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GUEST:	**Arthur Levin** Chief, External Relations and Communication Units International Telecommunication Union
JOURNALISTS:	**James Wurst** Global Security Newswire
	Alan Capper ITN UK
MODERATOR:	Tony Jenkins

"Internet Governance, Telecommunication and Development"

The International Telecommunications Union (ITU) was founded at the end of the 19th century to deal with regulation issues stemming from the invention of the telegraph, and has since become the international agency overseeing the global telephone network.

But how does the international community address common technical problems (such as 'spam' or network security) in the age of the internet? Does the internet have the power to make poor countries 'leapfrog' industrial development, and if so, should it be managed as an international public utility, rather than remain regulated by a private non-profit organization overseen by the U.S. Department of Commerce? How will different viewpoints on internet regulation -- and freedom of expression – play out at the 2005 World Summit on the Information Society in Tunis?

These are some of the questions explored in this episode of World Chronicle with Arthur Levin of the International Telecommunications Union.

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Executive Producer:	Michele Zaccheo
Director:	Dave Woodie
Production Assistant:	Devi Palanivelu

ANNOUNCER: From the United Nations in New York, an interview programme on major global issues. This is **World Chronicle.** And here is the host of today's **World Chronicle.**

JENKINS: Many experts believe that the internet has the power to make poor countries 'leapfrog' industrial development -- and move directly into the digital age. But if Internet technology is the key to so many policy problems -- should it be managed as an international public utility? Or should it remain regulated by a private non-profit organization, overseen by the U.S. Department of Commerce? And regardless of who controls the internet, can the promises of the 'digital revolution' really bridge the gap between the haves and have-nots? Will the 'digital divide' become this century's measure of inequality? These are some of the questions we'll be getting into today with Arthur Levin of the International Telecommunication Union, also known as the ITU. Welcome.

Many people might think that it's anomalous that a private, a semi-private organization in the United States controls the Internet throughout the whole world. Certainly there are many governments that are trying to do something about it but it seems that the countries that are pushing the hardest to rest control of the Internet away from this organization in the United States are the very same countries that are the most restrictive in allowing their own citizens access to the Internet such as China and Iran. What's your feeling on that?

LEVIN: The situation is the following: We have a World Summit on Information Society and this Summit is taking place in two phases. We already had the first phase in Geneva in December of 2003 and the second phase will take place in Tunis from November 16-18. This is one of the reasons why this question has become very high on the global agenda but it has to be said in the context of overall consideration of Internet issues. And one of the things that we have seen in the Summit process is that the global community in general thinks that there is an important need for an international policy dialogue on many aspects of the Internet. The issue that you cite is

one that concerns domain names but there are many, many other issues involved, what we call public policy concerns about the Internet from spam, to email to the security of the Internet to the security of online transactions to consumer protection issues. All of these issues are being discussed in the context of the World Summit and what some people don't realize is that we already have made a lot of process on these issues.

JENKINS: But isn't the issue of governance certainly the one that seems to be dominating the headlines at the moment. Isn't it the one that is dominating the debate that you're involved in?

LEVIN: It's dominating in the sense that this is the most contentious issue and it's natural that in any negotiations that the issue that's the most contentious gets the most headlines. But there is, again, widespread agreement that many of these other issues are also very key fundamental issues and at this stage of the negotiations, we have basic agreement on many other issues. The attention has been focused most on recent discussions on the most contentious of issues. But it's not to say that the other issues are not equally important. There are really three key issues about the Internet in this debate in the Summit. One is the whole package of public policy concerns, to some extent the domain name issue is a public policy concern because it affects the sovereign rights of different nations to use their country name in the Internet addressing system. The second broad set of concerns are technical concerns. We want an Internet that works anywhere in the world, anytime, using any technology. This is the beauty of the Internet, it's global. We have standards, we have recommendations that make it happen. It doesn't happen by chance. The third, of course, is development concern. And this is where you get into the issue of digital divide.

JENKINS: Excellent. Well to help us deal and delve into all of these issues, we are joined by two other people on the panel - James Wurst of the Global Security Newswire and Alan Capper of ITN in the United Kingdom. Alan…

CAPPER: Since the first part of the conference in 2003, it seems that the opposition to the United States' control of the Internet has grown. And which nations in

your view are really not the most critical or concerned about the U.S. control of the Internet?

