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PLENIPOTENTIARY CONFERENCE 2022

BUCHAREST, ROMANIA

OPENING CEREMONY

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>> CRISTIANA FLUTUR: Please be seated.

Ladies and Gentlemen, please welcome His Excellency, the Deputy Prime Minister of Romania, Mr. Sorin Mihai Grindeanu; the Secretary‑General of the International Telecommunication Union. Dear guests, please welcome the Deputy Prime Minister of Romania, Mr. Sorin Mihai Grindeanu; the Secretary‑General of the International Telecommunication Union.

Everyone, if you can please take your seats. We're about to begin. Dear Deputy Prime Minister, dear Secretary‑General and ITU elected officials, dear Ministers, dear Distinguished Representatives of the Romanian Administration, Your Excellencies, High‑Level Representatives of ITU Member States, dear guests, dear friends, dear ITU family, we have the honor to officially welcome you to Romania.

(Applause.)

>> CRISTIANA FLUTUR: It warms my heart to see so many of you here today in this beautiful September day in Bucharest. We are starting the Opening Ceremony of the 21st Plenipotentiary Conference of the International Telecommunication Union. We will now listen to the Romanian National Anthem performed by Cantus Mundi choir.

(Singing of Romanian National Anthem)

(Applause.)

>> CRISTIANA FLUTUR: It was a very special moment. Next the Cantus Mundi aim is the hope for a future in which the people of the world are united. Let us connect through song and music and let the children build this future of humanity the way they see it.

(Cantus Mundi choir)

(Applause.)

>> CRISTIANA FLUTUR: Thank you. I hope you enjoyed this moment. Now there is a surprise for you. As you know art can be the most natural form of uniting people. It builds communication bridges, easily promotes a message, but above all it spreads beauty and joy all around. To this end the National Chamber Choir will perform another song. And we propose to have this as the ITU PP‑22 Anthem called Connect and Unite.

(National Chamber Choir)

(Applause.)

>> CRISTIANA FLUTUR: Thank you very much. Thanks to Cantus Mundi and the National Chamber Choir for these moments. And I understand by your applause that you agree to have this theme for PP‑22. Thank you. And now I have the honor to introduce Mr. Sorin Mihai Grindeanu, the Deputy Prime Minister of Romania. Excellency.

>> SORIN MIHAI GRINDEANU: Thank you. Mr. Secretary‑General, Ladies and Gentlemen, on behalf of the host country I want to express a warm welcome to all the Delegates who are present here in Romania on this very special occasion.

It is an honor and a privilege for us to organize the ITU Plenipotentiary Conference 2022 in a Member State of the European Union for the first time in the last 30 years.

I must confess my special connection to this conference ever since I was the head of the Romanian regulator, ANCOM, I supported the idea of hosting, hosting it in Romania. And I believe in our capacity to deliver an impeccable event at the palace of the Parliament.

I was happy also to hear that more than 50 top‑level representatives attended the Ministerial Round Table yesterday. An event that produced an important result, namely Bucharest Declaration, building a better digital future for all.

From the late 19th Century, when the telegraph and telephones were first introduced to the present day the ITU has been a global platform for cooperation in the field of communication, whether it is the management of satellite orbits and radio spectrum, or standards in electronic communication. ITU was the first international organization to which Romania dealt and in full process of defining the national identity since 1866.

We are in the middle of a digital revolution that enables and provides the means for the development of new industries and coverage services such as health care, Smart Cities, and homes.

How we live and use this technological advantage dictates the development of our economies and societies. Digital technologies deliver great services to the humanities, but these technologies also generate fundamental ethical concerns.

Precisely for this reason the United Nations Member States must assess the risks generated by the improper use of digital and other emerging technologies on privacy, freedom of expression, and freedom of movement.

At this turning point in technological development we must not forget our essential duty to respect the human being, its fundamental rights and freedom. Only fulfilling this duty allows us to protect the freedom and prosperity of future generations in whose lives the technologies we see today as emerging will play a determining role.

