

**OPENING REMARKS OF THE SECRETARY GENERAL OF CANTO  
AT THE OPENING CEREMONY OF THE 31<sup>ST</sup> AGM OF CANTO  
CO-HOSTED BY TELESUR  
25<sup>TH</sup> JANUARY 2015**

- **His Excellency, Robert Ameerali, Vice President of Suriname**
- **Dr. Hamadoun Touré, outgoing Secretary-General of the ITU**
- **Mr. Dirk Currie, CEO of Telesur and Chairman of the CANTO Board of Directors**
- **Mrs. Helma Etnel, Vice Chair of the CANTO Board of Directors**
- **Board of Directors of CANTO**
- **Supervisory Board of Telesur**
- **Board of Directors and Management of Telesur**
- **Members of the Diplomatic Corps**
- **Members of CANTO**
- **Sponsors & Exhibitors**
- **Members of the Media**
- **Other Invited Guests**
- **Ladies & Gentlemen**

It is a great pleasure to be here in Paramaribo, Suriname and to welcome you all to CANTO's 31<sup>st</sup> Annual General Meeting. Special thanks to Mr. Dirk Currie, outgoing CANTO Chairman and all the staff members of Telesur and CANTO who have spent considerable time and effort to organize this event and to make it the success that we know it will be.

As someone from Suriname I am really delighted to be here once again as CANTO Secretary-General and someone from Suriname. I would therefore like to welcome everyone to this meeting as CANTO Secretary-General and as a Surinamer. I hope everyone will have a wonderful time with us here in Suriname and also enjoy all the wonderful things that Suriname has to offer.

The theme for this year's AGM is Improving Lives through Broadband Innovation. Our conference will examine many aspects of this theme and we hope that at the end of this AGM we will have concrete proposals for taking CANTO forward. We must take account of the fact that we are now in 2015 and this is the year in which we will see how the world fared in respect of achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the targets of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS). This is of great interest to CANTO and the entire Caribbean Information and Communication Technology (ICT) community. Here at CANTO we will take the opportunity of charting our future, taking into account relevant events at the global level.

In 2000, all our governments were signatories to the Millennium Development Goals, which were established to promote sustainable development, in particular the eradication of poverty. There were eight goals and goal number 8 refers to the need for making available the benefits of ICTs to everyone. There was no mention of broadband. Consequently as we plan our strategies we have to be bold, but realistic and forward-looking, seeking to achieve attainable goals that will improve the lives of our citizens.

Following the MDGs we then had the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) in two sessions in 2003 and 2005. They also established targets, with a strong emphasis on connecting people, institutions and communities. We have seen many activities in this regard in the Caribbean, including connecting schools, communities and institutions. The WSIS targets are also to be reviewed this year. However, one of the main functions of the WSIS was to facilitate the implementation of the MDGs. So, we can see the recognition that ICTs are cross cutting and are important for nearly everything we do in our daily lives.

We should also bear in mind the contributions of the ITU/UNESCO Broadband Commission which has made several pertinent recommendations for advancing broadband development globally. They also have recommendations for 2015.

As many of you may be aware, the CANTO Secretariat in conjunction with its members have been giving serious consideration the future of CANTO. In this regard during the 2014 session of the AGM, six main actions recommendations were proposed. We intend to continue the examination of them in order to get the best possible outputs for this organization. The six recommendations were:

1. Introduction of a Regulatory Forum at the Conference
2. Engagement of the Youth in CANTO activities
3. Establishment of a Youth Forum
4. Formation of the CANTO Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) Committee
5. Formation of more strategic alliances and partnerships
6. Establishment and securing partnerships for the Women's Forum

We will seek to take whatever action that is necessary implementing these recommendations. I will make some brief remarks in respect of these recommendations. They are not static and as such we will seek to improve and modify them as necessary.

Having now established a Regulatory Forum we must ensure that all the necessary inputs are provided and recommendations can be made for specific actions to be taken. We must ensure that the needs of our members as far as obtaining adequate spectrum resources are met. This includes making inputs into discussions regarding digital transition, whereby spectrum being used by the broadcasting sector will be made available for mobile use. We must also continue to examine possible solutions for the issue of Over-the-Top operators, a subject which has been widely discussed at CANTO. We also need to ensure

that the needs of our members are taken into account during global debates, for example at the ITU World Radio Conference.

