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Message from Mr. M. MILI, Secretary-General of the ITU, on the occasion of the First World Telecommunication Day

17 May 1969

It was on 17 May 1865, 104 years ago to-day, that the plenipotentiaries of twenty countries signed the first International Telegraph Convention, the intergovernmental agreement which was to enable telegraph circuits to cross national boundaries and to cover the world and soon afterwards to make communication possible between the most distant countries.

By their signatures, these plenipotentiaries at the same time created the International Telegraph Union, which became the International Telecommunication Union.

The history of the Union is in fact the history of the remarkable development of the practical application of telecommunications. It is the story of the effort of international co-operation, first made by a number of States and now by 136 Member countries.

To-day, when we switch on the radio, none of us is surprised to receive programmes from many different countries. In countries with television networks, no-one is surprised to see on the screen pictures which have come from outer space. Likewise, it seems the normal thing to talk by telephone to people on the other side of the world. Ships at sea, aircraft in flight, and manned satellites on trips into outer space can remain in contact with the earth.

Radio circuits and submarine, underground and overland cables weave a finely-meshed network around

the earth. Parts of this network now even reach out to the stars.

But these links, visible and invisible, have become so much part and parcel of our daily life that we cannot imagine ever being without them or that in spite of their number and diversity they might mutually interfere one with another.

This remarkable achievement is the result of the co-operation between the States Members of the Union which I have just mentioned. This co-operation at international level finds expression in the establishment of international regulations which enable all telecommunication services to function, in the standardization of equipments, in planning on a world-wide or regional scale and in direct assistance to the new or developing countries within the framework of the United Nations Development Programme.

In the atomic and space age, therefore, with its enormous technical possibilities and the pressing need for co-ordination that they create, it seemed to us opportune to initiate a World Telecommunication Day.

This Day will be celebrated each year on the anniversary of the first International Telegraph Convention and will help us to publicize the common effort made by all those who take part in the great adventure of modern telecommunications.