ITU World Telecommunication Development Conference 2017

Background Paper

**Summary**

In October Member States and Sector Members of the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) Telecommunication Development Sector (ITU-D) will meet upon Buenos Aires, Argentina for the 8th [ITU World Telecommunication Development Conference](https://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Conferences/WTDC/WTDC17/Pages/default.aspx) (WTDC-17). Over the course of 10 days, delegates will set the development agenda and priorities for ITU-D for the next four years. The development sector’s role is to facilitate and enhance telecommunications development by carrying out several mandated tasks that include promoting infrastructure development and capacity building through partnerships, and coordinating technical cooperation for telecommunications growth and development.[[1]](#footnote-1) WTDCs focus on accomplishing a set of specific outcomes that are laid out in the ITU’s global treaty, the [ITU Constitution and Convention](http://search.itu.int/history/HistoryDigitalCollectionDocLibrary/5.21.61.en.100.pdf) and in relevant ITU Resolutions, in particular its Strategic Plan (Resolution 71). In that context, the members will discuss emerging telecommunications/ICT trends and explore areas of future focus and direction of the ITU. WTDCs serve as forum for developing countries to address shared development challenges such as bridging the digital divide.

**About WTDC-17**

WTDC is a conference hosted by the ITU every four years, and in Buenos Aires delegates will set the development agenda for the next four-year period (2018 – 2021). WTDC is a non-treaty conference. While the various instruments adopted exclusively by Member States that govern the work of the development sector, e.g. resolutions, recommendations, etc., are non-binding, the conference outcomes demonstrate a political commitment by Member States towards fulfillment and implementation of the ITU’s development agenda.

WTDC-17 provides a forum for discussion on some of the telecommunication/ICT trends and development issues such as cost of International Internet Connectivity, digital inclusion, affordable broadband access, and emergency telecommunications. WTDC-17 outcomes may influence discussions at the Plenipotentiary Conference that will be held in 2018, where a the ITU Strategic Plan will be revised.

WTDC-17 will be held from 9 to 20 October in Buenos Aires, Argentina. The theme for the conference is ***“ICTs for Sustainable Development Goals.”*** The theme is intended to increase awareness of the role of ICTs in achieving the SDGs and by linking the various outputs and activities in the Buenos Aires Action to the SDGs, demonstrate to governments how ICTs should be integrated in sustainable development (health, agriculture, environment, etc.).[[2]](#footnote-2)

**Main outcomes of WTDC-17**

Over the course of two weeks, the many commitments and negotiations by government officials, private sector and non-profit organizations will culminate in outcome documents that define the ITU-D’s focus for the next four years**.** The three main outcome documents are:

* [**Buenos Aires Declaration**](https://www.itu.int/md/D14-TDAG21.CG.OL.SPO-C-0005/en) renders solidarity and support for main conclusions of WTDC including the Strategic Objectives of ITU-D;
* ITU-D contribution to the[**2020-2023 Strategic Plan**](https://www.itu.int/md/D14-TDAG21.CG.OL.SPO-C-0003/en) which will be adopted at the next Plenipotentiary Conference in 2018; and the
* [**Buenos Aires Action Plan**](https://www.itu.int/md/D14-TDAG21.CG.OL.SPO-C-0004/en) **(BAP**)which provides direction for the ITU-D work program and activities. The BAP reflects:
	+ Outputs to fulfil the 5 Strategic Objectives of ITU-D
	+ Regional initiatives from 6 ITU Regions
	+ New and revised resolutions and recommendations
	+ New and revised questions (work items) for ITU-D Study Groups

**WTDC-17 Regional Preparatory Meetings**

In preparation for WTDC-17, Regional Preparatory Meetings (RPMs) were held in each of the 6 ITU regions. The RPMs facilitated regional coordination and preparation for WTDC-17. They also allowed Member States to report on the progress of the regional initiatives from the last Study period.

The main outcome of the RPMs is the Chairman’s Report that summarizes:

* Progress of ITU-D Programs/Activities in the region
* Identifies regional priority areas
* Regional Initiatives
* Common Proposals related to work of the Study groups e.g. proposals for new or modifications to SGs, working methods, Rules of Procedures, new/revised questions; Resolutions and recommendations)
* Consolidation of regional Inputs for inclusion in Action Plan

The [Regional Telecommunication Organizations](https://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Conferences/WTDC/WTDC17/pages/rto.aspx) will hold similar preparatory meetings to agree on and finalize the common regional proposals for WTDC-17. Some of the proposals reflect new/revised study group questions, new/revised WTDC Resolutions, draft recommendations, etc.

