UN Broadband Commission urges public-private partnerships to reach 'the unconnected'

17 March 2017 – New public-private partnerships are essential if broadband is to reach everyone and help accelerate the achievement of global sustainable development goals, members of the United Nations broadband commission said today.

&#8220ICT [information and communications technology] and broadband are linking everyone and everything for the betterment of economies and societies,&#8221 said Rwandan President Paul Kagame, Co-Chair of the UN Broadband Commission for Sustainable Development, during its spring meeting in Hong Kong.

&#8220We are motivated by wanting to have the global community connected, especially the billions of unconnected. We will succeed when we work together: government, industry and civil society leaders,&#8221 he added.

The Broadband Commission was established by the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) and the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in May 2010 with the aim of boosting the importance of broadband on the international policy agenda, and expanding broadband access in every country as key to accelerating progress towards national and international development targets.

Following adoption of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in September 2015, the Commission was re-launched as the Broadband Commission for Sustainable Development to showcase and document the power of ICT and broadband-based technologies for sustainable development.

According to a press release on the meeting, some 5 billion people are currently without mobile broadband access, meaning that the paths to access digital services and applications are blocked for much of the world's population – holding back progress on sustainable development.

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The release also said that at the spring meeting, the need for a new deal between all players was roundly debated, with renewed commitment to work towards concrete actions that will effectively connect the unconnected with broadband – especially to support least developed countries.

In particular, emphasis was placed on remote and rural areas which represent the biggest challenge and where barriers to access need to be also viewed through the prism of affordability and content, notably local and multi-lingual content.

Houlin Zhao, ITU Secretary-General and Commission Co-Vice Chair, stated, &#8220ICTs underpin vital achievements and modern services in many sectors, and governments and industry must increasingly work together to create the conditions so badly needed to facilitate the growth of broadband for sustainable development,&#8221 he stressed.

Irina Bokova, UNESCO Director-General and Commission Co-Vice Chair, noted, &#8220We must ensure the digital revolution is a revolution for human rights, in order to promote technological breakthroughs as development breakthroughs.&#8221