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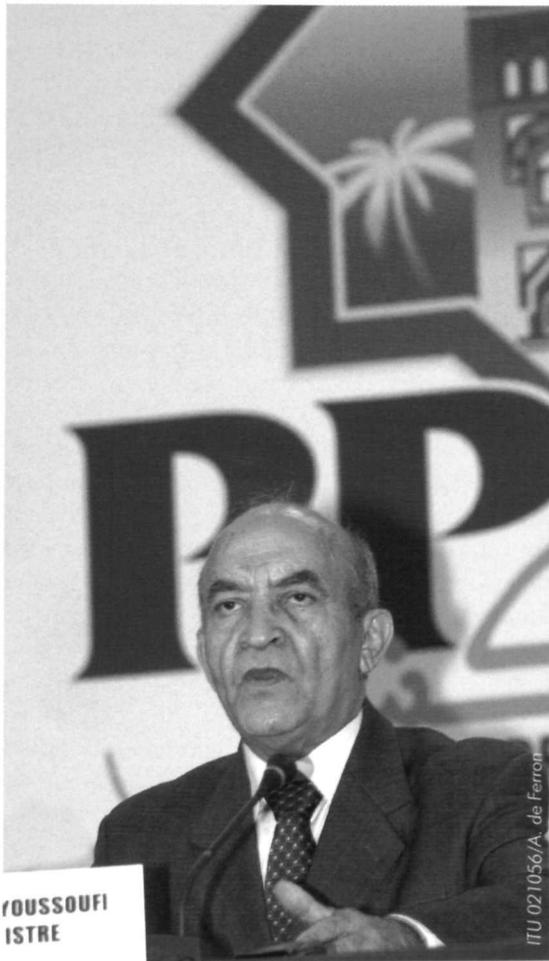
Prime Minister Abderrahman Youssoufi opens ITU Plenipotentiary Conference

The Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Morocco, Abderrahman Youssoufi, conveyed a royal welcome from His Majesty King Mohammed VI of Morocco to the more than 1000 delegates who attended the opening ceremony of the 16th Plenipotentiary Conference of the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) at the magnificent *Palais des Congrès of Marrakesh* on 23 September 2002. The Prime Minister declared:

"All Morocco is most proud to have here (Marrakesh) such an august assemblage of personalities and dignitaries of world renown in a domain which has, in the last decade, permeated all aspects of human life and has become an activity vital and indispensable to humankind, to the extent that communications and information have become major tools of social interlocation, the intensive possession of which has become a true indicator of the economic power of countries." Morocco is the first Arab country to be selected as the venue for

such a major ITU event since the inception of the Union in 1865.

The Prime Minister recalled that Moroccans have known ITU since 1906, when the Sultan of Morocco, Moulay Abdelaziz, realized the role of the telegraph in modernization and became particularly interested in it. The Sultan, he said, established the first private telegraph company and sent the first Moroccan delegation to participate in an ITU telegraph conference, held in Berlin in 1906. Morocco has since followed constantly all ITU activities, intensified its participation in the Union's meetings and continued to lend its support to the organization's administrative and functional management through its able staff. "ITU can be proud that it has remained throughout all these years the main authority regulating all the new developments witnessed by the world of today in the fields of communications, radio and television broadcasting, communication satellites and global information networks", the Prime Minister stated.



Abderrahman Youssoufi, Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Morocco

Highlighting the attention which the Moroccan Government has devoted to the development of the communications and information sector in recent years, the Prime Minister had this to say:

"Morocco, like other developing countries, is striving to catch up with modern technology and to adapt to the rapid changes in the world of communications and information. In this it relies on its material and human resources, so as to avoid the digital gap which has come to separate peoples, and even segments of a single society, a situation that requires joint efforts through close international cooperation for the benefit of the less developed countries, in order to meet the challenges of development in a world which has come to be characterized by

violent convulsions and crises." He expressed full confidence in ITU to continue to work for the benefit of all the world's inhabitants, particularly those in countries with limited income.

