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World Telecommunication and Information Society Day 2010 (WTISD 2010) *Better city, better life with ICTs*

Message from ITU Secretary-General, Hamadoun I. Touré

This year marks the 145th anniversary of the establishment of ITU. I am proud to be leading this dynamic organization, the specialized United Nations agency which defines the cutting edge of information and communication technologies — or ICTs — and is steadfastly committed to connecting the world to the benefits of the ongoing digital revolution.

ICTs are constantly reshaping the way the world communicates while creating the opportunities for a better life through long-term, sustainable development, not least among the most vulnerable sections of our society.

In the urban context, ICTs have increasingly dictated lifestyles and behaviour patterns and contributed to the growth of trade and commerce, improved governance and municipal services, and revolutionized entertainment through the development of rapid communications, both mobile and fixed.

ICTs provide solutions to many of the problems facing cities even as they become magnets for migrating populations as well as contribute to making them more eco-friendly and economically viable. For many city dwellers, it is nearly impossible to imagine life without ICTs. From television to mobile phones and the Internet, ICTs have reshaped the world, helping billions of people to live, work and play in the most creative ways. ICTs present innovative ways of managing our cities — smart buildings, intelligent traffic management, new efficiencies in energy consumption and waste management, and not least exchanging information and knowledge and communicating on the move in an increasingly converged information society.

While the world's cities are undoubtedly endowed with many advantages, the disparities between the haves and the have nots among urban populations is often a vivid reminder that the vast majority is left out of the reach of development. It is ironic that even in densely populated urban centres countless millions are deprived of access to the means of communication and information that are taken for granted by others. Along with this growing digital divide, the lack of safe drinking water, sanitation, food, shelter, health care and education are basic needs that are addressed by the Millennium Development Goals, which call for the significant improvement in the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers by 2020.

By tapping into the huge potential of ICTs to improve the lives of people and by providing affordable and equitable access to information and knowledge to empower everyone to achieve their aspirations, administrations can contribute towards meeting the rising expectations of an ever-growing population in the world's cities. Acting as catalysts for a more productive and better life, ICTs open the door to the myriad solutions that can help achieve harmony among the spatial, social and environmental aspects of cities and their inhabitants.

The World Summit on the Information Society, which met in Geneva in 2003 and in Tunis in 2005, called upon countries to consider establishing national mechanisms to achieve universal access in both underserved rural and urban areas in order to bridge the digital divide. ITU is committed to connecting the world and to ensure that the benefits of ICT reach the remotest parts of the world, including the millions who remain unconnected in our teeming cities.

I urge you to celebrate this special 145th anniversary of ITU by focusing on connecting people around the world and harnessing the full potential of ICTs so that we can all enjoy a more productive, peaceful and — in every way — a better life.