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## **The Kyoto Plenipotentiary Conference: Meeting the challenges of change**

In a couple of weeks, the Plenipotentiary Conference — the ultimate policy-making body of the ITU — will meet in Kyoto in what promises to be a lively four-week long session. But first, let us have some background.

Faced with a fast-changing telecommunication environment the 1989 Nice Plenipotentiary Conference had no choice but to focus on change. And structural change there had to be, if the ITU was to remain relevant and responsive to the growing needs of its Members and the wider telecommunication community.

At the heart of the debate today is whether the structural changes introduced between 1989 and 1994 are satisfactory or have they, in fact, fallen short of the expectations of ITU's membership? And more precisely, what improvements have been made in the internal management of the Union? With the new structure now in place, can the Union hope to better umpire a rapidly changing telecommunication environment? One in which many countries are taking giant strides towards out-and-out liberalization, deregulation (or is it re-regulation?), not to mention, privatization? That evaluation may well rest with the Kyoto Conference. But 129 years of experience (the ITU was established in 1865) should surely be an asset enough to succeed.

That the ITU is an intergovernmental organization where Members are States represented by administrations is beyond dispute. But, remember, the ITU also exists to meet a wide range of interests: "to facilitate the provision of services to end users by operators, service providers and equipment manufacturers". These growing non-member participants (or small "m"embers as they now call them) make a core contribution to the work

of the Union. Whether the Kyoto Conference will consider giving them a place in ITU's decision-making bodies still remains to be seen.

Also at issue is how the Union will deal with the growing duality between an internationalized society of infrastructure haves, on the one hand, and fragments of isolated societies of infrastructure have-nots on the other.

Not least, will come the deeper issue: the pocket. What budget is the ITU Council taking to the boardroom? A zero growth budget they say. But, if, as recent surveys suggest, a long-predicted economic recovery is at last well and truly under way, should the Union continue to operate on such a budget despite its many new responsibilities? And just how will the budget be split among the Union's three Sectors: Development, Radiocommunication and Standardization? The Plenipotentiary Conference is particularly well placed to answer those questions and more. In the meantime, let us not forget that the Union has to continue meeting the challenges of change. Clear strategies, clear policies, clear priorities and a decent budget ceiling is what the ITU needs to fulfil its broad mandate.

The Editor