**Speech for CANTO AGM 2019**

**Salutations**

It is my distinct pleasure to welcome you to the 35th Annual General Meeting here in the beautiful country of Guyana.

I want to take this opportunity to sincerely thank our Headline Sponsor and Co-Host GTT; we are truly grateful for your sponsorship of this AGM.

**Ladies and Gentlemen** at this AGM I will step down as Chairman of CANTO having served two terms as Chairman. I want to say a special **Thank You** to CANTO members for the honour of serving you as Chairman of this prestigious organisation. I am indeed most grateful for the opportunity and I sincerely wish the new Chairperson and all CANTO members every success in the future. Special thanks also to the Secretary General, Teresa and the CANTO Secretariat management team and staff. It has been a great pleasure working with all of you.

I would like to say a special thank you to my wife (please stand) for her support and guidance over the last four years. It’s very easy being the Chairman when you have great family support.

There can be no doubt that my role as Chairman of CANTO has been a most time consuming one. Fortunately, Digicel has always fully supported me and ensured that I have adequate time to perform my various duties as Chairman. I would take this opportunity to thank Digicel for all their support during my tenure as Chair.

The industry has changed significantly since becoming Chairman 4 years ago. I would say that the most significant change for network operators is the reduction of international voice revenue with the advent of Over The Top (OTTs) players such as What’s app, FaceTime, etc. Operators have been re-examining and changing their business models to compete with these unregulated online services. This is a significant challenge for Caribbean network operators who conduct business in a regulated environment but compete with unregulated OTTs offering the same services. Let’s be honest - there should be an equal playing field: as the GSMA have often stated “same rules for the same services”.

**Ladies and Gentlemen** I have had a keen focus on CANTO’s achievements – here are some of our achievements since 2015.

**2015-2018 Achievements**

New Secretary General

Making Teresa Wankin as Secretary General was one of my best recommendations. I recall some of the Board directors at the time were not sure if we should go with someone internal or perhaps focus more on advertising the position externally. I made the recommendation to the Board that Teresa the former Operations Manager should act as Secretary General for a 6 month trial period. At the end of the 6 months the Board unanimously agreed that Teresa should be Secretary General on a full time basis. Teresa’s experience in running events, her personality and being a team player in addition to her natural leadership abilities made this an easy decision for the Board.

New Working Committees

The CANTO organization and its operations was the subject of my MBA dissertation. Several recommendations that were made from my dissertation have actually been implemented. One included promoting corporate responsibility leading to the introduction of the new CSR committee which among other things produced a best practices paper for the environmentally sound management of mobile handsets. In addition, a new Technical working committee was established which produced a paper on ‘assessing the IoT potential’ and a white video on ‘Block-chain’.

Lobbying for Spectrum

In 2015 - As CANTO Chair the organization successfully lobbied for future mobile services in the UHF Band to go forward to the World Radio Conference (WRC); we successfully lobbied Caribbean countries to vote for mobile service for the UHF Band at the Inter-American Telecommunications Commission meeting (CITEL) in Ottawa, Canada. Mobile services in the UHF band went forward to WRC 15 as a Multi-Country proposal; what exactly did this mean? CITEL was the only regional group that took a neutral position instead of “no change” on 600 MHz issue. All other 5 main regions in the world indicated “no change”. This “neutral position” adopted by CITEL was due to the influence by the Caribbean states. The Caribbean got together as a group and forced enough votes to take a neutral position on the 600MHz. This landmark result was largely due to CANTO’s lobbying efforts. As a result of this decision, the FCC in the United States issued the 600MHz spectrum which of course has a major influence on the Caribbean region. This is one example of how the Caribbean can influence policy and make a difference on a global scale by coming together as a unified region.

Industry Led Regulation

In 2016 - CANTO introduced a landmark agreement for most Network Operators in the Caribbean by introducing the **Code of Practice for Safeguarding the Open Internet**: Network Operators agreed not to block Over The Top operators. This was an historic event as more than 30 operators signed the Code of Practice. This agreement is an example ofindustry led regulation.

Collaboration - Involving all ICT Stakeholders

Henry Ford once said “Coming together is a beginning, staying together is progress, and working together is success.”

We changed CANTO’s mission to:

*Influence the innovation and development of ICT solutions for the benefit of members by developing, navigating and leveraging relationships with all stakeholders.*

*Advocate for policies, legislation and rules which advance the creation of an environment which facilitates the deployment of services and technologies around the region.*

The mission has evolved over the years by focusing more on inclusiveness: that is, embracing **all** ICT stakeholders in the region. We advocate on key issues of the day more often than we did in the past and we try to create an environment that encourages investment and innovation.

**Ladies and Gentlemen** one of the key lessons learnt is that it is better to be inclusive and encourage all ICT stakeholders to be involved in the process - this produces the best results. Our conference has evolved over the years from one which was simply geared towards Network Operators and industry suppliers to one which is now far more inclusive of all stakeholders in the ICT industry. Last year we had senior level high quality speakers which included The FCC Chairman Ajit Pai. We had 12 Ministers and over 40 regulators from across the region attended and of course most of the Network Operators culminating in near 500 delegates – this was in fact the largest ICT event in the Caribbean. We also introduced GSMA Workshops at our CANTO conferences.

**Conference and Exhibition**

For those of you that could not attend last year’s Conference and Exhibition in Panama – you missed one an amazing conference; the CANTO Secretariat received positive feedback. We made sure that the topics were subjects of interest. The Ministerial panels were particularly good. We had significant speakers from the FCC, GSMA and other major organizations. We has 2 successful GSMA workshops on spectrum management and the Internet of Things. We even arranged a private meeting for our Regulators so that they could discuss key regulatory issues of the day. We want all ICT stakeholders to get value from the Conference and Exhibition.

**My Board Directors**

I would like to acknowledge my team of Directors:

David Cox – Vice Chair, representing Cable & Wireless, Grenada

Helma Etnel – Treasurer, Telem, St. Maarten

Melesia Sutherland – representing Cable & Wireless, Antigua

Mike Antonius – Telesur, Suriname

Charles Carter – TSTT, Trinidad & Tobago

Delreo Newman – representing GT&T Guyana

Lyrio Gomez – UTS, Curacao

Desha Clifford – representing Digicel, Turk & Caicos Islands,

**Ladies and Gentlemen - in conclusion**

CANTO will continue to Engage, Lead and Advocate during this important time in our industry’s development. We will continue to strive forward no matter the challenges and we shall move forward together.

On behalf of the Board of Directors let me wish everyone a successful CANTO AGM.

Thank you and God bless

Julian Wilkins