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editorial

Message from U Thant, Secretary-General United Nations, to the ITU World Administrative Radio Conference for Space Telecommunications

Geneva, 7 June 1971



“ Any utilization of outer space, for whatever purpose, requires the use of radio waves as the sole link between the earth and the spacecraft or satellite. The radio frequency spectrum, however, is a limited and increasingly overcrowded natural resource. For that reason, from the very beginning of the space age, the international community recognized the need for co-operative measures at the global level to ensure that sufficient frequencies are available for space telecommunications. As early as 1958, the General Assembly of the United Nations stated that the initial steps into outer space had “ added a new dimension to man’s existence and opened new possibilities for the increase of his knowledge and the improvement of his life ”. The following year, 1959, the United Nations *Ad Hoc* Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space drew attention to the fact that “ there is already in existence and operation an international organization suited to consider the problems of radio frequency allocation for outer space uses, namely, ITU ”.

“ Through the years, the United Nations General Assembly, the United Nations Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space, and the United Nations Working Group on Direct Broadcast Satellites have clearly recognized the competence of the International Telecommunication Union in this area. As recently as last December, the General Assembly unanimously invited the

ITU "to continue to take the necessary steps to promote the use of satellite broadcasting services by Member States and to consider at the 1971 World Administrative Radio Conference for Space Telecommunications the appropriate provisions under which satellite broadcasting services may be established". The Assembly also requested the ITU "to transmit when available to the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space all information about the use of the geostationary orbit and the frequency spectrum".

"It is most gratifying to note that the details of functional problems raised by the advent of the space age have been successfully worked out in the ITU. The first special Conference to make allocations of radio frequency bands for outer space activities was convened by the ITU in 1963. However, at that time it was impossible to foresee the many outer space developments which were to take place within a few years—in particular, the widespread use of the geostationary orbit and the prospect for broadcast satellites. Accordingly, it is timely that today, eight years later, a further World Administrative Radio Conference is being convened by the ITU. I have no doubt that this Conference will further advance the peaceful applications of the practical benefits of space technology in the common interest of all mankind, as called for by successive resolutions of the United Nations General Assembly.

"The orderly development of the radio spectrum, on a rational and equitable basis, not only will contribute to further progress in space communications, including satellite broadcasting, but will also promote the development of the entire range of space applications. Reliable and uncluttered telecommunications are a prime necessity for

any successful exploration of outer space and any application of the results of such exploration. This applies equally to the gathering of meteorological data, remote sensing of earth resources, aerial and maritime navigation and the use of telecommunications for educational and cultural purposes. I wish, therefore, to urge the delegates of this Conference to bear in mind continuously the vital importance of spectrum requirements for these various applications of space technology.

"In this context, I am most mindful that the achievements of space technology hold out a great potential for the solution of a number of economic and social problems in the developing countries. It is extremely important, therefore, that the Conference take due account of the present and future space communications needs of these countries. If all mankind is to benefit from its increasing mastery over outer space, then it is essential not only that outer space technology be fully shared but also that the frequency spectrum be apportioned in such a manner as to prevent the emergence of yet another gap between the haves and have-nots of our world.

"The International Telecommunication Union already has made a distinguished contribution to the great international collaborative effort of spectrum management. I wish to take this opportunity to pay a special tribute to our distinguished friend and colleague, Mr. Mohamed Mili, the Secretary-General of ITU, for his wise leadership in guiding the activities of the organization in this and other important fields of activity. I am confident that the new World Administrative Radio Conference will provide the necessary leadership and guidance for the future. In this spirit, I wish the Conference every success."