and teledensities of the Maldives, Cape Verde, Tuvalu and others. They even surpass most non- small -Island States and non-LDCs.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

For us to make progress, it is important that governments play a facilitative role by putting in place an appropriate policy and regulatory framework to stimulate competition in the ICT sector. This would be a good development because; it is often out of competition that the spirit to innovate is born.

Economic planners often argue that there are just not enough resources for financing ICT initiatives as there are more pressing needs. But, we ought to remind ourselves that no matter how small the initial cash outlay for these projects is, the most important thing is the political will behind it. It is often said that ***whatever you can do or dream you can do, begin it. Boldness has genius, power and magic in it.*** It must be recognized that development of the ICT Sector does not necessarily have to be mutually exclusive to the budgeting for other pressing needs. If *anything, ICTs can play a catalytic role in attaining most of the important development targets.*

How do we then proceed?

Countries should ordinarily initiate programmes and own them then invite partners to come and provide support for these initiatives. Following this, networking by partners is critical for these initiatives to succeed and should happen at various levels. First, it is required between those organizations that are involved in providing funding for ICT related projects so that resources can be pooled in order to maximize both resource allocation and utilization. Second, entities involved in implementing projects should ideally

work together so as to ensure the interoperability of networks, services, and applications, avoidance of duplication of efforts, and establishment of some kind of symbiosis and synergy. This is important especially in this era of convergence where information technology meets telecommunications and broadcasting. Third, networking is essential among policy-making bodies that are essentially governments so as to attain policy harmonization at sub-regional, regional and international levels. I am glad to say that this seems to be the thinking in the Pacific Island States where in December 2004 we successfully held a sub-regional symposium on ICT development for sustainable development. The initiatives and projects identified by the symposium are due for implementation in 2005 and ITU together with a few other partners have already put aside a budget for this. Likewise, during the second quarter of 2005, a similar event is scheduled for the Caribbean Small Island States. Our aim is to focus and develop differentiated solutions for countries and sub regions as one size fit all solutions will just not go far enough.

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

If our generation is visionary, if we can commit ourselves to the principle of continuous innovation, if we can build our strategies around partnerships and networks of a like-minded people and entities, and if we can transform all these into robust and ubiquitous ICT networks, we certainly can attain that Information Society that we are all craving for. In that society, smarter working methods will emerge giving impetus to even more innovation, creativity, and improvement. If we succeed in creating this kind of society, it is possible then to reap many development benefits that will add value to all peoples of the world i.e. the rich and the poor, the urbanites and the rural based, those in developed nation states and those in developing small island states resulting in a win-win outcome. This way, there would be more hope for the full attainment of the goals of the Barbados Programme of Action, attainment of the Millennium Development Goals, and targets of the Programme of Action adopted by the Geneva first phase of the World Summit on the Information Society.

The International Telecommunication Union, within the framework of carrying out its dual responsibility as a United Nations specialized agency and as an executing agency for implementing projects under the United Nations development system or other funding arrangements is fully committed to overcoming barriers to equitable universal access.

Today, as we review the implementation of the Barbados Programme of Action, it is my fervent hope that the subject and role of Information and Communication Technologies will be given the prominence that is befitting of its importance. For us, what is important is a genuine exchange of ideas that can be translated into ACTION. Action - based on national and sub-regional priorities, which are pragmatic and attainable. This should be critical for us all as we are at a defining moment leading to the second phase of the World Summit on the Information Society in 2005. For us in the ITU, there is added urgency in that we are also preparing for our World Telecommunication Development Conference in early 2006, and our Plenipotentiary Conference to be held later in 2006. These important events define our future Action Plan and priority areas and seek to address

challenges of infrastructure development, financing, human resource development and retention, and universal access and align these challenges to workable state-of-the art strategies that can make a difference in developing countries.

Distinguished Guests,

Speaking for ITU, I assure you of our determination to play our part not only to fulfill the needs, and expectations of the people of the world in this century, but also to work with every stakeholder to produce and deploy even smarter technologies that can readily provide solutions to our shared world. I hope, you will help us to do that.

Let me conclude by stating that, it would be naive however, if I were to create the impression that those living in digital abundance live in a paradise. The digital era is neither a magic wand nor a panacea to world-ills. It was Dickens who, in describing the French Revolution said, it was "...the best of times and the worst of times." Quite an interesting paradox! In the digital era too, there are setbacks. Yet, I maintain my ground that the opportunities arising from digital connectivity far outweigh the problems arising from the same.

There is no denying that ICTs provide a great opportunity for that **rural farmer** who wants to know what the market price is before delivering his products, that **small entrepreneur** who wants access distant markets at affordable cost, that **population** in rural areas that have no access to schools within reasonable distances, that **remote** clinic in need of expertise that is thousands of miles away in an urban area somewhere, that **fisherman** who needs to be warned of an impending disaster arising from sudden sea-level rises, and that **family** desperately in need of government services and no longer have to travel hundreds of kilometers to access them.

I thank you.