

Doreen Bogdan-Martin

United States

Candidate
for the post of
ITU Secretary-General



What is your view on the role of digital technologies in a rapidly changing world?

My view is ambitious.

Digital technologies are transforming our lives, from governance to health care, to finance to production, education, entertainment and how we relate to one another. They are at the frontier of human creativity and key to solving our global problems, from climate change to poverty. Reaching across long distances in an instant, they connect computing power in the pockets of billions of people to vast human knowledge. The opportunity is an exponentially growing network effect for humanity.

But my primary ambition is to include those currently excluded – those living in poor areas, women and girls without educational opportunities, people with disabilities, members of ethnic or linguistic minorities, among others. We must deliver connectivity to them, be smart in innovating for inclusive economic productivity, and at the same time protect our populations from cyber risks.

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How should ITU evolve to maintain relevance in today's world?

Just when we need to act collectively – from caring for our planet to managing pandemics to protecting our children online – we seem more deeply divided both between and within countries. I cannot think of a time when an organization like ITU should be more relevant. We convene the world's regions and nations, along with many of its important information and communication technology (ICT) businesses, civil society, and academics, to work on development, technical standards, and radio spectrum. But to be relevant, ITU must evolve and sometimes break from old ways.

We must keep our eyes on the prize – breaking through the real problems – and this means being a listening and learning organization. We need to more vigorously embrace the very innovations we espouse. We must use data analytics better to give us a fact-based understanding of connectivity challenges. We must bring thought leadership and expertise in transformational technologies such as 5G, 6G, new space technologies, the Internet of things (IoT) and artificial intelligence (AI). We must apply critical feedback checks to keep ourselves impact-driven.

Being relevant also depends on improving our internal collaboration platforms. If our mission is to connect the world, we need to connect more regularly with our members and regional organizations. To achieve anything, we need to earn everybody's confidence, so we must be transparent about what we do with our members' resources, and why, and be responsive to their concerns.

If elected, what are your top three priorities and how do you plan to achieve them?

First, we must aim high to deliver universal digital connectivity that is safe, inclusive and affordable for the 2.7 billion people still off-line. I will strengthen ITU's advisory services, especially on regulatory practices that attract investment and ensure competition. We must walk our talk. I will build ITU's expertise to put us at the vanguard of understanding communication technologies and practical realities on the ground. I am pursuing this with our Last Mile Connectivity Toolkit, our Equals Partnership to close the digital gender divide, and with our Giga partnership with UNICEF that aims to connect every school to the Internet. We will integrate the voices of developing countries, women and girls, youth, and civil society into our action planning processes.

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Second, we must collaborate for impact. I will lead ITU into a new era of global and regional partnerships, calling on the wonderful range of relationships I have built across governments, investors, operators, technology companies, standard-setting organizations, development banks, universities, and United Nations bodies. During the World Telecommunication Development Conference (WTDC) in June, I announced 426 pledges under Partner2Connect, amounting to USD 26 billion, to close the digital divide. This and the over 100 new partnerships I brokered as ITU's Telecommunication Development Bureau (BDT) Director are only the beginning. Internally, I will lead a culture of collaboration that fulfills the potential of ITU's tripartite structure to meet our members' differing needs. Closer collaboration across the three Bureaux and through our regional presence will fortify coordination and reduce duplication.

Third, we must excel as an institution both in performance and governance – making major improvements to the quality of our work and our financial accountability. We will upskill and motivate our staff with more sharing and circulation of knowledge and people. I will deepen results-based management in pursuit of clear and measurable outcomes across the organization. I will strengthen the transparency mechanisms that hold us accountable, and we will become known for our ethical integrity. To be as agile, resilient and secure as the networks we promote, I will ensure that ITU develops up-to-date operational readiness, business risk assessments, contingency plans and crisis management.

◆ ***With seven years remaining in the UN Decade of Action, how can ITU, as the UN specialized agency committed to connecting the world, help accelerate progress on the Sustainable Development Goals?***

We are slipping on many of the SDG targets. We must turn this around with a step-change in growth of Internet access. We must push the boundaries of what we imagine is possible, try different things, accepting some will work while others may not. The world can change faster than we realize.

The 2.7 billion – those currently left behind – represent a huge economic opportunity. We must set in place conditions and partnerships for investment to bring the unconnected online. As my work with the ITU/UNESCO Broadband Commission shows, this requires public-private collaboration, which is ITU's sweet spot. As the right specialist organization among the range of UN bodies, we can help support demand-side use cases that can be brought to scale – like digital financial services, online education and health. These very network effects, intrinsic to our industry, are vital for sustainable, inclusive development to prevail.



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◆ ***Tell us about your achievements in leadership and building consensus.***

I lead with the interest of all countries in mind. My open, consensual leadership style has borne much fruit. In addition to the achievements mentioned above, it has enabled numerous major joint initiatives with UN and donor agencies and private-sector partners. It also brought major improvements in BDT's performance and accountability.

My [vision statement](#) summarizes these. I have led three Plenipotentiaries, eleven ITU Council meetings, two World Telecommunications Policy Forums, eleven Global Symposiums for Regulators, and twenty-four meetings of the ITU/UNESCO Broadband Commission. The one thing I will add here is how proud I am of how, with my support for staff members, we at BDT redeployed during the COVID-19 pandemic to maintain business continuity, staff morale and engagement with our members.

◆ ***What else would you bring to the table as the next ITU Secretary-General?***

I will pursue an outcome-driven focus on ITU's mission, with respect and integrity and without political agenda. Under my leadership, ITU will have the trust of our members and partners.

◆ ***Is there anything else you would like to add?***

As a mother of four, I know how urgent it is to build a safer, stronger digital world for all our children.



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