**Regional Preparatory Meetings (RPM)**

* [RPM-CIS](https://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Conferences/WTDC/WTDC17/RPM-CIS/Pages/default.aspx), November 9-11, 2016 in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan (Commonwealth of Independent States)
* [RPM-AFR,](https://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Conferences/WTDC/WTDC17/RPM-AFR/pages/default.aspx) December 6-8, 2016 in Kigali, Rwanda (Africa)
* [RPM-ARB](https://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Conferences/WTDC/WTDC17/RPM-ARB/Pages/default.aspx), January 30 – February 1, 2017 in Khartoum, Sudan (Arab States)
* [RPM-Americas](https://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Conferences/WTDC/WTDC17/RPM-AMS/Pages/default.aspx), February, 22-24 2017, Asuncion, Paraguay (Americas)
* [RPM-AP](https://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Conferences/WTDC/WTDC17/RPM-ASP/Pages/default.aspx), March 21-23, 2017, Bali, Indonesia (Asia Pacific)
* [RPM-EUR](https://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Conferences/WTDC/WTDC17/RPM-EUR/Pages/default.aspx), April 27-28, 2017, Vilnius, Lithuania (Europe)

**Internet Society’s Objectives**

The Internet Society’s (ISOC) mission is to promote the open development, evolution, and use of the Internet for everyone, everywhere. For 25 years, ISOC’s strategic objectives and initiatives have helped connect people in communities around the world, supported the growth and development of Internet technology, and advanced a bottom up, multistakeholder approach for Internet matters. Together with our partners and community of more than 100,000 members, 123Chapters and more than 164 organizational members from across the world, ISOC is uniquely positioned to provide leadership and expertise on policy, technology and development.

As a Sector Member of ITU-D, ISOC will be participating at WTDC-17. We will engage delegates to ensure they are well informed on the issues as they set the development priorities for the next four years.

* In Buenos Aires, we intend to deliver our key messages on “Access and Trust” in support of our Strategic Objectives. We will not only advocate the key principles in our [Enabling Environment Framework](https://www.internetsociety.org/sites/default/files/bp-EnablingEnvironment-20170411-en.pdf) and the [Multistakeholder Approach](https://www.internetsociety.org/doc/internet-governance-why-multistakeholder-approach-works) for Internet development but invite governments to fully commit to these approaches to ensure that Internet growth continues and meets the goals of the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.
* Furthermore, we will call upon delegates to consider innovative approaches such as [community networks](https://www.internetsociety.org/what-we-do/community-networks), and enabling policies that foster competition, innovation and infrastructure investment in order to overcome the toughest barriers to access and connectivity.
* As delegates consider strategies to bridge the digital divide, we want to ensure that the networks that are developed are secure, stable and reliable, and are developed on a solid foundation of Trust. We will advance key principles in our “[Policy Framework on Open and Trusted Internet](http://www.internetsociety.org/doc/policy-framework-open-and-trusted-internet)” so that Internet users maximize the technology’s full potential in a trusted environment.
* Additionally, ISOC will encourage Member States to implement the principles of ISOC’s [Collaborative Security approach](http://www.internetsociety.org/collaborativesecurity), and highlight the successful initiative between the African Union Commission and the Internet Society that produced [Internet Infrastructure Security Guidelines for Africa](https://www.internetsociety.org/doc/aiisg).
* In the context of Internet security, where there is global interdependency, accountability is key. Internet security depends not only on how well participants manage security risks they face, but also, importantly, how they manage security risks that they may pose to others (whether through their action or inaction) – the “outward” risks. Further, it depends on an acceptance of collective responsibility for the security of the Internet as a whole. Accountability for Internet security must be shared fairly and it must be underpinned by a common understanding of what is the overall objective of Internet security.
* Further, initiatives which encourage responsible disclosure of security vulnerabilities, facilitate information sharing and coordination among security experts, support research and testing of security of devices and systems, enable collaboration across borders, require appropriate disclosure of data breaches and security incidents, signal the level of security that has been deployed, are useful in addressing security challenges.
* ISOC will continue promoting and supporting spaces for constructive dialogue amongst delegates, civil society and industry about the key role that the Internet can play in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, such as in Education (SDG4) and Gender Equality (SDG5). Through a series of pre-event roundtables on SDG4 and SDG5, participants will be invited to share examples of best practices that are having a positive impact on education and gender equality, and identify actions and policies that can foster an enabling environment for development and trusted environment for the Internet’s future growth.
* In view of the task ahead, we want to encourage ITU-D to remain focused on its core development activities that have been successful in expanding access to telecommunications/ICTs in developing countries.
* ISOC will also encourage delegates to harness and strengthen ITU-D as a platform for the open exchange and sharing of information and maintain the best practices approach for development success.
* Finally, ISOC will encourage delegates to respect the diversity of roles and responsibilities in the Internet’s Ecosystem and seek conference outcomes that support the ITU-D mission and remain with the ITU’s mandate.

