

International Telecommunication Union

For immediate release

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World leaders agree: The future will be Built on Broadband

**As high-speed networks transform our world,
ITU Secretary-General Hamadoun Touré calls for a ‘broadband boom’
and urges all governments to move broadband to the top of their agendas**

New York, 19 September 2010 – ITU Secretary-General Dr Hamadoun Touré today challenged global leaders to ensure that more than half of all the world’s people have access to broadband networks by 2015, and make access to high-speed networks a basic civil right.

Dr Touré threw down the challenge to politicians, UN agency chiefs and industry heavyweights at the second meeting of the Broadband Commission for Digital Development, which delivered its final outcome report earlier today to UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon in New York.

“Broadband is the next tipping point, the next truly transformational technology. It can generate jobs, drive growth and productivity, and underpin long-term economic competitiveness. It is also the most powerful tool we have at our disposal in our race to meet the Millennium Development Goals, which are now just five years away,” said Dr Touré.

The Commission outcome report, which includes a High-Level Declaration calling for ‘Broadband Inclusion for All’, comprises a detailed framework for broadband deployment and ten Action Points aimed at mobilizing all stakeholders and convincing government leaders to prioritize the roll-out of broadband networks to their citizens.

Recent research suggests a strong link between broadband penetration and economic growth. “In the 21st century, affordable, ubiquitous broadband networks will be as critical to social and economic prosperity as networks like transport, water and power. Broadband will serve as tomorrow’s fountain of innovation. It represents the ripening of the digital revolution, the fruits of which have yet to be invented or even imagined.”

The report was presented to the UN Secretary-General during a side-event held in conjunction with the UN MDG Summit, which is set to begin tomorrow at UN headquarters. Receiving the report, Mr Ban noted the power of technology to inject new impetus into the development paradigm.

“Information and communication technologies are playing an increasingly important role as drivers of social and economic development, but it will take partnerships such as the Broadband Commission to ensure that those technologies live up to their extraordinary potential,” said Mr Ban. “The Commission’s report is an important contribution to our efforts to ensure that the benefits of information and communication technology can further the United Nations goals of peace, security or development for all.”

The report stresses the need for leaders to focus on building a ‘virtuous broadband development dynamic’, noting that broadband has the power to “cut a swathe through the silos associated with health, education, energy, transport, the environment and other key sectors.”

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It also asks: "What price will be paid in the brave new world of digital opportunity by those who fail to embrace broadband inclusion for their citizens?" - a stark warning in light of huge disparities in broadband affordability worldwide, which means that those who can least afford it pay the most for access, relative to average national monthly income.

While subscribers in the developed world - for example the UK, US, Canada or Australia - pay under 1% of average national monthly income for a fast broadband connection, in many of the world's UN-designated Least Developed Countries, such as Ethiopia, Malawi or Niger, even a relatively slow broadband connection costs many times an average monthly salary.

Affordability has a clear and direct correlation to take-up, so that while around 30% of people in the highly 'wired' countries of Western Europe, Oceania and North America have a broadband subscription, in BRIC countries penetration is modest at around 10%, and in the world's poorest nations broadband reaches less than 1% of the population.

The Commission outcome report stresses the importance of promoting cultural diversity and multilingualism in the online world. It urges governments not to limit market entry nor tax broadband and related services too heavily, and to ensure ample availability of spectrum to support mobile broadband growth. ITU forecasts a total of 900 million broadband subscribers by 2010 - and predicts that mobile broadband will be the access technology of choice for millions in the developing world, where fixed link infrastructure is sparse and expensive to deploy.

"The new realities and opportunities for digital development must be firmly fixed in the minds of world leaders as a leadership imperative," says the report, urging leaders to replicate the 'mobile miracle' of the first decade of the 21st century in a 'broadband boom' that will create shared high-speed resources accessible and beneficial to all.

A multimedia news release comprising broadcast quality footage and images from the meeting can be downloaded at: <http://video360.world-television.com/ITU/>

Photos can be downloaded at: www.flickr.com/photos/itupictures/sets/72157624908644814/

The outcome report of the Broadband Commission for Digital Development can be downloaded at: www.broadbandcommission.org/report1.pdf

An Executive Summary of a contribution document prepared for the meeting detailing strategies for broadband roll-out can be downloaded at: www.broadbandcommission.org/report2.pdf

A selection of quotes from the meeting can be viewed at: www.broadbandcommission.org/media/19sept2009/quotes.html

High-resolution images of the Broadband Commission campaign and campaign animations can be downloaded at: www.broadbandcommission.org/b_more.html

A full list of Commissioners can be found on the Broadband Commission website at: www.broadbandcommission.org/commissioners.html

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About ITU

ITU is the leading United Nations agency for information and communication technology issues, and the global focal point for governments and the private sector in developing networks and services. For 145 years, ITU has coordinated the shared global use of the radio spectrum, promoted international cooperation in assigning satellite orbits, worked to improve telecommunication infrastructure in the developing world, established the worldwide standards that foster seamless interconnection of a vast range of communications systems and addressed the global challenges of our times, such as mitigating the impact of natural disasters and climate change and strengthening cybersecurity.

ITU also organizes worldwide and regional exhibitions and forums, such as ITU TELECOM WORLD, bringing together the most influential representatives of government and the telecommunications and ICT industry to exchange ideas, knowledge and technology for the benefit of the global community, and in particular the developing world.

From broadband Internet to latest-generation wireless technologies, from aeronautical and maritime navigation to radio astronomy and satellite-based meteorology, from convergence in fixed-mobile phone, Internet access, data, voice and TV broadcasting to next-generation networks, ITU is committed to connecting the world.

About the Broadband Commission for Digital Development

The Broadband Commission for Digital Development is a top-level group of international experts comprising leading figures from a range of industry and public sectors. It is co-chaired by President Paul Kagame of Rwanda, and Mr Carlos Slim, Honorary Chairman of the Carso Foundation and recently named by Forbes magazine as the world's wealthiest man.

Its formation in May 2010 was driven by a passionate belief in the power of broadband improve our world.

The Commission's mission is to promote the adoption of broadband-friendly practices and policies so that the entire world can take advantage of the benefits broadband can offer.

More specifically, the Broadband Commission seeks to demonstrate that broadband networks:

- have the same level of importance as roads and electricity networks; they are basic infrastructure in a modern society;
- are uniquely powerful tools for achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs);
- are remarkably cost-effective and offer an impressive return-on-investment (ROI) for both developed and developing economies;
- underpin all industrial sectors and increasingly are the foundation of public services and social progress.

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