

**Address on Internet Governance
Telecom Africa-2004, Cairo, 5 May 2004**

**Houlin Zhao
Director of TSB, ITU**

Your Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good afternoon!

It is an honour and a pleasure for me to be here with you at this session on Internet governance.

The end of the 20th century witnessed a veritable explosion in the communication and information society, particularly with the rapid growth of the Internet and mobile telecommunication which not only changed the face of communications, but also gave fresh impetus to the global economic growth. Started in the early 1990s, the Internet today has revolutionized human communications, trade, health, education and many other areas of human life. However, as is inevitable with something so big, we are seeing some problems. As we all know, Internet governance was one of the most controversial issues debated during the whole process of preparation for the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS), and it is one of two remaining issues on which WSIS requested the Secretary-General of UN to establish a Working Group to look at.

Why did it become such a hot issue? It is clear to me that this is not because the developing countries do not understand the Internet and raise this issue at WSIS out of ignorance. If this were true, I would ask why, among developed countries, this is also a hot topic for debate. In my opinion, this is because the issue itself is no longer a purely technical one, but has become a highly politically sensitive one during recent years.

In both output documents “Declaration of Principles” and “Action Plan”, it is recognized that the global coordination of the Internet, and its good functioning and continued expansion, encompass both technical and policy tasks. WSIS recognized that policy authority is the sovereign right of governments; that the private sector has had and should continue to have an important role in the technical and economic fields; that civil society has played and should continue to play an important role; that intergovernmental organizations have had and should continue to have a facilitating role in the coordination of public policy issues, and that international organizations have had and should continue to have an important role in technical standards and relevant policies.

Many governments consider that Internet governance affects the sovereignty of countries; therefore, governments should play an active role in it. Furthermore, they are not happy with the existing situation that only private-sector entities manage everything. These people have argued that the legal character of ICANN, which operates under the framework of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the US Department of Commerce, is a matter of concern to many countries; and they would like to request an intergovernmental organization to take care of the issues that affect sovereignty, while technical matters, and possibly operational matters could be left to the private sector.

However, others, although recognizing the need for a more active government role and some other changes, prefer to keep the basic arrangement of the current system, i.e., to leave all issues in the hands of the private sector. They have argued that the factors mentioned above are not an impediment to private entities such as ICANN performing the tasks and they consider that if an intergovernmental organization, for example, the International Telecommunication Union (ITU)

were to step in, it would control everything and private organizations would lose their influence and, more seriously, might disappear, and this would threaten the stability as well as future evolution of the Internet.

In the early draft WSIS Declaration of Principles and Plan of Action, there were specific wordings of “an international organization” in contrast to “an intergovernmental organization” concerning management of issues related to Internet governance. These contrasting wordings were interpreted by some people as a debate on a choice between ICANN and ITU, or in other words the wording suggested that ICANN and ITU are mutually exclusive alternatives to deal with international Internet governance matters. This should not be the case. This is not the case.

In reply to the reform call by ICANN in 2002, I sent a paper to ICANN, clearly indicating that ITU would seek to cooperate with ICANN, particularly with issues where ICANN faces some difficulties but ITU has the competence. There was no proposal in this paper to replace ICANN. The ITU Member States unanimously supported this paper.

ITU already cooperates with ICANN in several ways. In 1999 ITU was a founding member of ICANN's Protocol Support Organization (PSO), now replaced by the Technical Advisory Committee (TAC). ITU is a member of ICANN's Government Advisory Council (GAC), and as Director of TSBI was a member of an ICANN Independent Review Panel Nominating Committee. In March 2003, ITU organized a ccTLD Workshop, which was very well attended. The results of the workshop were widely appreciated, including by the ICANN staff who attended the workshop. Also in July 2003, I met with the newly appointed President of ICANN. We exchanged views on issues of common interest and agreed to seek closer cooperation. I am very pleased with this first face-to-face meeting with him. I firmly believe that today neither ITU, nor ICANN, nor anybody alone, can take care of everything. ITU seeks an efficient and effective international cooperation with all partners concerned, including ICANN. ITU would be pleased to leave the tasks to the competent entities that have handled them successfully, no matter if a public entity or a commercial agency. ITU would take an active part in those areas where governments express their interest. ITU would also continue to contribute to the technical studies, such as security issues regarding the Internet. I am pleased to see that there also exists good will from ICANN to work with ITU. Recently, I received a proposal from Mr. Twomey to co-chair a workshop in Malaysia this year. I promptly accepted his proposal. This joint workshop will be held on 24 July 2004. I would welcome any proposal to bring all stakeholders together to address the Internet governance issue. Cooperation between ITU and ICANN, together with others, would allow all the different communities around the world that use, provide, operate, and design the Internet to address efficiently and effectively, in a constructive and productive manner, the various issues which have to date proven difficult to resolve within any one particular organization, such as ITU and ICANN.