LEVIN: Well, I think that control is a word that we use loosely. We are talking about the addressing system of the Internet. Doesn't mean that the United States controls the Internet but this issue is contentious. The Internet has grown exponentially over the last ten years. It started with an addressing system that was based on a model that was a much smaller Internet. But it has grown and many countries are concern if this is adequate. What we have seen is that over the last couple of years, there's certainly a big concern in the developing world. There is both a plus and a minus. It's a plus in the sense that the developing world has much more access right now and many more of their citizens are getting online. We've seen that the numbers are going up very rapidly, for example, in Latin America. These countries that were not very involved in the basic policy concern of the Internet are now getting concerned. They want to know what's going on and how the Internet is being run. Secondly, we have what we found out in the recent negotiations in Geneva in September, is that the European Union countries have also expressed their concerns about the way the addressing systems are being run. This is where the debate lies right now.

CAPPER: The domain name issue that you refer to, that's the hot button issue, if I can use that term, at the moment? The fact that the domain is very much held by certain private organizations is concerning for the future, isn't it?

LEVIN: There are a lot of hot button issues. You are dealing with a technology that changes very rapidly. The Internet is radically different from what we had ten years ago. We didn't have *Google* ten years ago and no one would have predicted that *Google* would be one of the major players in the Internet ten years ago. In the same way, we are not sure what the Internet will look like ten years from now. We know that it'll be quite different. There's a big concern in the policy level to keep policies up to date with the technology. Now we are going to see in the next ten years a huge transformation of the Internet. We are going through a transformation of all of our communication devices and systems into what we call converge networks – next generation networks - which will be new networks that will provide all the services

including the Internet and one of the big concerns is that what will be the basic addressing or naming or phone number system that is going to be used for these new networks. So the driving part of the concern – How will this system that we presently have adapt to these new technologies?

WURST: Why now? Why is this issue of governance so prominent? We are dealing at a time when the United States' government is not exactly, to be polite, very enthusiastic about multilateralism. So you are not really dealing with a government that's receptive to the idea of multilateral control of the Internet. Knowing that as a political reality, why is this coming up as an issue now?

LEVIN: Well, it's not really coming up now in the following sense. The Summit process has been going on for four years and the idea of the information society is a very broad idea. When you say what is the agenda of the information society, what does the Summit need to address? That was a big concern during negotiations in the first couple of years. And clearly the Internet, Internet Governance was a big issue. In the first phase of the Summit, we did reach an agreement on a number of key points, which I think are worth bearing in mind. There was an agreement in Geneva in the declarations that the Internet is a global public facility. It's no longer an academic or research tool. We recognize it as a major influence in our lives, particularly in the developed world. Secondly there was a recognition in Geneva declaration that each societal actor has a role to play. That governments have sovereign rights and we need to determine what are the public policies and to take decisions in those areas. There is also an important role for the private sector in economic and technical issues. And also a role for civil society as well as for international organizations to facilitate. Now in the first phase that as far as we got. There was not the ability at that time to reach any final agreements on Internet governance. So what happened when the world leaders met in Geneva, they decided to ask the Secretary-General of the United Nations to form a working group to look into these issues. He did that and a group met several times. They produced a report and this report was only first published in July of this year and only first considered in the negotiations process in September. That's why now we are

really focusing in on these issues in an attempt to produce a final outcome document for the Summit in Tunis.

JENKINS: A quick reminder - We're talking with Arthur Levin of the International Telecommunication Union about Internet regulation and global governance.

VIDEO AND AUDIO IN

The Internet revolution has exploded worldwide connecting people across continents through computer links and satellite systems. But in an increasingly complex, competitive and demanding world, the question remains – will the poor be left behind as the rest of the world catapults into the new millennium?

VIDEO AND AUDIO OUT

JENKINS: We were talking just before then about how the United Nations has been brought in. The report has just come out which recommended a global Internet policy council. As far as I can make out, the United States has decided to ignore it; the Commerce Department has basically said, "No, we are going to continue with the system of governance that we have had until now". In other words, the U.S. has just said no. Can they say no? What can the rest of the international community do about it? And what could this global council do that I can't and the organization that's running the Internet at the moment now can't do?

