

## GREETINGS

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## ON THE OCCASION OF WORLD TELECOMMUNICATION AND INFORMATION SOCIETY DAY

It is with great pleasure that the Telecommunications Authority of Trinidad and Tobago joins the nation and indeed, the rest of the world, in celebrating World Telecommunication and Information Society Day.

There is absolutely no doubt that telecommunications and information technologies (now popularly referred to as Information and Communications Technologies – ICTs) have had a major transformation effect on the world as we know it today – from the ubiquitous telephone to the complex satellite and submarine transnational systems enabling international commerce.

Rapid communication over long distances has always been one of mankind's greatest pursuits. The ability to communicate and receive information through the use of ICT's is linked to the development of national wealth. ICTs are also of significant value to individuals particularly in the areas of accessing information, distance education, maintaining relationships, and entertainment. Therefore the value of easier access to these technologies at affordable prices by individuals and entities is of tremendous benefit at the individual and national levels.

The central mandate of the Telecommunications Authority of Trinidad and Tobago (the Authority) is that of opening of competition in Trinidad and Tobago's telecommunications and Broadcasting sectors to competition. The Telecommunications Act 2001, by which the Authority was established, also mandates universal access to telecommunications and broadcasting services for all persons in Trinidad and Tobago.

Since becoming operational in 2004 the Authority has been working towards these goals.

Thus in many households in Trinidad and Tobago, there is at the very least mobile telephone access due to the liberalization of the country's mobile market in which there are currently two providers. The country also currently has thirty six (36) radio stations, six (6) free to air television stations and seven (7) subscription television service providers. Very soon subscribers of fixed line services will also have choice since Concessions have recently been granted to additional providers in that arena.

Universal access to telecommunications by all, particularly children and young people is one that is of great concern at a global level, thus the selection of the theme "***Connecting the Young: the opportunities of ICT***" for the observation of World Telecommunication and Information Society Day by the International Telecommunications Union.

While a wider variety of ICTs at lower prices are now available to added numbers of individuals in Trinidad and Tobago, a lot more still has to be done to fulfill the Universality Policy of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, which effectively seeks to ensure that every citizen gains access to ICTs. In this regard the Authority has initiated the development of a Universality Implementation Plan for the local telecommunications and broadcasting sectors. The successful completion and subsequent implementation of this plan will significantly narrow the gap between those persons who are able to easily access ICTs and those who do not now have access – the so called ‘digital divide’.

This initiative is in alignment with the Plan of Action ratified at the International Telecommunications Union’s (ITU) World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS), which concluded in Geneva last November. This plan sets out a number of objectives and strategies for the reduction of the global ‘digital divide’.

Every sector of the national community stands to benefit from increased access to and widespread use of ICT’s empowering citizens at all levels of society. The country’s human resource capital will be bolstered, fuelling further national development, as many more students would access tertiary level education through on-line classes and distance learning or e-learning.

Students of primary and secondary schools are increasingly given assignments involving extensive research. Access to valuable research material for homework and term projects via the Internet will be helpful for all students of families of varying income levels. Access to telephone services by all citizens would make life easier and safer particularly for groups such as the elderly, the differently abled and the economically disadvantaged.

The effective reduction of the ‘digital divide’ will definitely lead to greater connectivity among individuals, groups, businesses, non governmental organizations, governments and particularly our future generation.

Today we join with all ITU member organizations and governments in working towards the realization of this vision which is embedded in today’s theme - “***Connecting the Young: the opportunities of ICT***”.