



Touré Talks ITU, Dubai and Future Telecoms

Dr Hamadoun Touré, ITU Secretary-General, talks to Robbie Alcock of InterComms



Dr Hamadoun Touré, ITU Secretary-General

Dr Hamadoun Touré has been progressively occupying strategic positions over the past 26 years in the Technical, Operational, Marketing and Management fields.

Dr Touré was first elected Director of the Telecommunications Development Bureau (BDT) of the International Telecommunication Union at the Plenipotentiary Conference in Minneapolis (October 1998). As Director of the BDT he had the opportunity to plan and implement development strategies in accordance with the decisions taken at the Valletta World Telecommunications Development Conference

(WTDC-98). He made significant contributions to transforming the Regulatory environment and cultivating a new type of relationship with the Private Sector and succeeded in creating result oriented Public-Private Partnerships aimed at mobilizing more resources for the development of the information and communication sector.

Dr Touré's contribution was rewarded with his reelection as Director of BDT at the Marrakech Plenipotentiary Conference (October 2002). His reelection gave him the unique opportunity to supervise the implementation of two action plans, i.e. Valletta and Istanbul Action Plans, and to spearhead the adoption of a third Action Plan by the Doha World Telecommunications Development Conference (WTDC-06). In his current position he has played a significant role in the World Summit on Information Society (WSIS) process by way of launching numerous projects based on partnership building with International Organizations, Governments, Civil Society and the Private Sector.

Q: The downturn in the world economy has led to a shrinking of global trade and a stalling of many ICT projects. Do you view the role of UN bodies like the ITU as a key facilitator for moving projects forward in the developing world?

A: There's no doubt that the worldwide economic downturn adversely affected the ICT sector, just as it impacted every other business sector. ▶

▶ But while equipment manufacturers have been hit hard, our industry is very resilient. We already battled our own crisis in 2002-2003, and we learned some tough lessons that are now standing us in good stead. Most ICT companies are now lean, efficient, and in good shape to weather the storm.

We should also remember that the ICT industry has created more jobs over the past five years than any other single industrial sector. Demand for mobile telephony services, particularly in developing economies, remains strong, and large markets like Brazil, China, India and Nigeria are still registering good levels of subscriber growth, even if those figures are expected to be lower than in previous years.

As a UN agency, the crisis has put extra emphasis on our unique role as a facilitator of cooperation between the public and private sectors, and on our campaign to try to forge strategies to bridge the broadband divide.

The crisis has clearly shown how critical the role of government really is in large-scale infrastructure development like ICT networks. It has also shown that governments believe, as ITU does, in the key role of ICT as an economic driver that can help pull the world out of the current crisis.

This is because ICT has not only proved a highly resilient sector in its own right; it has the power to drive economies in other sectors – through e-commerce, e-education, e-health, and e-government. That's why so many governments around the world have announced ICT infrastructure-based stimulus packages. Many of these focus on broadband, because this is the technology that will empower us to develop more new services, applications and efficiencies.

This is also the reason why it is so critical that ITU does what it can to help avoid the emergence of a new 'broadband divide' just as we are finally beginning to bridge the Digital Divide.

Q: With your extensive experience in helping drive telecommunications development through your former role as Director of ITU-D, what are your views on the principal ways the ITU can lead over the next few years?

A: In troubled financial times, companies are looking to maximize their investments and reduce their risk. They may be less willing to stake large quantities of money on different proprietary technologies; increasingly they are seeking collaborative partnerships and examining ways to share technology and investments to reduce costs.

As the leading UN agency for ICTs, ITU is able to bring the top names from industry, government and regulators together for major events such as ITU Telecom World 2009. Through our unique, broad membership base, ITU bridges the public and private sectors, helping companies speak to other companies, to governments and to regulators. Our role as an 'honest broker' will be a critical one for ITU over the next few years, as governments and industry alike look anew to partnerships that

will stimulate the economy and promote the development of new networks and services.

And of course ITU will continue to lead the way in our traditional areas of expertise; managing the international radio-frequency spectrum and satellite orbit resources, setting the standards underpinning modern information and communication networks, helping spread equitable, sustainable and affordable access to information and communication technologies, and organizing events at a local, regional and global level that help promote the development and take-up of ICTs worldwide.

Q: Do you feel IPv6 is relevant for the developing world – or is it only a developed world issue?