The E-Morocco strategy

Nasr Hajji, Secretary of State to the Prime Minister in charge of Posts and Telecommunication and Information Technologies also welcomed delegates to Morocco, "a land that is both Arab and African", he said. Referring to the changing environment, Mr Hajji remarked: "With globalization asserting itself as an indisputable fact, a new economy is characterizing its emergence. This intangible economy accords a special place to information and knowledge, which are seen as the essential means of accessing an expanding global market. In this intangible economy, information and communication technologies (ICT) play a fundamental role." Aware as it is of this undeniable new context and of the stakes that are involved in its integration into the global information technologies market, Morocco has made this sector a national priority.

In this regard, Mr Hajji said: "In order to ensure the success of the E-Morocco strategy adopted by our country, we have focused on a



Nasr Hajji, Secretary of State to the Prime Minister in charge of Posts and Telecommunication and Information Technologies

global and integrated approach in the fields of telecommunications, information and audiovisual technologies, multimedia and communication as a whole. In this way, we are taking full and optimum advantage of the convergence of information technologies, their synergies and their complementarities within the framework of a strategic vision."



ITU 021013/A. de Ferron

Mobile phone user on a terrace of a café in Marrakesh

Morocco — a model for telecommunication progress

The policy of liberalization adopted by Morocco is based on a controlled regulatory framework. It has enabled the country to make extraordinary progress, particularly in the field of mobile telephony, where the number of subscribers has risen exponentially from 150 000 in 1999 to the present figure of over 6 million. "Our strategy is also based on the conviction that what has been valid and conclusive for mobile telephony will be equally so for Internet connections, where appropriate measures will of course have to be taken to provide encouragement and guidance", he said.

Mr Hajji also told the telecommunication leaders that despite the downturn in the industry, which he blamed on excesses of a non-technological nature, "we remain firm in our conviction that it is the new technologies that now represent the fundamental and indisputable driving force underpinning the success of all

economic and social activities". He called upon the Conference, through its decisions and resolutions, to send out confident and optimistic messages regarding the future of the telecommunication sector.

Information — a tool in the fight against tyranny and ignorance

ITU Secretary-General, Yoshio Utsumi, in fluent Arabic welcomed delegates to the Red City of Marrakesh. He highlighted the major challenges facing ITU today, placing emphasis on the new information society, where information is the key to economic, social and cultural development, and where ITU must play a pivotal role. Mr Utsumi declared: "At the start of the 20th century, the world was still labouring under the yoke of colonialism. Today, we are engaged in a new battle: the struggle for knowledge against the tyranny of ignorance. Information has the power to dispel ignorance, and to empower those who are oppressed by it. Moreover, information has the power to bind the global community into a cohesive fraternity, which shares the common ideals of peace and tolerance, growth and development." He went on to stress that "ITU must provide a global policy perspective and wholehearted support for the battle against tyranny and ignorance".

A supply and demand mismatch

A concerted global effort is needed to eliminate the gap between rich and poor in terms of flow of, and access to, information, says Mr Utsumi. "The goal of the telecommunication world is our goal, and we have a central role to play. But we have many hurdles to overcome." He added that the euphoria of the dot.com boom carried the world into uncharted waters, and that "at times we lost sight of the horizon".

Between 1995 and 2000, the volume of Internet traffic grew by four times. But available capacity grew by 200 times in the same period. Explaining this phenomenon, Mr Utsumi said that the "dark fibre" available on the most used routes, for example, those across the Atlantic, grew by several thousand times. Furthermore, overzealous expectations created overcapacity, which in turn has led to falling prices and profits.



Still, telecommunication indicators show that demand outstrips supply in the developing world. For example, three out of four new telephone users connected each year are in the developing countries. Furthermore, there are ten times more potential Internet users in the developing countries than in the developed ones. In Mr Utsumi's words: "Two decades of market liberalization, privatization and technological progress have made our industry more efficient, and more innovative. But it has not necessarily made investors wiser. Nor has it made telecommunication managers more honest, as recent accounting scandals have shown."

