

M-ENABLING GLOBAL BRIEFING TOUR

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WELCOME REMARKS

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Distinguished colleagues,
Ladies and gentlemen,

- It is a great pleasure to welcome you for this m-enabling briefing session – which is being organized by G3ict, the Global Initiative for Inclusive ICTs, in cooperation with the Federal Communications Commission, and ITU, the United Nations Specialized Agency for ICTs.
- At ITU, we are committed to connecting the world, and I am pleased to be able to report that – thanks to mobile technologies – we have largely achieved this objective, with more than six billion mobile cellular subscriptions worldwide and 2.3 billion Internet users.
- ICTs are now within reach of almost all the world’s people, even those in the poorest, most rural and most isolated regions in the world.
- But there is still one very large segment of society which is under-served and under-connected.
- I am referring of course to the one billion people with disabilities of some kind or another, who face accessibility issues.
- These include: complex human interfaces which can be hard to use for those with cognitive impairments or learning disabilities; a lack of alternatives for people with poor eyesight or hearing; and handset ergonomics which simply weren’t designed for persons with physical disabilities.
- The majority of persons living with disabilities are often ‘invisible’ –either because their disabilities are not immediately obvious, or because they have fewer opportunities to interact in everyday social life.
- But just because people are less visible does not mean they don’t have the same ‘right to communicate’ as everyone else.

Ladies and gentlemen,

- At ITU, we take accessibility issues very seriously, and have been working hard over the past years to address the issues from a number of different angles – and particularly through the work of our Standardization and Development Sectors.
- All of our work in this area is designed to help achieve the goal of equitable communications for everyone, with a focus on accessible design, availability, and affordability.
- The ITU’s Standardization Sector has been working at improving ICT accessibility standards for some years. Indeed, several of our ITU-T Study Groups are now working on Human Factors and Accessibility, and all of our Study Groups use an accessibility checklist when starting work on new standards.
- The creation and adoption of international telecommunication standards helps to promote the development of assistive products and services that are interoperable on a global basis.
- These can be simple improvements such as standardizing telephone service pictograms, symbols and icons, or more complex ones, such as defining the requirements for sign language and lip reading in video materials.

Distinguished colleagues,

- Turning now to ITU’s Development Sector, we also do valuable accessibility work here in:
 - Helping our Members States understand and meet their obligations under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities;
 - Encouraging the exchange of best practices;
 - Helping to develop and promote policy guidelines and provide policy advice;
 - Developing pioneering projects such as a text-to-speech engine in the Mongolian language; and
 - Creating greater awareness through conferences and publications.
- A good example of this last activity is the thematic report we published, in cooperation with G3ict, on “Making TV Accessible” which is available for free download on the ITU website and the forthcoming report,

“Making Mobile Phones and Services Accessible.” which will also be freely available from ITU’s website.

- Another very positive result of our cooperation with G3ict has been the development and launch in 2010 of the ‘e-accessibility policy toolkit for policy makers’ – which has already become a primary reference in matters of ICT accessibility among international policy makers.
- I think we can all agree that sharing good practices and solutions that work to benefit anyone with a disability is a necessity for all stakeholders.
- The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities clearly defines ICT accessibility as an imperative: the majority of ITU Member States have ratified it and now seek to actively ensure that mobile accessibility and mobile assistive solutions are widely available and affordable.

Ladies and gentlemen,

- Let me close by emphasizing the power of partnership.
- Through partnership, we are here, today, and I am delighted that G3ict took the initiative in getting us all together to collaborate globally on promoting mobile accessibility through the M-Enabling summits and briefing sessions held around the world.
- Getting all the stakeholders together to share solutions which are workable and sustainable from both a technical and business standpoint is beneficial to all.
- In a world where one in seven people suffers from some kind of disability, we must make ICTs not just more accessible in themselves, but also leverage the incredible power of ICTs to drive innovative solutions that work for all. Global cooperation, sharing of good practices and economies of scale can help us achieve this objective.

I wish you a productive session and look forward to our cooperation.