A: IPv6 will take us to the so-called 'Internet of Things' – a world where machines and inanimate objects will actively interact with the network, without the need for human intervention.

Because ICTs are just as indispensable in the developing world as they are to developed economies, the issue is critical. IPv6 is clearly an important global issue. At ITU we continue support the proactive promotion of IPv6 as the new platform for innovation and business sustainability. Now that the final European IPv4 addresses have been issued, (*please see IPv6 Forum area of the journal for announcement*), we all have to finish migration now.

Q: As someone who has been involved in the setup of many telemedicine and tele-education schemes, do you feel more could be done in providing expertise to developing regions?

A: It's certainly true that we need to continue to push these applications, which can deliver enormous benefits in regions where geography and cost constraints can limit traditional service delivery. I do not believe we will meet the Millennium Development Goals without the concerted deployment of ICTs. There'll be no education advances without e-education; no improvements in public health without e-health; and no 'good governance' without e-governance. This is why this year's ITU Telecom World event features special Thematic Pavilions focusing on e-Health, on Green ICT, and on e-Education. We've developed these Pavilions in partnership with other leading development agencies, such as UNESCO, the World Health Organisation, and the World Meteorological Organization. We'll also have the Director-General of the World Intellectual Property Organization at the show to speak on technological innovation.

Q: Why did the ITU look at Dubai and what were the major attractions?

A: ITU Telecom World 2012 will be held at the Dubai International Conference and Exhibition Centre in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, alongside GITEX, the leading ICT event ▶

► for the Middle East, Africa and the South Asian region. Moving ITU Telecom World from its traditional venue in Geneva is in line with the general principle of geographic rotation between regions set down by the Plenipotentiary Conference in 2012. Dubai is a particularly exciting and appropriate location as a dynamic trade hub at the crossroads of Asia and Europe, a powerhouse of entrepreneurialism with a deep-seated and vibrant business culture and a cosmopolitan city embodying cutting-edge technology applied to daily living. The state-of-the-art venue and opportunity to leverage unique synergies alongside GITEX are further important factors.

Q: What can attendees expect from the event?

A: ITU Telecom World 2012 provides a unique global forum convening leading stakeholders from across the ICT ecosystem to engage in conferences, discussions, workshops, networking and showfloor events in a collective drive to find meaningful ICT solutions to pressing global challenges. Following the success of the format pioneered at World 2011, the event is focused on knowledge-sharing and networking at the highest level.

A dynamic conference agenda offers debate, roundtables, panel discussions and leadership key note speeches on the critical issues facing the industry and the world today, including cybersecurity, energy efficiency, citizen services, innovation, development and the economic crisis, M2M, cloud computing and smart grid communication, the optimization of spectrum resources and the convergence and transformation of the ICT value chain.

The exclusive Leadership Summit provides a collaborative platform for debate for global leaders responsible for framing and implementing ICT visions and strategies that will shape our future world. Technology Insight focuses on debate amongst digital thinkers at the forefront of ICT developments worldwide; the Young Innovators Competition calls for innovative digital ideas and solutions to real-world problems, with winning entries from social entrepreneurs aged 18 – 25 taking part in interactive workshops, mentoring and presentation sessions at the event. On the showfloor, National Pavilions from around the world

showcase the best of regional technologies and developments, and highlight key investment opportunities. Structured and unstructured networking occasions include high-level one-to-one meetings, social functions, hosting sessions, networking breaks and active engagement in the online networking portal.

Q: Dr Hamadoun Touré, what would you say is the future of ITU?

A: ITU is the leading United Nations agency dealing with information and communication technology issues, and the global focal point for governments and the private sector in developing networks and services. In an environment where ICTs are the powerhouses of the global economy and offer real solutions towards generating sustainable economic growth and prosperity, I would say ITU has an extremely important role to play in laying the foundations for the future growth and development of the ICT sector.

For nearly 150 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 Telecom World, a global ICT showcase and networking platform, brings together the most influential representatives of government and the ICT industry to exchange ideas, knowledge and technology for the benefit of the global community. The 40th anniversary of ITU Telecom shows the resilience of this important event in the fast-moving ICT world. A highlight of this year's event will be a Broadband Leadership Summit that will explore the future growth of networks and services for a connected world, further highlighting ITU's pivotal role as the leading intergovernmental agency for ICTs.

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