Thanks to the coherent public policies led by MCID and ANCOM, Romania enjoys a very favorable environment for the development of electronic communications. We pride ourselves on our specialist IT workforce. Romania occupies leading positions in global ‑‑ in all global statistics of digital development. 85% of fixed Internet connections allow download speeds of at least 100 megabytes per second. However, we are aware that our efforts to develop this area must continue.

We consider the further development of digital public services, connectivity, cybersecurity and digital skills.

To this end, we committed to spend 1.8 billion Euros for Romanians' digital development, the most significant financial contribution included in the National Recovery and Resilience Plan.

The conference takes place in an international context marked by major challenges for the United Nations' mandate, international peace and security, sustainable development, and Human Rights. From this perspective, the ITU Plenipotentiary Conference 2022 provides the framework for adopting decisions based on the principle of international law, the foundation of the United Nations charter.

We consider that our ITU membership is both a privilege and a responsibility. And I wish to reaffirm Romania's commitment to achieving the objectives of the Connect 2030 Agenda.

Ladies and Gentlemen, we have the opportunity to make some important decisions on this occasion. Let's work together and act in our interest. I wish you fruitful and constructive discussions for the next three weeks.

Thank you very much.

(Applause.)

>> CRISTIANA FLUTUR: Thank you very much, Your Excellency. From New York where the United Nations General Assembly takes place, the UN Secretary‑General, Mr. Anthony Guterres, has recorded a message for us.

>> ANTHONY GUTERRES: I'm pleased to greet this important conference. Digital transformation and connectivity are critical to rescuing the Sustainable Development Goals.

I commend the International Telecommunication Union's collaboration with sister UN Agencies to leverage digital technologies in support of the SDGs.

And I reiterate the importance of supporting the World Summit on the Information Society. As my roadmap for digital cooperation emphasizes it's essential that we seize the digital technology by protecting against its risks. Over the next few weeks you have the opportunity to form common positions that will shape global digital transformation for years to come. Your deliberations will help shape the future Global Digital Compact proposed in my report "Our Common Agenda".

I applaud you for making this conference gender responsive, green and inclusive of youth. I call on you to put humanity's progress at the center. The International Telecommunication Union has a vital role to play.

I wish you every success in helping to close the digital gap for an equitable and sustainable future. Thank you.

(Applause.)

>> CRISTIANA FLUTUR: Thank you. And now I will invite Mr. Houlin Zhao, the Secretary‑General of ITU to deliver his speech.

(Applause.)

>> HOULIN ZHAO: You see I use my iPad, not use my paper because my Deputy is very green minded.

Vice Prime Minister, Sorin Mihai Grindeanu, Excellencies, Ministers and Ambassadors, heads of Delegations, dear friends, Ladies and Gentlemen, how wonderful it is to see you all here today. We are grateful to all of you for making this trip despite the COVID‑19 pandemic and global geopolitical situation. Welcome to the ITU Plenipotentiary Conference 2022.

(Applause.)

>> HOULIN ZHAO: We have a wonderful day today. And this morning 9 o'clock we have also a new action we never had before. The ITU flag raising. I was very proud when I see the ITU flag be put on the top of the pole. Of course, when we have our Cantus Mundi children's choir to give us very wonderful songs and when I see these children, their eyes full of passion, full of pride, full of spirit. So it is a wonderful future for Romania. We are very grateful if their performance today.

It is fitting that Vice Prime Minister Sorin Mihai Grindeanu welcomed our conference as he was the right person who came to PP‑18 four years ago to present the invitation of Romania to host PP‑22.

Your Excellency, we are very lucky and pleased to have you with us today. Thank you very much.

(Applause.)

>> HOULIN ZHAO: I can tell you Romania hosted a marvelous, tremendous effort to have all facilities ready before we start. In September I came here to see this room is empty and many rooms in the palace not in order. But today we have everything here ready for us. It is a very good result of their hard work. So we enter the fourth year of the pandemic. It has been a trial for all of us. We have been kept apart for far too long. But we have managed to stay in touch, of course, with ICT tools.