LEVIN: Now, let's put this situation in perspective. The report of the Working Group on Internet Governance was a report developed by many experts. There was not an agreement on one single approach. In you look at the report, they identified four possible options. And the options range from really no change in the current system with ICANN in charge of DNS or Domain Name Systems or to create some new types of councils. And there are four different approaches, which are now being considered through the Summit negotiation process. As far the as the position of the United States, the position they maintain in negotiations. The first negotiations on this issue took place over a two week period in September in Geneva. We are very hopeful that this can be resolved by the time of the Summit in Tunis. But we have to remember the following.

This is the first time the world community is considering the Internet. Other UN Summits have dealt with issues like poverty, like racism that have been dealt with for generations throughout history. Internet is something new. And every new technology has required new solutions and new approaches. So it's not surprising at this time that we have very sharp differences and viewpoints. And we are very hopeful that in Tunis we'll have either a beginning solution or at least a way to talk about these issues. I think it's very important at this point is that the world community including the United States agrees that we need a global policy dialogue on these issues as a process to try and develop some solutions.

CAPPER: Picking up on Tony's question, do you think the United States really does recognise the amount of dissatisfaction with the other countries as they look at the existing situation?

LEVIN: I think that has been one of the benefits of the Summit process. In the Summit process, you have day and night negotiations; you get to hear the viewpoints of other countries. I think they've heard the message from the other countries. It is on one end, a very simulating and also a very contentious debate.

JENKINS: Really? You mean the U.S. is prepared to make some concessions on this issue?

LEVIN: I certainly can't speak for the United States. I don't know what their negotiations will be?

JENKINS: What does your gut tell you?

LEVIN: My gut has no feelings on this matter! You know, I've learned in my experience in the United Nations system that at the end of negotiation process, there are always a lot of surprises at the last minute. So we are hoping for some good surprises but what it would be in this case, I really couldn't say at this point.

WURST: Again, we keep hammering on the same point. I know that you can't really answer that sort of question but you really have to. But if you are going into negotiations with a major player that doesn't negotiate, what do you expect to come out of this?

LEVIN: I think you have to look at one of the possible expectations. Clearly this is a UN Summit process and we operate by consensus. We try and find the results that everybody can live with in the final documents. And I would see two basic possibilities that we have some beginning solutions and the other possibility is that we don't have a solution but we have a method to try and find a solution. I think those are the two possibilities. And, again, we should not loose sight of the following. This negotiation is in progress, there is a lot of agreement on a lot of issues concerning the Internet. One of the most important is the issue of digital divide. How we are going to bring the Internet, even more broadly new communication technologies and tools to the majority of the world which doesn't have these things. That's probably the most important issue.

JENKINS: I agree with you and I want to get to that but I want to just round up this discussion issue of governance with two quick questions. One is, using the age-old quote - if it ain't broke don't try to fix it. The Internet was originally run by an individual, Jon Postel, since then by ICANN. Hasn't it been a model of progressivity, of openness, of liberal values? That's one question. The other one would be if the United States doesn't cease control and doesn't allow the rest of the world to have some role in governing, is there a danger that the rest of the world could say, "Ok, we are just going to set up a system that's going to compete with yours". That can then endanger the homogeneity that has been one of the beauties of the Internet?

LEVIN: That's a lot of questions!

JENKINS: Just two!

LEVIN: But there are many parts to that question. You know the International Telecommunication Union was founded in 1865 in Paris to deal with similar issues when the telegraph was introduced. How do we make sure that we only have one system that works everywhere in the world? This is why the ITU was founded 140 years ago. With each new technology, you have a set of new challenges but the goal remains the same that the service is affordable, works well, it's inter-operable. For example, if it's a telephone, you can pick it up; you can dial it anywhere in the world. Each country has only one country code. All these things have been sorted out with international agreements and consensus. I think we can be generally optimistic in the

long-term to find solutions for the Internet. And when we say control of Internet, again, I would have to point out that we have agreed on a working definition of Internet governance already in these negotiations. There are a number of public policy concerns. One of them is, of course, addressing Domain Name Systems issues concerning ICANN and which there remains. Big differences of opinions. On the other hand, if you look at, "Is the Internet broken or not"? I think that those people, then again those who are able to use the Internet, have seen both the benefits and the problems with the Internet. There are some who are disappointed with the uptake of e-commerce for example. Why is that? Because of problems with fishing, with spy-ware, with spam, with security, with network hacking. These kinds of problems are costing, in the United States alone, more than $10 billion a year. So it's a very positive sign that in the Summit process we've got the agreement of the world community to address these problems. We don't have the final solutions but we have an understanding that these are public policy issues that must be addressed by the international community. So when we talk about the control of the Internet, whether it's working or not, we have to say that in many areas there are problems with the Internet. And this process will hopefully find solutions to these problems.

