

Message from the ICT Authority on the occasion of the World Telecommunications and Information Society Day (WTISD) 2010 – 17 May 2010



The purpose of the **World Telecommunication and Information Society Day (WTISD)** is to help raise awareness of the possibilities that the use of the information and communication technologies (ICT), including the Internet, can bring to societies and economies, as well as of ways to bridge the digital divide. At its 2009 session, the ITU Council adopted the theme: “**Better city, better life with ICTs**” to mark the World Telecommunication and Information Society (WTISD) Day in 2010. The theme of this year’s WTISD aims to ensure that ICTs will contribute to a better future for the growing populations of urban centres.

In line with the above theme, the ICT Authority intends to implement a series of action lines which will ensure that ICTs can further contribute to a better future of the Mauritian citizens. Such a holistic approach is based on the starting premises that no single action/project can achieve the set objective in a sustainable manner. The different action lines will aim at increasing, securing and improving quality of access to communication services in Mauritius. The specific measures will include the following:-

- I. Launch a Quality of Service QoS framework for communication services in Mauritius.
- II. Make connecting schools a priority and formal requirement in the disbursement of Universal Service Funds.
- III. Deploy a QoS measurement and assessment framework for Internet Broadband services in Mauritius.
- IV. Reinforcing the existing provisions to better curtail harmful and illegal content on the Internet through examination of the state of ISP-filtering framework deployed by ISPs under their present obligations.

I Launch a Quality of Service QoS framework for communication services in Mauritius

In order to mark the WTISD the ICT Authority is launching the QoS Consultation paper on this date. For the ICT Authority, this public consultation constitutes an important step towards a more effective industry monitoring and protection of end-users of ICT services and is in line with international regulatory trends to improve standards in ICT service performance via measurable and rigorous indicators.

Quality of Service (QoS) as defined in the **ITU-T Recommendation E.800** is *“the collective effect of service performances which determine the degree of satisfaction of a user of the service”*. QoS provides an indication of what the customers experience when using the telecommunication network.

In many countries, ICT regulatory bodies have adopted a policy of enforcing quality of service through regulation and directives. These usually require operators who provide ICT services to measure and report the quality of the services they provide. In turn the regulators publish these reports to enable the industry to use these indicators to set performance targets for improved standards.

In Mauritius, ICT service providers obtain commercial and Engineering licences from the ICT Authority to operate their services. Under one of the licence conditions, the ICT Authority imposes the obligation on its licensees *“to maintain quality of service in accordance with international best-practices”*.

As liberalisation of the ICT sector deepens, we have more and more service providers offering a wider range of ICT services. The need for a comprehensive QoS framework to measure, monitor and improve service performance also become important. The QoS framework proposed by the ICT Authority indeed goes in this direction and has been developed while taking into account the best international regulatory practices from various jurisdictions.

II Make connecting schools a priority and formal requirement in the disbursement of Universal Service Funds (USF)

In an attempt to foster and sustain the inculcation of a 'technology temper' at the grassroots level, it is essential that students continue to benefit from access to modern ICTs within the educational fabric. There are two distinct layers to ensure that the objective of connecting schools is satisfactorily ensured.

Firstly, the emphasis should happen at both the teaching and user experience levels, requiring the continued promotion of the use of ICTs as educational tools within the prescribed curriculum. Towards achieving this aim, it is imperative that on one hand, the quantity of ICT equipment (computers, projectors, printers, etc...) available to schools, and on the other hand the quality of such equipment (in terms of performance characteristics) are constantly improved upon to ensure that the workforce of the future is completely attuned to the latest technology and software innovations.

Secondly, the provision of a fast and reliable connection to the worldwide web is another prerequisite to ensure that the student population is endowed with a fundamental tool for research purposes. While such an initiative has already been launched, with a number of secondary and tertiary educational establishments being provided with entry level Internet connections, there is a need to give a further fillip to this project. The ultimate objective has to be the provision of a quality Internet connection to all schools, for all the different cycles (primary, secondary and tertiary, including the ZEP), which takes into account the selective requirements of such establishments as may arise, and ultimately, creating a connected educational network nationally.

These two layers are in line with the philosophy of projects to be funded from the USF, given the nature of the positive externalities associated with having an ICT literate student population, which will be called upon to become the ICT-centric workforce of tomorrow for the country.

III Deploy a QoS measurement and assessment framework for Internet Broadband services in Mauritius

The benefits from having a 'connected' nation through the integration of ICTs in everyday life are already set in stone, as the deployment of modern, secure and reliable ICT infrastructure helps to optimise transactions and interactions across people, businesses and institutions. One of the building blocks for the concretisation of this vision is through the promotion of high speed broadband Internet services in Mauritius, which also meets the value for money proposition from the customers' perspective.

The ultimate approach towards ensuring the above is through the implementation of a QoS measurement and assessment framework for broadband Internet services in Mauritius, which is aimed at showing the general public what level of quality they are getting for the monetary outlay they are incurring. At the same time, through the creation of this quality awareness, this will motivate operators to constantly improve the performance characteristics of their offerings within the boundaries of a competitive environment, while minimizing any unwarranted or excessive reporting to the regulatory authority. The overarching purpose of this measurement and assessment framework is aimed towards building consumer trust into the broadband offerings of operators and thereon boosting the subscription levels to such services.

In terms of project funding, the appeal of such a project to be financed under the USF has clear justifications, as in effect the operators' own contributions would be deployed towards a measurement & monitoring system of their own services, and this would become freely accessible to the public as well. This will create a motivation for continuous quality improvements from operators, which will be a pre-cursor to more competitive outcomes, with the end users standing to benefit the most.

IV Reinforcing the existing provisions to better curtail harmful and illegal contents on the Internet through examination of the state of ISP-filtering framework deployed by ISPs under their present obligations

Under section 18(1)(m) of the ICT Act 2001, as amended, one of the functions of the ICT Authority is to “take steps to regulate or *curtail harmful and illegal content on Internet and other information and communication services*”. Equipped with the above legal mandate the Authority had, under section 14 of an ISP licence, imposed the following conditions on ISP licence holders at the time of grant of licence to the ISPs:-

<p>14. Cyber Laws</p> <p>14.1 <i>The Licensee shall take all the necessary measures to discourage and prevent the flow of content which is grossly offensive or of an indecent, obscene, or menacing character or infringing intellectual property rights and international and domestic cyber laws.</i></p> <p>14.2 <i>The Licensee shall be liable and assume the sole responsibility for any claim or damage arising out of default of the licensee or any breach of section 14.1 above.</i></p>
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With a view to reinforcing the present framework, the ICT Authority is now proposing to explore further into additional technical solutions with ISPs in order **to come up with co-regulatory measures for the deployment of filtering tools at the level of ISPs and/or to make available to subscribers appropriate ISPs filtering tools for download**. For this purpose, ISP-filtering technologies benchmarked against the following criteria will be assessed:-

- **Performance** – whether the product degrades Internet performance;
- **Effectiveness** – the extent to which the products correctively identify and filter out illegal content;
- **Adaptability** – whether the products can be customised to apply different levels of filtering according to the preferences of the user.

Discussions with ISPs will also be engaged for reporting concerns, abuse and illegal behaviours. It is very important for ISPs to have in place robust procedures for handling complaints and mechanisms for prompt removal of offending contents. Measures to ensure the mandatory deployment of such filtering solutions at the level of ISPs will be examined through active consultations before issuing pragmatic regulatory decisions.