Delegates challenged to develop global policy

Despite an abundance of telecommunication capacity in some places, there is not even a basic telephone connection in many villages in other parts of the world. It is not a question of resources, but of distribution. "This is the result of a lack of global policy perspective", Mr Utsumi told delegates. He added that ITU's ambition today "lies in the concrete realization that telecommunications can enable a hardy peasant in the snow-bound Himalayas to receive the latest weather forecast; or a young woman in the sun-scorched plains of Africa to learn the skills to improve her handiwork". To achieve this goal: "we will have to make radical and bold reforms, not weighed down by a myriad of bureaucratic mazes. We cannot afford to lose ourselves in endless debates. The Union must be reformed into an effective force that can lead the charge to realize the digital opportunity."

1.5 million villages unconnected to the information society

Mr Utsumi repeated the appeal he made to the World Telecommunication Development Conference in Istanbul in March 2002: "Let us set a global goal to provide connectivity to every village all over the globe by the time of the World Summit on the Information Society." While the investment required is relatively modest, raising the capital will require innovative approaches. He stated: "There are around 1.5 million villages still unconnected. They

could be connected for less than the price paid for a third-generation mobile auction in developed countries that are already well-served."

In the year 2000 alone, the telecommunication industry is said to have invested more than USD 200 billion worldwide. "But the financial and social dividends have been far from optimal, because we were super-serving the rich few, and failing to provide basic services to the many."



"Information has the power to bind the global community into a cohesive fraternity, which shares the common ideals of peace and tolerance, growth and development."

To conclude, Mr Utsumi appealed to the world's telecommunication leaders to make bold suggestions for a global policy that would help us to "reach the unreached" and bring the potential of ICTs to all of the world's people.

The Conference elected Nasr Hajji as Chairman of the 2002 Plenipotentiary Conference, along with six Vice-Chairmen (see page 6 for the Conference structure). Secretary of State Hajji brings with him a solid experience in diplomacy and negotiations, having held several high-level positions both in government and civil society. His main role will be to keep the Conference on track and act as a "backroom" negotiator to bring diverse views to a compromise. Most decisions are expected to be taken by consensus. ■



Conference structure

Chairman of the Conference:

Nasr Hajji (Morocco)

Vice-Chairmen of the Conference:

David Gross (United States)
 Michael Goddard (United Kingdom)
 Leonid Reiman (Russia)
 Samuel Chepkong'a (Kenya)
 Kiyoshi Mori (Japan)
 Mohamed Mulla (Saudi Arabia)

Committee 1 — Steering Committee

This Committee is composed of the Chairman and Vice-Chairmen of the Conference and of the Chairmen and Vice-Chairmen of all the Conference committees and Working Group of the Plenary.

Committee 2 — Credentials

Chairman:

Victor Grigorascu (Romania)

Vice-Chairmen:

Jaime Herrera (Costa Rica)
 Ashraf Moussa (Egypt)

Committee 3 — Budget Control

Chairman:

Emmanuel Owusu-Adansi (Ghana)

Vice-Chairmen:

Grigory Saghyan (Armenia)
 Kathleen G. Heceta (Philippines)

Committee 4 — Editorial

Chairman:

Marie-Thérèse Alajouanine (France)

Vice-Chairmen:

Les Barclay (United Kingdom)
 Luis Sanz Gadea (Spain)
 Andrey Svechnikov (Russia)
 Wenjin Zheng (China)
 Mustapha Bessi (Morocco)

Committee 5 — Policy, Reform and Legal Matters

Chairman:

Anthony S. K. Wong (China)

Vice-Chairmen:

João Carlos Albernaz (Brazil)
 José Toscano (Portugal)
 Brice Edgard Ponga (Gabon)
 Abdulkareem Saleem (Kuwait)

Committee 6 — Administration and Management

Chairman:

Bruce Gracie (Canada)

Vice-Chairmen:

Frédéric Riehl (Switzerland)
 Mactar Seck (Senegal)

Working Group of the Plenary on General Matters

Chairman:

Lyndall Shope-Mafole (South Africa)

Vice-Chairmen:

José Vivanco Arias (Ecuador)
 P.K. Garg (India)