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World Telecommunication and Information Society Day 2013 (WTISD 2013) *ICTs and improving road safety*

Message from ITU Secretary-General, Hamadoun I. Touré

The theme for World Telecommunication and Information Society Day 2013 is **“ICTs and improving road safety”**.

ICTs play a catalytic role in creating opportunities for people in every walk of life. Today, even as we take to the streets in our vehicles, we have the tools at our fingertips to communicate across the world, navigate through dense traffic and find our way in unfamiliar terrain. At the same time we can choose from a host of entertainment options, be it music, radio, television or social media.

While these technologies are becoming increasingly ubiquitous, we must ensure that we use them responsibly and with caution, especially while driving, in order to avoid accidents and injury.

Road traffic safety is a global concern for public health and injury prevention. Every year, 1.3 million people die in traffic related accidents and another 20-50 million people are injured mainly in developing countries around the world. As a result, Governments and individuals suffer an estimated USD 518 billion in global economic loss.

Driver distraction and road-user behaviour, such as “text messaging” and interfacing with in-vehicle navigation or communication systems while driving, are among the leading contributors to road traffic fatalities and injuries.

My message is clear: Don’t be distracted by technology when driving, whether calling from your mobile phone, or setting the navigation system. Sending a text message or tweeting while driving is extremely dangerous and should be avoided at all cost.

At the same time, I call upon our Member States and industry partners to promote the use of safe interfaces and hands-free devices in vehicles and take action to eliminate technology-related distractions while driving. Along with promoting national policies to encourage the use of ICT in enhancing road safety, we must also promote the development and use of intelligent transport systems.

These measures will not only help prevent traffic accidents but also improve efficiencies in traffic management as a means of combating the effects of climate change.

I am pleased to say that ITU has been developing standards for safe user interfaces and communication systems in vehicles designed to optimize driving performance by eliminating unsafe technology-related distractions.

ITU has also been leading worldwide efforts in developing state-of-the-art ICT standards for Intelligent Transport Systems and driver safety that utilize a combination of computers, communications, positioning and automation technologies, including in-car radars for collision avoidance.

The theme for WTISD 2013 “**ICTs and improving road safety**” will be taken forward in the years to come in partnership with the automotive sector and with automobile associations worldwide under the banner of the F.I.A. – the International Automobile Federation – with whom we will be working closely to meet one of the most urgent global challenges of our times.

I urge you to celebrate World Telecommunication and Information Society Day this year by paying particular attention to improving road safety by harnessing the power of ICTs.