

Message from the ICT Authority on World Telecommunication Day 2005

The World Telecommunication Day this year marks the 140th anniversary of the founding of the oldest international organization, the ITU. Right since its birth, while traversing the telegraphy era, through radio and television broadcasting up to satellite communications and the Internet, the mission of the ITU has been to bridge technological differences and promote interconnectivity for all.

This year also marks the 20 years of the release of a landmark report which for the first time invoked the concept of digital divide between information "haves" and information "have nots" in the world. Since its publication, the ITU has been seriously working towards proposing concrete solutions to bridge that divide. Nevertheless, we see that many parts of the world are still facing problem of basic access to telecommunication.

To help focus the world's attention on issues that hinder the information society, ITU members chose the theme for this year's World Telecom Day as, *Creating an Equitable Information Society: Time for Action*; and have recommended to organise national programmes with a view to: 1) promoting awareness of such pertinent issues, and 2) recognising ICT as a tool for economic and social growth, amongst other things. In this respect the ICT Authority is very pleased to be associated with this event.

The need to encourage ubiquitous telecommunication infrastructure development with a view to increasingly fostering public access to ICT has prompted, in recent years, a paradigm shift away from nationalized provision of telecommunication services in favor of a competitive market-based model. This trend was reinforced by the commitments taken by signatory countries, including Mauritius, to the WTO Fourth Protocol to the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS).

Nevertheless, there are still significant concerns that, market opening by itself is insufficient to promoting access. In part, this reflects some commercial realities, while on the other hand it also reflects current government processes for putting up the necessary policies and institutions in place to effectively deal with increasingly complex issues that retard the development of meaningful competition. Once the policy environment is right, then it can be left up to business and consumers to determine the pace and direction of the ICT market development.

At the ICT Authority, which is the ICT sector regulator for Mauritius, in our endeavor to accomplish our mandate as enshrined under the law with respect to the democratization of access to ICTs, we have set forth our vision to play a leading role in the future of ICT in Mauritius, contributing to an efficient, competitive and optimally regulated ICT sector. To realize that vision we have set out our mission to

promote affordable and adequate access to quality ICT services through functional market-driven competition and regulatory principles in a trouble-free networked and knowledge society.

Against this backdrop the objectives we have defined are numerous but they are principally hinged on efficient management of communication resources, and consumer safeguards and awareness. The strategies we have formulated in the realization of our grand objectives revolve around technical regulation, service regulation, Economic regulation and Consumer & Social regulation, which are all in line with the functions and objects the Authority has under the law.

By issuing 18 new commercial licences over the last couple of years, the Authority has enabled new services to be introduced in Mauritius; in the same breath, the cost of many services has been reduced by over 50% on average. The number of fixed telephone connection today stands at 340,000 household over a population of 1.2 million and the number of mobile subscribers is 525,000. This gives a total teledensity of over 70%.

Further, the Authority is currently finalizing the Community Access Point project which aims at providing free Internet access to the public through 96 post offices, in line with government policy. Project of this kind has proved to be of utmost value in countries of low Internet access penetration.

I believe that the appeal: **Time for action** from the ITU, should, in the case of Mauritius be focused on strengthening our position. There is the need to create a common platform where the policy maker, the regulator, the operators, the civil society & consumers, and the academia, may meet to brainstorm on such a grand issue of national interest. This contemplation note on my behalf sums up the future action we may require for this sector.

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