# Association for Progressive Communications (APC) Contributions to the ITU Strategic Plan 2016-2019 February 2014

The Association for Progressive Communications (APC) welcomes the opportunity to submit comments to the ITU as part of the process to develop its Strategic Plan for the years 2016-2019. The open consultation to which this submission responds is a very positive and welcome step on the part of the ITU Council which, as the following comments indicate, APC hopes will become a consistent feature of the ITU's ongoing work.

The APC is an international network and non-profit organisation founded in 1990 that wants everyone to have access to a free and open internet to improve lives and create a more just world. http://www.apc.org

The following paragraphs comment briefly on:

   a. the global challenges and strategic goals of the Union;
   b. the importance of human rights in contextualising its work;
   c. its relationship with other international and ICT stakeholders, including the importance of multistakeholder participation.

## Global challenges and strategic goals

The past thirty years have seen very rapid growth in the scope, scale and capacity of ICTs, including telecommunications, and in the significance of ICTs in almost every aspect of economy and society.  This gives increasing importance to international efforts to enable the benefits resulting from ICTs to be shared throughout the world community, and to address problems which arise as a result of the growth and/or misuse of ICTs.

In this context, APC welcomes the focus which could be achieved by the ITU working towards four strategic goals concerned with growth, inclusiveness, sustainability and innovation, as identified in drafting of the Strategic Plan.  These goals reflect critical needs at both global and

national levels, and are relevant to all countries, particularly developing countries.  Focusing on them will also help to address the risks of relevance and mission dilution which have been identified in work to develop the Strategic Plan.

It should be recognised, however, in establishing these goals and setting targets for them, that the ITU is only one of many actors involved in the achievement of these objectives.  The cooperation and engagement of a variety of UN and other international agencies, and of private sector and civil society stakeholders, is essential if they are to be effectively pursued.

In the context of inclusiveness, APC believes that the goals and targets established in this context should explicitly draw attention to the needs of women and of marginalised social and economic groups.  It is important to ensure that no-one is left behind in the emerging Information Society.

In the context of sustainability, APC particularly welcomes the emphasis proposed on ICTs' contribution to greenhouse gas emissions and electronic waste.  These are substantial problems which can be addressed by cooperation involving the ITU, other international agencies and private sector businesses, not least through renewed attention to standards.

In the context of sustainability and innovation, APC is concerned by the very limited attention which has been paid to date to the impact and potential of ICTs in discussions concerning the forthcoming Sustainable Development Goals and the post-2015 development agenda.  It is important for the ITU, as the relevant technical agency, to work with UN agencies concerned with human development, and with other stakeholders, to bring a stronger focus to bear on the impact and potential of ICTs in these discussions.

To have a significant impact on these four strategic goals, two things will be important:

Firstly, the focus implied by the strategic goals will need to reach throughout the Union's work, across the activities of all three Sectors, with appropriate allocation of financial and personnel resources.  The work of the Sectors will need to be well-coordinated in the focus areas, building synergies between the Sectors.

Secondly, the ITU will need to work, within the boundaries of its core mandate, closely and cooperatively with other international agencies which have responsibilities in these fields, including UN and other agencies concerned with human development aspects of the Information Society, and international organisations concerned with technical aspects of the Internet and other areas of ICTs.

**The importance of human rights**

The increasing significance of ICTs in all aspects of economy, society and culture has raised increasing challenges to human rights.  The UN Human Rights Council has reaffirmed that the same rights that people have offline must also be protected online.

Research into the impact of the Internet by APC has identified a widespread belief among those concerned with human rights that, while opportunities to exercise freedoms of expression and association have been extended by the Internet and ICTs, they have posed substantial new challenges to the right of privacy and to some other rights.  There is widespread and growing concern among all stakeholders about data-gathering, data protection and surveillance.

While the ITU is not directly responsible for the oversight of human rights, the importance of ensuring human rights, as established in the International Covenants on Civil and Political Rights and on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and in other internationally agreed instruments, should be reflected in its work. This is relevant across all four proposed strategic goals.

ACP suggests two relatively simple steps to support this objective.  The importance of working to maintain and build human rights, including human rights online, should be acknowledged in the Strategic Plan.  Each sector should ensure that human rights considerations are taken fully into account in its work and that of study groups and other fora.  This is particularly important in work concerned with cybersecurity.

**Multistakeholder participation**

Multistakeholder participation in ICT fora has become widespread since it was established as an important principle at the World Summit on the Information Society and in its follow-up activities.  APC's view is that multistakeholder participation is not an end in itself, but a means to achieve more inclusive discourse and engagement which will improve the quality and increase the effectiveness of decision making.  It enables discussion and decision making to be enriched by sources of expertise which would not otherwise be available, and helps to achieve the cooperation among stakeholders which is necessary for effective governance.

As noted above, APC welcomes the initiative taken by the Council Working Group for the Elaboration of the Draft Strategic Plan to invite all stakeholders to contribute their views and ideas into its development. APC has long argued that both the ITU and the ICT sector generally would

benefit by the Union becoming more open to the views and contributions of all stakeholders and welcoming their participation in its activities.

The present consultation process is an opportunity for the ITU to demonstrate that it recognises the value of multistakeholder engagement in its work.  APC and other contributors will look with interest to see what impact it has on the final text of the Strategic Plan when this is agreed.

APC also hopes that the ITU will move towards full recognition of the principle of multistakeholder participation in its formal processes and decision-making structures, facilitating the participation of civil society and other stakeholders.  Particular attention should be paid to the financial constraints that limit the participation of civil society stakeholders from developing countries.

Free access to ICT publications, along the lines offered by other UN agencies, would also significantly help all civil society organisations to make use of ITU resources in their work and contribute effectively to the Union.

APC would be happy to discuss these issues further with the ITU and to work with it in order to foster multistakeholder engagement and develop multistakeholder participation in the spirit of this consultation.