Dear Vice Prime Minister, this long and difficult period has seen ICT become a huge part of people's lives around the world. People everywhere now recognize and appreciate the power of ICT. I'm very pleased to share with you a picture taken last week on 19th September at the United Nations General Assembly hall where I joined the other heads of UN sister organizations to discuss the future of our digital transformation. I have been there many years since 2007 but never invited to speak.

And this time, I consider this invitation to be a great honor for ITU and for the ICT family. To some extent I consider ITU is the right center of that General Assembly. For the next three weeks ITU members will discuss the future strategy plan and activities of our union at the highest level.

Bucharest will be the world capital of ICT, at least for the next three weeks. This is a momentous occasion. And I would like to take the opportunity to thank all our members and partners and others for their successful and tireless work in promoting ICT.

You join me in thanking UN Secretary‑General, Anthony Guterres, for the strong message of support to ICT and to ITU he just delivered. By highlighting the importance of ICTs for the SDGs, the leading role of ITU in facilitating ICT development and recognizing the World Summit of the Information Society, the Secretary‑General encourages to continue to rise to the occasion.

Let me know now thank our host Romania, one of the oldest and active members of our union and the city of Bucharest, one of Europe's most hospitable and cultural cities. They have spared no effort to bring us to this important moment. I take this opportunity to congratulate Romania on its digital transformation as evident by key projects like Educated Romania and RO‑NET.

Dear Delegates, we gather one more ‑‑ once more to steer our union through challenging times. The world still rears from the pandemic. Economic crisis, natural disasters, conflicts, geopolitical tensions continue to impact the billions of lives. The SDGs are under threat.

As for our own industry we need to continue to direct new and advanced ICT technologies and services and have them disputed fairly and equally across the globe. 2.7 billion people are still offline.

There are still digital divides between Developed and Developing Countries, between cities and villages, between men and women and other vulnerable groups of our population.

We need to work hard to bring them online as fast as we can with a firm belief that ICTs can help everyone everywhere.

So Ladies and Gentlemen, incredible access to ICTs is not just a moral responsibility; it is essential for global prosperity and sustainability. We have a lot of work ahead of us. Let us continue to work together in the service of human development. Let us renew our commitment to all those we serve, all the people whose lives are transformed by ICTs. Let's get to work building a better digital future for all. We thank Romania for hosting us and wish them a bright digital future. I wish you all a good Plenipotentiary Conference 2022. Thank you.

(Applause.)

>> CRISTIANA FLUTUR: Thank you, Mr. Secretary‑General, for this speech. And I also take the opportunity to thank you most of all for all the years in service of the union. A total of 36, if I'm not mistaken. Yes.

Can we give a round of applause?

(Applause.)

>> CRISTIANA FLUTUR: Thank you. The Romanian Government through the Ministry of Research, Innovation and Digitalization has played a significant role in the organization of this event. And I take this opportunity to invite Mr. Sebastian Burduja to deliver his speech.

>> SEBASTIAN BURDUJA: Deputy Prime Minister, Sorin Mihai Grindeanu; Secretary‑General, Houlin Zhao; Distinguished Delegates, Your Excellencies, it is a great honor to stand where I'm standing here today, and I wish you would all see the site I'm seeing now.

And it's such a privilege for Bucharest, Romania, to join you today. So let me start by quickly thanking everyone who made this possible; the ITU leadership team, Secretary‑General Houlin Zhao, 36 years, but he looks so young. And he is so active. And we're very grateful. So once again, Secretary‑General.

(Applause.)

>> SEBASTIAN BURDUJA: We congratulate all the countries and all the candidates for their hard fought campaigns. And speaking of campaigns, let me remind you that Romania is also running for the eighth time in a row. We seek a seat on the Council and we're counting on your support.

It's true that the world is old and ITU is old. In fact, I believe it is the oldest Intergovernmental organization in the world, dating back from 1865. But it also deals with the world's newest challenges, while still facing the old. Poverty, disease, hunger, and war itself.