We are very happy to have our youth represented among us and this will continue to be a part of CANTO's activities. We need to have our young, talented and creative minds engaged in discussions with us so that they can let us know how they see ICTs, how they use ICTs and how they think ICTs should be used in the future. Therefore, we want to continue have dialogue with our young people and strengthen our Youth Forum which could become an incubator for new, creative and innovative ICT ideas.

CANTO members take seriously their responsibility as corporate citizens. In this regard CANTO has agreed to the establishment of the CANTO Corporate Social Responsibility Committee (CSR) aimed at achieving a balance between business and social responsibility. Through this committee we will look at matters relating to the environment. This will include the disposal of end-of-life mobile handsets, computers and other electronic equipment and will be done in accordance with international standards. We also believe that the committee should also look at possible measures to reduce the production of greenhouse gases. ICTs can be seen as both a cause and a cure for climate change. Consequently we need to look more closely at how this committee can play a role in climate change, disaster management and related areas.

The fourth recommendation concerns the need for strategic alliances and partnerships. This has always been an important part of CANTO's activities. CANTO respects the mandate of other organizations and we ask that others also respect our mandate. There is always a need for cooperation and collaboration and we always welcome this. Therefore we want to look at strengthening the relationships that we have and to look for other organizations or entities with which we can establish sound relationships, including the ITU, CTU, CARICOM, OOCUR, among others.

The final recommendation relates to the establishment and securing of partnerships for the Women's Forum. This is just an initial step since at CANTO we feel strongly that women can and should be empowered by ICTs. We would like to now engage with NGOs, governments, other ICT partners in developing and executing projects aimed at empowering women throughout the Caribbean, using ICTs.

I now wish to address a very important Caribbean activity which is being implemented as I speak. This is the CANTO/Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) project on Broadband Infrastructure Inventory and Public Awareness in the Caribbean (BIIPAC). This project is being funded by the IDB and executed by CANTO and consists of four components, namely:

- Broadband diagnostic and infrastructure maps;
- Review of legal and regulatory frameworks and current sector trends;
- ICT awareness and capacity building programs;
- Public policy recommendations for the design of national broadband strategies.

As you can see, this is a very comprehensive project and at the end of it we expect to have a better idea of where we are with broadband development and there will be recommendations for further actions to be taken. Members of the BIIPAC project team will be meeting during this AGM and there will be an update on activities undertaken, progress of the project and what can be expected in the near future.

The BIIPAC project will provide important information, statistics and recommendation on how Caribbean countries can move forward in developing broadband. One of the important aspects will be the funding of broadband activities. CANTO members have been working with governments and other ICT stakeholders in rolling out broadband infrastructure throughout the Caribbean. One impediment has been the lack of sufficient funds to implement all the actions that are required. I made mention before of the evaluation of the MDGs and the WSIS targets and these will give us an idea of how we fared in the Caribbean, how we compare with other countries and how we can best use the updated information coming from these two global activities.

From CANTO's perspective, we believe that all Caribbean countries should have a definition of Universal Service and that definition should include access to broadband for everyone. It would also be necessary for all countries to establish a Universal Service Fund (similar to what has been done in many other countries) which will help to provide funding for broadband infrastructure. Some Caribbean countries are already doing this and we would recommend that others follow. This is an area in which CANTO would be interested in participating.

So, as we plan the future of CANTO, let us put our thoughts and minds together to develop concrete strategies that will propel the Caribbean forward. Let us have a good look at where we are and where we want to go. As we seek to develop our ICT agenda, let us also be engaged in discussions on the post-2015 sustainable development agenda which is important for all our countries. However, we must be aware that this agenda will not go forward without the strong support of ICTs and in particular, broadband.

Let us work together, strengthen CANTO, seek partnerships, empower women, engage the youth, be good corporate social citizens and utilize the power of ICTs to strengthen and develop the Caribbean. Let us improve lives through broadband innovation.