Change and continuity

After six weeks of intense work involving strenuous, not to say passionate, debate, guided with consummate skill by Mr. H. K. Kosgey, Kenyan Minister of Transport and Communications, the 12th Plenipotentiary Conference of the Union, the first ever held in Africa, came to an end.

In my first address to *Telecommunication Journal* readers as Secretary-General of the Union, I should like to share with you a few thoughts about the results of that important Conference. In deciding the course of the Union for most of the 1980s—the next Plenipotentiary Conference will be held in 1989—delegates displayed a desire both for change and continuity.

Continuity, because—as in the case of the two preceding Plenipotentiary Conferences (Montreux, 1965, and Malaga-Torremolinos, 1973)—the Nairobi Conference reaffirmed the major elements of the International Telecommunication Convention, as well as the need for special information and advisory services for developing countries in the interests of world-wide telecommunication development.

Continuity, too, because the decisions of the World Administrative Radio Conference of 1979 certainly had a major impact on the programme of both world and regional radio conferences that was adopted to ensure the timely application of the international regulatory provisions for the effective and equitable access to the spectrum and the geostationary orbit in keeping with the aspirations and needs of all Members of the Union and their communities.

Continuity in providing for the necessary programme of activities—conferences, meetings of the Consultative Committees, technical co-operation and assistance contributions and for the regular and specific duties of the organs at the headquarters of the Union, including the approved programme for extended use of the computer for information and data processing.

Continuity also in acknowledging the importance of linguistic services which facilitate communication, understanding and co-operation between Members of the Union, their representatives and

experts, and communities concerned with tele-communications and which are also necessary for carrying out the daily work of the Union.

But also considerable change has been foreseen to take account of developments in the world economic, social and political situation over the past decade; in particular, change in institutional methods and means ...

While the 1970s were a decade of preinvestment surveys culminating in the progressive realiz-ation of such regional projects as the Asian telecommunication network, PANAFTEL, MED-ARABTEL*, the South-West Pacific Island communities network, and the integration of the regional networks in the Americas, the 1980s must be one in which these projects are further consolidated and expanded with emphasis on speedier development of national networks including those for the rural areas.

With the evolution of regional telecommuni-cations we have seen the establishment or strengthening of regional organizations; organ-izations with which close co-operation is essen-tial. Furthermore, changes in the provisions of the United Nations Development Programme and the consequences of the communications debates have led the Union to give greater atten-

*PANAFTEL   = pan-African telecommunication network
 MEDARABTEL = telecommunication network of the Middle East and the Mediterranean Basin.

tion to telecommunication considerations in the many regional forums.

Hence, the Plenipotentiary Conference took steps to strengthen the Union's regional presence as an institutional responsibility by providing for some devolution from ITU headquarters of the Union's representation and the future adminis-tration of technical co-operation activities.

The Conference recognized the vital importance of telecommunications for social and economic development and for the achievement of a new world information and communication order, and thus placed special emphasis on the priority to be given to the development of telecom-munication infrastructures in under-equipped regions.

The Conference decided also to establish an independent "International Commission for World-Wide Telecommunications Develop-ment" to be composed of representatives of the highest decision-making authorities with specific terms of reference to examine and recommend a range of methods both tried and untried "for stimulating telecommunication development in the developing world using appropriate and proven technologies" leading to "progressive achievement of self-reliance ... and the narrowing of the gap between the developing and developed countries". Hence the greater

significance in the creation of a special voluntary programme for technical co-operation which, moreover, demonstrated the determination of Member countries to diversify the traditional sources of technical assistance to better satisfy the needs of the developing countries.

It is significant that the creation of the International Commission should coincide exactly with World Communications Year (WCY), 1983: Development of Communications Infrastructures. The Plenipotentiaries clearly wished to make a practical, positive response to the resolution of the United Nations General Assembly which, in proclaiming the Year, sought to encourage the in-depth examination and analysis of national communications development policies. The Conference confirmed the need for the Union's response to the United Nations General Assembly endorsement of the International Programme for the Development of Communication and the ITU's active technical support of the Programme, which is guided by a special Inter-governmental Council and a secretariat housed at UNESCO as a focal point in the UN system.

A change was recognized in the overall approach to the problems posed by modern telecommunications and the growth of new services. The Conference therefore decided to hold in 1988 a World Administrative Telegraph and Telephone Conference to revise the present regulatory provisions for public telecommunication services.

The coming years will thus be years of innovation and dialogue between all partners in the world of telecommunications—administrations, operating agencies, industrialists and users—a meaningful, realistic dialogue that should take account of the needs of all.

Lastly, whilst acknowledging the need for an increase in the activities of the Union over the next six or seven years, and indeed providing for extra revenues for the introduction of new approaches to co-operation within the framework of the Nairobi Convention, the Conference applied a 10% cut in the resources available for the regular functioning of the headquarters as a compensation against the increased expenditure for other activities. These cuts will necessitate for the ITU a review of priorities, and the rationalization of efforts and methods influencing our ability, or rapidity, to respond to service needs. Consequently the impact of the cuts will need consideration and review at national levels, where the basic work of the Union is initiated. But I am confident that thanks to the spirit of co-operation which has always prevailed amongst ITU Member countries we will be able to meet the challenge we are now facing.

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