Romania joined a year after the ITU was established. And the world was very, very different back then. The telegraph had been invented only a couple of decades before in 1844. In 1876 the telephone. 1901 the radio and 1971 the first e‑mail was sent. In 1973 the first mobile phone. 1974, the first personal computer. 1983, January 1, the birthday of the Internet. 1991, the first website. 1994, the first Smartphone.

And over the past two decades the pace of change has shocked us all and it includes social media networks and online streaming and advanced wearable technology and virtual reality and cloud computing. And in 2017 the best goal player in the world was an Artificial Intelligence program. This is the world we live in today.

And it is normal to feel overwhelmed by the pace of innovation. But also blessed that we can be here to discuss it, to debate it, to decide what we'll do further and how we answer the difficult questions that lie before us.

What is the balance between freedom and security? What are the boundaries of Artificial Intelligence? How do we make sure that nobody's indeed left behind? How do we connect the 2.7 billion people that to this day have never ever been online? And how do we prepare the future generations, the kids you saw here earlier on stage? How do we prepare them for the future of work?

Now yesterday we passed the Bucharest Declaration. And I'm very thankful for all of your support. We think it is an important moment because it talks about the basic principles that will make this work.

Connecting and uniting, of connecting and uniting. It is the mission of the ITU and it involves both adopting new technologies, but also preparing all the citizens of the planet to use them. The future, the future for sure will be more digital. But it is not by default better. As technologies are morally neutral. And it is in our hands how we will use them.

To conclude, I think there is three key ingredients to this success to answer these difficult questions. And the first one is partnership. Partnership between states, nations, but also partnership with the private sector and Civil Society, working together hand in hand.

The second is a sense of responsibility. In fact, the ITU I think is tremendously important because it essentially writes out our future. How do we want that future to look like? But, you know, what they say, to whom much is given, much will be required. And so please look around you today. Look around you now. And realize the burden of responsibility that comes with your mission in this amazing organization.

It is indeed about how our children will live their lives and their children and their children. Generations to come. Last but not least, there is a sense of ultraism that is needed to make this work. 150 years ago a great Romanian was born. He is not that well‑known around the world but he did something incredible. He managed to lift off the ground a self‑propelled monoplane for the first time in the history of humanity. His name was Traian Vuia. And he did leave us with a memorable quote. Asked how he was able to succeed and he said "I work not for my own glory, but for the glory of humankind".

As you face the difficult questions and the decisions over the next days and weeks here in Bucharest, please keep that in mind. We wish you lots of success. And we are so grateful to host you here in Bucharest. Thank you and thank you again to everybody who made this possible, ANCOM, all the Romanian authorities, the entire leadership team, Deputy Prime Minister Sorin Mihai Grindeanu, thank you so much.

(Applause.)

>> CRISTIANA FLUTUR: Thank you very much, Your Excellency, for your speech. I would also want to take this occasion to recognize the long career of the Deputy Secretary‑General in the ITU, Mr. Malcolm Johnson. We are very happy to have you here with us. If I can have a round of applause for him as well. Thank you very much.

(Applause.)

>> CRISTIANA FLUTUR: Thank you. We are coming closer to the end of this ceremony. So we want you to discover not only our beautiful palace of Parliament, but also more of Romania. So please enjoy a video of our traditions and beautiful places.

I think we have a bit of delay. If we can have the video.

(Video)

(Applause.)

>> CRISTIANA FLUTUR: We hope you enjoyed it. And I hope you will get a chance to enjoy physically as well Romania.

We have come to the end of our Opening Ceremony. I would kindly ask you to remain seated for a moment. And I will invite the Vice Prime Minister, the Secretary‑General, the Minister of Research, the President of ANCOM and ITU elected officials to come in front of the stage to take a group photo. It will take a moment.

(Group photo).

>> CRISTIANA FLUTUR: Thank you very much. Thank you for attending the PP‑22 Opening Ceremony. We wish you all a successful conference.

Now we have an announcement. We are kindly invited to have lunch. The lunch is provided by our Distinguished Colleagues from Tunisia in Unity Hall starting at 12:30. Thank you very much. And see you at the first Plenary. Welcome to Bucharest!

(Applause.)

(Event concluded at 12:00 eest)

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