In February 2004, ITU organized a Workshop on Internet governance. We saw a lot of high-value input from the various stakeholders. For your information, ITU also sent a letter to Mr. Kofi Annan earlier this year, to express our wish to contribute to the work he would undertake on Internet governance, for which ITU received an appreciative reply.

Recently, I heard an argument that Internet governance is a topic much wider than the mission of the ITU, and that, therefore ITU should not be engaged. Although I share the view that Internet governance is a topic much wider than the ITU's mission, I would not agree that ITU should therefore not participate. Since Internet governance is a topic which has a broader scope than any organization can match, we should not therefore single out any particular organization, no matter whether an “international organization” or an “intergovernmental organization”, or any organization. On the contrary, we should welcome everybody to join the discussions, as Internet governance affects everybody's life in one way or another. Bearing in mind the fact that the

mandate of WSIS is much wider than that of ITU and that ITU was called upon to assist the UN in organizing the first Phase of WSIS, as such, I believe the ITU is ideally placed to support the UN Secretary-General in his efforts on Internet governance. I would like to reiterate that the whole world is looking for a better solution for Internet governance, unwilling to maintain the current situation. Otherwise, it is meaningless to work on Internet governance by establishing a Working Group by Mr. Kofi Annan, as requested by WSIS.

The International Telecommunication Union (ITU) was founded in 1865. After the United Nations was established, the ITU became a UN specialized agency for Telecommunications. The purposes of the Union are given in the ITU Constitution. Essentially, the ITU's role is to provide a forum in which the Union's membership can cooperate for the improvement and rational use of telecommunications of all kinds. At present, ITU's membership includes 189 Member States and around 700 private sector Members. The ITU has a proven track record of efficiently and effectively performing numerous coordination functions for global identifiers that are essential for the good functioning of critical infrastructures. For example, the ITU defines and manages E.164 numbering resource and the E.212 mobile numbering resource. It is widely acknowledged that the ITU performs its tasks to the general satisfaction of industry, governments, and the public at large, using processes that are open, transparent, and ensure accountability to all stakeholders. It should also be noted that ITU does not control any private telephone conversations although ITU developed the public telephone numbering scheme, for example, 41 for Switzerland, 202 for Egypt, 966 for Saudi, 963 for Syria. ITU allocated these country codes, but ITU has never stepped in to control any private telephone conversations, and ITU will never do so in the future.

ITU is an effective public-private partnership since 1865. In the ITU, industry and governments work together, to achieve common goals for the public benefit. ITU is unique in this partnership between governments and industry for information and communication technologies (ICT).

There is a lingering negative perception of ITU's past. But the situation today is very different from what it was some years ago. Working methods have been streamlined, decision-making is faster, and online tools are used intensively. The ITU's speed to approve its technical Recommendations today takes about two months, which can challenge any global organizations who develop standards for ICT. Membership has increased, in particular among Sector Members and among developing countries.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In conclusion, I would like to re-emphasize the importance of having an efficient and effective dialogue among all stakeholders on Internet governance and, once again, I would like to assure you that ITU will do its best to contribute to the WSIS work on Internet governance. ITU sincerely hopes that we would go to Tunis in November 2005 for the second phase of WSIS with a good proposal to meet the challenges to the satisfaction of all.

I wish you a successful meeting.

Thank you for your attention.