The ITU the world needs now

Vision Statement of Tomas Lamanauskas

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If I am given the mandate by Member States, I will work to ensure that the ITU fully leverages its experience, expertise and resources to help the world respond to the most pressing challenges, and to take advantage of the opportunities, by:

1) **Building broad impact-oriented partnerships to bring everyone to the digital world;**
2) **Raising ambition on sustainability as a key ITU-wide priority ensuring that every ITU initiative and activity includes a climate change perspective;**
3) **Becoming an organization that is fit-for-the-times, further raising the bar on results-orientation, accountability and transparency, speed and efficiency, flexibility and agility, and utilisation of modern digital tools and working methods.**

Above all, I am committed to the ITU as a neutral venue, where everyone seeks mutual understanding, aims to deliver together on the most pressing issues of the day, and jointly works towards the common vision for a truly connected world.

At the start of the Covid pandemic, as countries around the world locked down, governments realised how reliant they are on technology to keep society and the economy functioning. But what, exactly, should they be doing? Every country was in an unprecedented situation, and many of the challenges they faced were the same.

We launched the REG4COVID platform in one week. It enabled governments, regulators and other stakeholders to share ideas and learn from each others' experiences.

As the first wave of the crisis began to ease, and governments started to ask themselves how technology could help them to build back better, some ITU Member States came to us and asked what we could do to help less well-connected countries to leverage the power of digital infrastructure in responding to and recovering from the pandemic, and how they could support this work. We created the [Connect2Recover](#) initiative.

These two initiatives, which were part of my recent work with the ITU as Special Advisor on Crisis Strategy and Partnership Initiatives, showcase what the ITU does best: bringing everyone together, enabling us to learn from each other and support each other, and helping to leverage digital connectivity and technologies to tackle the challenges the world faces and seize opportunities in front of us - as one. And it can be fast, agile, responsive, efficient and impactful. As one President of an ITU Member State famously used to say: "yes, we can".

I have been a proud member of the ITU community throughout my career. I have seen the value (and the shortcomings) of the ITU, as a staff member and adviser, and while representing Member States as well as the private sector. I have experienced the work of the ITU from the perspective of governments from four regions of the world, countries with very diverse levels of economic development, digital connectivity and income levels.

Based on my experience, I know we are capable of adapting to meet the new challenges that are coming our way and take advantage of the opportunities.

What do I think they are? What should we do to rise to the task? And what will I bring to the role?

PARTNERSHIPS FOR CONNECTIVITY

First, we must build partnerships to bring high quality connectivity to everyone. The pandemic has been a huge call to action to accelerate our efforts to close the digital divide. We need to speed up progress, and governments cannot do it on their own.

The world enjoys unprecedented levels of connectivity. However, many people remain unconnected and [93% of them](#) live in lower and middle income countries. Significant investments in connectivity will be required to ensure everyone can benefit. The vast majority of these investments, an [estimated](#) 75%, will be from the private sector.

In an increasingly complex connectivity ecosystem, investments will come not just from telecommunications operators but also private equity, infrastructure funds, hyperscalers, tower companies, independent fibre companies and other new players.

The ITU has a critical role to play in bringing together all stakeholders to form impact-oriented partnerships for universal meaningful connectivity. We have the capacity to bring major players around the table and help create enabling environments to unlock the flow of investments, as well as to maximise the use of the connectivity deployed.

We must reach the poorest countries and the remotest communities with connectivity of high enough quality for people to do schoolwork, earn a livelihood, access health services, and achieve whatever their personal ambitions may be.

From my time advising the government of Vanuatu, I know what it takes to widen the reach of quality connectivity, rapidly and from a low base. We delivered a comprehensive National ICT Policy developed in a truly collaborative manner, negotiated the deployment of the country's first submarine cable - which brought an immediate 70% decrease in broadband internet prices and near doubling in subscriptions - and developed a universal access policy that the country's Prime Minister recently credited with providing 98.8% of the population with mobile coverage, and 86.2% with broadband coverage.

