



**ITU TELECOM WORLD 2003**  
Geneva 12-18 October


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## ITU TELECOM WORLD 2003 Opening Press Conference — 11 October 2003

**Yoshio UTSUMI, Secretary-General,  
International Telecommunication Union**

Welcome, and thank you for coming.

Before I say more about TELECOM, I would like to say a few words about ITU — the International Telecommunication Union.

ITU is the organizer of the TELECOM event. Founded back in 1865, it is the world's oldest intergovernmental body, and a United Nations agency. This gives a clear indication of how important communication is to a society undergoing rapid industrial change.

With 189 Member States, ITU includes almost all of the countries in the world. Uniquely, for a specialized agency of the United Nations, the Union also has around 650 Sector Members, comprising industrial companies, public and private operators, broadcasters and regional/international organizations.

ITU plays a number of different roles.

One is to develop and adopt telecommunication standards.

Another is to allocate and oversee the use of the radio-frequency spectrum for applications like satellite TV, mobile phones and the wireless Internet.

ITU also strives to accelerate and expand telecommunication growth, particularly in the developing nations of the world.

Finally, ITU organizes TELECOM events, which bring together the most influential representatives of government and industry to exchange ideas, knowledge and technology for the benefit of the global community, and in particular the developing world.

The TELECOM event came into being in 1971. Exhibitions were combined with a Forum not only to cover exciting developments in technology, but also to track and highlight industry trends and share information, and to foster the transfer of new technologies and information to less developed countries.

ITU TELECOM World 2003, for obvious reasons, has fewer attendees than in 1999. The recent downturn has affected the entire industry.

The telecommunication industry is at an inflection point. The ICT sector is in soul-searching mode - trying to understand what went wrong. Now is the time to move forward and identify which nations and technologies, such as broadband and Wi-Fi, may fuel growth that will, hopefully, spill over into other sectors.

In a sense, this year's World TELECOM is more important than ever, as the industry struggles with intense competition, price erosion and overcapacity, and seeks a new direction.

Nevertheless, I would like to highlight some enormous successes achieved since we last gathered in extending networks, particularly in the world's poorest countries. In 1999 there were around 1 billion lines. Today there are nearly 2.5 billion. Such advances pave the way for investment and the economic growth that inevitably follow.

Indeed, the main opportunity for the industry to rebound will come from the lower-income countries of the world. Pent-up demand, simpler equipment, and more affordable communication services are dovetailing with a regulatory and economic framework that makes doing business possible where it would not have been imaginable only a few years back. And such investments are, by-and-large, profitable.

Although the commoditization of telecommunications has hurt the industry, it has also taken us closer to the utopian idea of universal access. Telecommunication services are finally becoming financially and logistically viable in emerging economies. That makes our broker role, and World TELECOM as a venue for debate and forging common solutions, all the more crucial.

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Please listen closely to what the experts have to say, particularly in the Forum sessions.

This year's TELECOM is different for other reasons, too.

We have added the TELECOM Village, a more human space, to provide an optimum environment for dialogue and negotiation amid recreated cafes, streets and open squares.

Also noteworthy is the large number of new, small to medium-sized exhibitors, primarily located in the pavilions. The fact that one out of every two exhibitors is participating in an ITU World TELECOM event for the first time illustrates how the telecommunication industry is reshaping itself, with a new wave of smaller, innovative companies beginning to emerge.

Showcase presentations also make their debut this year, where companies can break away from the noise and deliver their key messages. All these changes are designated to enable businesses to negotiate, enhance their visibility and boost revenue.

Maybe the most exciting addition, however, is the Youth Forum, where the young leaders of tomorrow will enjoy quality time with today's visionaries, to hammer out potential solutions for current telecommunication issues.

At the TELECOM event we have the honour of opening today, you will see the huge

advances that have been made by the industry in the four years since 1999, particularly in wireless and broadband.

The competitive landscape has evolved tremendously, as well.

In 1999, there were about 80 countries around the world with regulatory agencies. That number has again grown by 50%, to over 120.

Such efforts, for which ITU serves as catalyst, have helped spur telecommunication growth, particularly in mobile services which are, relatively speaking, less costly and cumbersome to install in areas with little or no infrastructure.

Today, more telephone subscribers use mobile than fixed phones; that certainly was not the case four years ago.

Worldwide, the number of mobile subscribers has rocketed, to 1.2 billion from 23 million, in under a decade. Under half of those users are in the developing world today, where 80% of the global population resides.

This has important implications for service providers and equipment manufacturers, and for how and where people will access the Internet, the likely focus being on the handset.

The rapid uptake of IP telephony is also noteworthy.

Regulatory, economic and technological forces are now converging to bridge the digital divide. The result will be, I hope, that the most advanced telecommunication services will become available, accessible and affordable to all the world's people, rather than a minority as at present.

It is in order to attain this important goal that we have organized the World Summit on the Information Society, to be held in Geneva from 10 to 12 December. Our aim is to bring together all the key corporate, political and technical experts, to seize the opportunity that lies before us.

With these brief words, I would welcome your questions.

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