JENKINS: This is World Chronicle and our guest is Arthur Levin of the International Telecommunication Union, ITU. Here's our report form Honduras.

VIDEO AND AUDIO IN

NARRATION: Las Trojas in Honduras is a tiny village isolated from modern communications technology. But gone are the days when communication meant messages personally delivered by the bus driver as he made daily trips to and from the city. Now, residents make use of the community's telecenter – making phone calls and logging on to the Internet. Farmer Humberto Salgado who struggled with crops damaged by caterpillars – found the Internet could play an important role in his livelihood.

SALGADO: On the Internet, I found the solution because there I found the name of the pests that killed my produce.

NARRATION: In ways both big and small, Information Technology is being applied to the pressing needs of the developing world.

VIDEO AND AUDIO OUT

JENKINS: Interesting. Alan, you have a question in this issue?

CAPPER: Yes. You talked about convergence and I look at that as the new-wave, if you like, in the Internet. We have convergence and we have wireless increasingly in developed nations. But is that increasing the divide, the digital divide between the affluent nations and the poor nations? How are we going to bridge that gap so that they get the full benefit of the Internet in the future?

LEVIN: Well, the good news is that in some ways, some measurement, the gap is narrowing. We have seen, particularly through the use of mobile technology. We have in telecommunications, a lot of revolutions going on at the same time. One of course is the Internet but the other is mobile technology. During the three years of the Summit process, mobile phone subscribers in the world have doubled. So in terms of some access to communication we have seen great progress but, of course, much needs to be done. Another issue is the cost of access. And another is the quality of access. We know in the developed world right now the big concern in broadband and having fast access to the Internet. And this, of course, is not too wide spread in the developing world and would require greater attention. But then again this is one of the major issues in the Summit. In the first argument that had to be accepted because we started the digital divide issue in the ITU twenty years ago. We first began to say that telecommunication infrastructure is one of the key parts to national infrastructure and the key to the national development policies. Most people didn't believe us twenty years ago, now most people believe us now that it was one of the key issues of the first phase of the Summit. Another issue that we're dealing with in the second phase is financing. This is a big part of the question. Where to find the money? Where do you get the investments to expand the communication infrastructure in the developing world? Mobile is certainly one of the success stories.

CAPPER: The private sector can possibly help there? Do you look for support in the private sector- the Bill Gateses of this world, the people who are forging this revolution?

LEVIN: Very much. The private sector is the key partner in this whole equation. We in the ITU have had the private sector involved in our organization since 1871. We call them sector members so they are direct players in the ITU. In the Summit process they have been an important part of the observer community, to express their views throughout all negotiations. And there's every clear intention that if we are going to rapidly deploy network capacity in the developing world, the private sector is going to be the one to do it.

WURST: Well, actually that's where I wanted to go because you mentioned financing and the cost of access. So you're looking at the Bill Gateses, the people who are making money off the Internet. You are hoping that they would help finance the access to people who can't afford it? If that's the case, it wouldn't necessarily be to their advance to have a lost of control over their assets? They might get more customers on the one hand but on the other hand, wouldn't they be opening themselves up to vulnerabilities down the road?

LEVIN: Well, the big issue on the telecommunication sector has been monopoly versus competition. You know in the telecommunication sector for most of its history was run by state owned monopolies. This is another evolution in the sector that has happened in the last twenty years. We have gone from a model of monopoly regulation to a privatized competitive market. This is in most countries, throughout the world. And this has certainly helped stimulate investments in the telecommunications deployment. As far as specific technologies, again we have seen that mobile is a quick win-win solution.

JENKINS: Is it? I mean you can't put broadband over mobile. In other words, isn't the technology making the digital divide wider instead of narrowing it? I don't understand it? Sure people are able to get cell phones when they weren't able to get land lines in the past. But cell phones can't carry broadband, they don't make it possible for people like the farmer we saw earlier in Honduras to go on the Internet and

learn how to deal with the vermin in his crops. That technology seems to be moving further away from the people like him, isn't it?

