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Subject: World Telecommunication and Information Society Day 2008

Dear Sir/Madam,

17 May marks the anniversary of the signature of the first International Telegraph Convention in 1865 and the creation of the International Telecommunication Union. Since 1973, the occasion has been recognized as World Telecommunication Day.

The Tunis phase of the World Summit on the Information Society identified 17 May as "World Information Society Day". This was endorsed by the UN General Assembly in March 2006.

The ITU Plenipotentiary Conference, which met in Antalya, Turkey in November 2006, decided to henceforth celebrate 17 May as World Telecommunication and Information Society Day.

As the leading ICT agency of the United Nations, ITU looks towards its members to raise awareness of the role of ICT in reducing poverty and creating opportunities for long-term and sustainable development. This year, for World Telecommunication and Information Society Day ITU Council adopted the theme: "*Connecting Persons with Disabilities: ICT Opportunities for All*" to address the special requirements of persons with disabilities in achieving universal access to ICT.

The World Summit on the Information Society, through the Geneva Plan of Action, urged Member States to address the special requirements of older people and persons with disabilities along with other marginalized and vulnerable groups in their national e-strategies. A further call was made to encourage design and production of ICT equipment and services adhering to the Universal Design Principle and the use of assistive technologies for research and development to facilitate accessibility to ICT for all, including people with disabilities.

The last World Telecommunication Development Conference (WTDC-06) held in Doha, Qatar in 2006, created a new Special Initiative on "Access to telecommunication services for people with disabilities". The Conference further requested ITU's Development Sector (ITU-D) through Resolution 56 (WTDC-06) to support Member States in implementing ICT initiatives and activities for persons with disabilities within its work programmes, and through Question 20 in Study Group-1, (Q20/1) to develop Guidelines for policy makers and regulators for mainstreaming disability issues.

Furthermore, the Doha Plan of Action endorsed the Tunis Commitment of building ICT capacity for all, including persons with disabilities, through the promotion of universal, ubiquitous, equitable and affordable access to ICT. It encouraged adoption of universal design and assistive technologies to ensure that the benefits are evenly distributed within societies in an effort to bridge the digital divide by creating digital opportunities for all to harness the full potential for development offered by state-of-the-art ICT.

The theme of this year's WTISD is aimed at ensuring that persons with disabilities can harness the potential of ICT to make their own unique contribution to society.

# World Telecommunication and Information Society Day 2008: Call for Action

During this year's WTISD, ITU calls upon all stakeholders (policy makers, regulators, operators and industry) to raise awareness on the need to adopt policies and strategies that would meet the ICT needs of people with disabilities by ensuring that both equipment and services are accessible. This move would not only ensure an inclusive information society, but would also enable Member States to meet their obligations under Article 9 of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in December 2006.

Among other issues, the Convention requires that "States shall take appropriate measures to:

1. ensure ICT and emergency service access to persons with disabilities on an equal basis
2. promote access for persons with disabilities to new ICT, including the Internet
3. promote design, production and distribution of accessible ICT at an early stage
4. ensure that persons with disabilities can exercise the right to freedom of expression and opinion
5. provide information in accessible formats and technologies appropriate to different kinds of disabilities in a timely manner and without additional cost
6. urge private entities that render services to the public to provide information and services in accessible and usable formats for persons with disabilities
7. encourage mass media (including information providers through the Internet) to make their services accessible"

In order to address issues related to persons with disabilities, Member States called upon ITU to:

- **Continue creation of public awareness** through workshops to identify policies, best practices, tools and resources for adaptation/use in their countries.  
**Call for action:** ITU Member States and Sector Members are encouraged to actively participate in ITU events for persons with disabilities and, where possible, provide experts and resources in order to share experience and best practices for mainstreaming disability issues in their policies, regulations and laws.
- **Support ongoing work** aimed at developing Guidelines on Disability issues for policy makers and regulators.  
**Call for action:** ITU Member States and Sector Members are encouraged to participate in the activities under Question 20 in Study Group 1 to support ongoing efforts to develop the Guidelines sharing experiences and best practices on policies and practices for persons with disabilities.
- **Implement a global meeting on accessibility and services for persons with disabilities** in the policy- and strategy-making process aimed at reviewing and reporting on efforts and to share best practices for accessibility as a basis for making recommendations to WTDC-2010.  
**Call for action:** ITU Member States and Sector Members are encouraged to partner with ITU, share experiences and contribute experts and resources to develop guidelines and recommendations for mainstreaming accessibility in issues in national ICT policies and strategies.
- **Develop and implement projects and activities** addressing ICT needs for persons with disabilities  
**Call for action:** ITU Member States and Sector Members are encouraged to develop and implement ICT projects and activities responding to the needs of persons with disabilities and complying with ICT accessibility standards.
- **Collect data on the number of persons with disabilities who have access to ICT** in order to develop suitable indicators that will contribute to placing ICT accessibility issues on the public agenda, create awareness and monitor progress for inclusion of persons with disabilities in the information society.  
**Call for action:** ITU Member States and Sector Members are requested to collect disaggregated data to facilitate development of policies and strategies to address ICT needs and barriers for persons with disabilities.

At the national level, you may wish to join forces with your telecommunications and ICT administration in programmes organized to mark WTISD with a focus on the theme *"Connecting Persons with Disabilities: ICT Opportunities for All"*.

On World Telecommunication and Information Society Day, let us resolve to promote ICT opportunities for persons with disabilities, the elderly and other vulnerable groups in our communities to seize the remarkable digital opportunities now on offer.

I wish you a very successful World Telecommunication and Information Society Day 2008.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'H. Touré', with a large, stylized flourish at the end.

Dr. Hamadoun Touré  
Secretary-General

Annex: World Telecommunication and Information Society Day Message