As governments increasingly prioritise digital connectivity in their Covid recovery plans, and diverse private sector actors are getting involved in rolling it out, I will work with the Secretary General and Bureau Directors to build cohesive and efficient partnerships that cut across the ITU, its sectors and bureaus. These partnerships must bring all the pieces of the puzzle together to get more people online, from community networks through mobile and fixed broadband to satellites, from supply side to demand side, from doing business to developing enabling policy and regulatory environments.

AMBITION ON SUSTAINABILITY

Second, we must deliver on sustainability as an organization and a sector – and give others the technological tools to meet their own climate change commitments. The survival of humanity is at stake. If we lose the planet, nothing else will matter.

The most fundamental assumption of our age – that the world will keep on getting better – is under serious threat. Climate change is looming. Net Zero by 2050 is an absolute minimum. A number of companies in our sector are leading by example in committing to Net Zero by 2030. It is crucial to make this goal as universal as possible. The ITU should also retain its focus on such challenges as reducing e-waste.

Sustainability and climate change must be a priority for the ITU across every sector, initiative and activity. We must help our industry play its part in helping humanity to overcome the existential challenge of today – by truly going "green" itself, as well as maximising the role of technology in helping others reduce emissions.

We should also support industry in ensuring that it plays its rightful role in the broader sustainability agenda. The ITU should be a key and willing partner for everyone working on this critical mission.

ORGANIZATION – FIT FOR THE TIMES WE LIVE IN

Third, we must make the ITU an organization fit for the times we live in: agile, responsive, results-based, transparent and accountable. We are one of the smallest UN agencies. We have to be fast-moving, efficient and flexible in the ways we do business. It is crucial that we leverage the rich experience and expertise of our members in achieving this.

I know that my own sense of pride in being part of the ITU community is widely shared. We are blessed with staff who are loyal, committed and believe in our mission. We need to unleash the spirit of service

and drive for achievement by empowering our staff to take the initiative and deliver to our members and the world. Full transparency and accountability are an imperative. These should be achieved not through box-ticking procedures, but meaningful risk-based frameworks encouraging individual responsibility and ownership, with pragmatic organisational controls.

The ITU needs to complete the integration of a results-based management approach in all its strategic, operational and financial management processes. Our business processes, operations and work platforms should reflect state-of-the-art practices to serve our members and the world in the best possible way. We must set an example for the UN family in leveraging digital tools and working methods and adapting to the 'new normal', including the economic environment.

Finally, it is also crucial that the ITU at all levels works closely with its members – Member States, Sector Members and academia – recognising their vast experience and expertise, and their role in building an ITU that would truly serve them. The organization should also fully embrace a collaborative approach and work with others to maximise the common good.

These ambitions mean nothing if we cannot work together. From connectivity to climate to Covid, the challenges of today and tomorrow do not stop at borders. We need to bring everyone on board – find out where we agree, make tangible progress in such areas together, and keep engaging where sufficient agreement is not possible yet.

When I joined the ITU as Head of Corporate Strategy, the previous year had seen an unprecedented breakdown of consensus and trust at WCIT-12. We responded by shifting focus from what divided us to what united us. The result was the Connect 2020 agenda (now Connect 2030), with more than 100 countries making tangible national commitments to support its implementation: when we looked for common ground, it turned out that we could agree on quite a bit.

Since 1865, the ITU has been the place where the world comes together to agree on how to communicate. Through the two World Wars, the rise of independent countries, and the Cold War, the ITU has kept the conversation going. We have always been a place where everyone can come to the table. That has never been more important than in today's uncertain, tense and rapidly changing world.

Whatever the coming years bring, as Deputy Secretary General I will work tirelessly to find agreement on addressing the biggest challenges we face and seizing the opportunities of the day. Not just aiming for agreement, but to make tangible progress – together. And when we disagree – as we will – I firmly believe that the ITU must remain a place where we will always be able to keep on engaging with each other.

We managed to help the world communicate for 156 years. With the right energy and determination, the aim for a joint vision for a truly connected world, and a spirit of understanding, I am convinced we will be able to continue delivering on this in the future. The world – more than ever – depends on us succeeding.