LEVIN: Well, it's a two-prong approach and there's no perfect solution for each country. One prong is that mobile can quickly get communication to more likely the citizens in urban areas. At the same time you need to ensure telecommunication, communication services throughout the country. One of the interesting parts of the Summit process in the first phase, we agreed on a set of targets. Time bound targets to connect the world by 2015. And these targets talk about connecting all schools, all hospitals, all these areas that would help farmers in Honduras and one of the ways that you do this in the developing world is that you can't simply get computer access and Internet to everybody but you've community access centres. This is a centre that's within a five kilometre walk. Everybody would have access within five kilometres to a full range of quality Internet services through community access service. This is also part of the policies that we are advocating and from what is going on right now, from the projects that are going on. One of the things that were said in the Summit in the first phase is that every government should adopt a national readiness strategy by 2005. Quite a few governments have already but for those who haven't, they are now planning to do this by 2010. And then again the private sector is a very important part of this effort.

JENKINS: Interesting. One of the things that we take for granted about Internet technology is how it collapses distance and travel time for information and commercial transactions. Let's take a look at this report from the Solomon Islands.

VIDEO AND AUDIO IN

NARRATION: Until recently, it might have taken weeks for farmer Elisson Wauru to send his brother a message. Elisson lives in Ulawa, one of the 850 islands that make up the Solomon Islands, a South Pacific nation. His brother lives in New Zealand, thousands of kilometres away. Now, thanks to a groundbreaking project, Elisson can communicate with his brother almost instantaneously at a very small cost.

WAURU: Letter will take about one month before I receive it. With the email I use today – just about one minute from here to New Zealand. That is easy for me to communicate.

NARRATION: Ulawa Island is one of the nine locations throughout the Solomon Islands where the People First Network, or PFNET, is available. PFNET is a network of E-mail stations located in remote islands across the country. The stations are usually hosted in provincial clinics, schools, or other accessible and secure public facilities. E-mail operators assist customers in sending and receiving messages at nominal cost. Each remote E-mail Station connects on schedule several times a day to the hub station in Honiara, the Solomon Islands capital city. Incoming or outgoing e-mails are transferred between remote stations, the hub in Honiara and the Internet.
Since February 2001, PFNET has run a very successful internet café in Honiara. People use PFNET for contacting their friends and family, business partners and for education purposes. Now PFNET is looking to expand and grow, says Randall Biliki, PFNET's Manager.

BILIKI: We want to strengthen the revenue side of the project so that we will be able to improve the services and expand the network that is so much depended on by rural communities, which are the main objective of our project.

NARRATION: The rural e-mail stations use a simple, robust and well-proven technology consisting of a short wave radio, a low-end computer and solar energy.

VIDEO AND AUDIO OUT

CAPPER: Will you be addressing the issue of content at all? Tony in his introduction talked about the liberal quality of the Internet but as we know a lot of its content causes concern - pornography, how to make a bomb on the Internet. Those kinds of things, is that going to be on the agenda at all?

LEVIN: Yes. When you say that, we are talking about the World Summit on Information Society? Most of these issues were addressed in the first phase. In the first phase, we addressed the issues concerning human rights. There's a language in the declaration that addresses the importance of freedom of expression and you know in

the Internet. I think most of these issues were already addressed in the first phase. In the second phase, since so much had already been done, we are only going to be focusing on three issues. One is the question of Internet Governance, second is the issue on financing, financing the deployment of ICT infrastructure. And the third is how do we make sure that the commitments made are being looked up to, that's the important thing. People have criticised UN Summits in the past for a lot of noble intentions but not a lot of concrete results. We are very determined this time around that the commitments that are made are looked up to. Both at the national, regional and international levels. These are really the three key issues of the second phase. Interesting, you are going to try and hold peoples' feet to the fire, we shall watch with batted breath. Thank you for being with us. Our guest has been Arthur Levin of the International Telecommunication Union. He was interviewed by James Wurst of the Global Security Newswire and Alan Capper of ITN UK. Thank you for being with us. I'm Tony Jenkins, inviting you to be with us for the next edition of **World Chronicle**.