

Message by the UN Secretary-General

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World Telecommunication
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Message by Mr Kofi A. ANNAN
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United Nations



It was 160 years ago next week that Samuel Morse used a simple series of dots and dashes to send the first message by telegraph — ushering in the dawn of the telecommunications age. Within a decade, telegraphy had become a routine public service.

Today, many people could not imagine daily life without the use of increasingly sophisticated information and communication technologies (ICTs), from television and radio to the mobile telephone and the Internet. Yet for millions of people in the world's poorest countries, there remains a "digital divide" excluding them from the benefits of ICTs.

The theme of this year's observance of World Telecommunication Day — *ICTs: Leading the way to sustainable development* — reminds us that ICTs serve as crucial tools for achieving economic progress. Affordable technologies, in the hands of local communities, can be effective engines of change, both social and material. Access to information and technological know-how is essential if the world is to defeat hunger, protect the environment and achieve the other Millennium Development Goals agreed by Heads of State and Government at the United Nations Millennium Summit in 2000. But to harness this potential, we need to forge global partnerships for development between governments, the private sector, civil society and the United Nations system.

Last December, at the first phase of the World Summit on the Information Society in Geneva, leaders set out a shared vision of how the world can eliminate the digital divide in content and physical infrastructure. This was the first global gathering of its kind, and I was very encouraged by the innovative initiatives that were put forward and by the strong commitment that was voiced towards overcoming the disadvantages faced by so many of the world's people. I urge Member States and all other stakeholders to sustain that commitment as we prepare for the Tunis phase of the Summit next year.

On World Telecommunication Day, let us resolve to do all we can to lead the way to a truly open, inclusive and prosperous telecommunications age.

Kofi A. Annan
Secretary-General
United Nations