**Main Focus Areas:**

* **Promoting Digital Inclusion**: delegates will discuss strategies to connect remote, rural and underserved communities, access for persons with disabilities and special needs, and how to mainstream women’s perspectives in national ICT plans to empower more women in ICTs.
* **Assistance for developing countries:** the focus will be on defining the most effective approaches to strengthen and enhance the participation of developing countries in ICTs. Capacity building, technical assistance for deploying new technologies, spectrum management assistance and partnership development for infrastructure investment are some of the areas that will be discussed.
* **Access to ICTs, Services and Applications:** delegates will discuss the barriers to Internet adoption such as the cost of Internet connectivity and access to affordable and reliable broadband service. Internet Exchange Points (IXPs), IPv6 adoption/transition and enabling policies for ICT development will be taken up in this discussion. Skills training and technical capacity development are areas that will also be emphasized.
* **Emergency Services and Communications:** this is a key priority for most ITU Member States. WTDC-17 discussions will focus on strengthening and enhancing the deployment of emergency telecommunication equipment and services for disaster management, preparedness and response.
* **Cybersecurity:** these discussions will focus on programs and strategies to strengthen institutions and infrastructure necessary to build national cybersecurity capabilities and capacity of developing countries. Design and formulation of national cybersecurity strategies, establishment of national CSIRTs to protect critical infrastructure sectors, public-private partnerships, raising awareness campaigns, strategies and policies for combating spam and child online protection are just some of the areas that will be taken up in the cybersecurity discussions.
* **Internet related topics:** a range of Internet related issues will be discussed at WTDC-17 and will likely reopen geopolitical divisions, particularly on whether Internet policy issues are within the ITU’s remit and what the appropriate role for governments should be in Internet governance issues**.**
* Over-the-top (OTTs) applications and services will be discussed along two main threads. Delegates will share insights into some of the models and approaches they have used to migrate their networks from traditional to emerging technologies, and the economic effects of emerging technologies on the revenues from traditional telecommunications services. If contention arises it will be the result of any discussions that lead towards reflecting regulatory measures for OTTs in ITU instruments such as WTDC Resolutions.
* Recent cyberattacks such as the Wannacry Ransomware and NoPetya attacks will emerge in discussions on addressing international cybersecurity norms and challenges. We expect less focus on national strategies for cybersecurity and more of a focus on the imperatives for international cooperation or an International cybersecurity strategy with attempts at defining a more prominent role and commitment from governments on this issue.
* Data protection (privacy) will be discussed in the context of consumer protection as emerging technologies such as the Internet of Things, Big Data and Artificial Intelligence become more mainstream. Privacy is often a contentious ssue and the debate often centers around whether such policy aspects are within the remit of the ITU or Sovereign States.
* The [Digital Object Architecture](https://www.internetsociety.org/doc/overview-digital-object-architecture-doa) (DOA) will emerge in discussions on combating counterfeit device theft. Arguments to maintain a technology neutral stance in ITU instruments will most likely be made in these discussions.

Comments/Feedback Welcomed.

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1. “Article 21, Telecommunication Development Sector,” Collection of the basic texts adopted by the Plenipotentiary Conference, 2015. Chapter 4 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. also see: ITU [↑](#footnote-ref-2)