

WSIS+20 High Level Event

High-Level Dialogue

Space for Sustainable Development: the case of connectivity

CICG, Geneva (Switzerland)

Opening Keynote Speech

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**Mario Maniewicz,
Director, Radiocommunication Bureau**

Your Excellency, Mr. Mário Augusto da Silva Oliveira, Minister of ICTs of Angola,

Mr. Matías González Martín, Secretary General of Telecommunications of Spain,

Mr. Niraj Verma, Additional Secretary of the Department of Telecommunications of India

Ms. Isabelle Mauro, Secretary General Director General of the Global Satellite Operators Association,

Professor Tim Unwin, Catalyst of the ICT4D Collective and Emeritus Professor of Geography of the Royal Holloway University of London,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am glad to welcome you at this WSIS session dedicated to space technology for connectivity, a topic that has been not only a field of unprecedented innovations during the last two decades but also a pathway to our future.

As we gather here today for WSIS+20, it seems fitting to take a brief journey back in time to the very first session of WSIS in December 2003. The outcomes of that inaugural session still resonate today and are of particular relevance to our current discussion.

The Plan of Action adopted at that session already recognized the essential role of satellite systems for connectivity when calling “to develop and strengthen national, regional and international broadband network infrastructure, including delivery by satellite and other systems, to help in providing the capacity to match the needs of countries and their citizens and for the delivery of new ICT-based services”.

Since 2003, multiple and diverse initiatives have been developed by an ever-growing number of States to ensure the availability of such satellite services. To give you a better feeling of this development, let me simply compare two sets of figures:

- at the end of 2003, 40 countries and 6 intergovernmental satellite organisations were operating satellites, most of them on the geostationary orbit;
- at the end of 2023, 92 countries and 9 intergovernmental satellite organisations were operating satellites on all types of orbits.

When also counting countries having submitted their plans for future satellite systems for registration to ITU, we reach the impressive number of 109. What better example of the globalization of the space industry than this figure?

We are fortunate to be able to highlight during this session three prominent examples of such success: Angola, Spain and India. They will tell us about the vision behind their successes but also give some tangible examples of the benefits brought by satellite connectivity to the socio-economic development of their countries.

In parallel with governmental initiatives and also at an unprecedented pace, the satellite industry has produced countless innovations in several areas ranging from:

- the dramatic increase in throughput delivered by satellite systems: as reflected by the evolution from the rather outdated reference to “high-speed satellite services” in the 2003 WSIS Plan of Action to the current widespread adoption of the terms “Very High Throughput Satellites”, or
- the publicly famous use of lower orbits, to
- the ability to seamlessly integrate with terrestrial systems.

The Global Satellite Operators Association will be sharing insights into these and other achievements during today's session, offering a unique perspective about the industry's progression.

Looking at past achievements helps to provide us with a positive impulse towards a future of continuing progress and innovations. However all these initiatives and innovations are in vain if we lose sight of the goal they seek to support: providing means of affordable connectivity to those that are unserved or underserved. According to the latest data from ITU, the number of people worldwide not connected to the Internet in 2023 are estimated to 2.6 billion people. This number only is a stark reminder of the remaining work ahead of us. The ICT4D Collective will share with us some outputs from the research they conduct in the field of Information and Communication Technologies for Development.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

While satellite technology was initially considered to connect underserved areas such as remote and sparsely populated areas, technologies merging terrestrial communication networks and satellite systems are maturing and now offer promises of a seamless integration between this longtime-separated worlds, not only now in such remote areas but basically everywhere humans would wish to be connected.

Having in mind the SDG targets in 2030, I suggest that we also use this session to exchange about the challenges and even the obstacles faced by governments and the private sector, which are hampering a more wide-spread adoption and deployment of satellite connectivity solutions. Let's also use this opportunity to identify the most pressing issues to work upon during the coming years in the context of WSIS.

[Ladies and Gentlemen,

During the last World Radiocommunication Conference held in Dubai last November and December, the ITU Member States decided to include the topic of radio spectrum management on the Moon on the agenda of the next Conference, which will be held in 2027.

As you can see, the appetite for connectivity has no limit, not even the sky is the limit in this case... but this is also a testimony to the enduring willingness of the ITU family to ensure international legal and regulatory frameworks keep pace with new technologies.

Such a positive state of mind needs to be leveraged and extended to devise future evolutions of these legal frameworks that would ensure more and more persons on this planet have the opportunity to benefit from a connection to our digital world.

The goal is certainly a noble one; let's now discuss how to achieve it!]

Thank you for your attention.