



**WITSA STATEMENT  
THE INTERNET AND THE INTERNATIONAL TELECOMMUNICATIONS  
UNION  
October 2003**

**Introduction**

Since its inception as the International Telegraph Union in 1865, the International Telecommunications Union (ITU) has played a constructive and important role in the diffusion of telecommunications technologies throughout the world. As an organization where governments and the private sector come together to advance the development of communications technology, the ITU has been instrumental in improving the lives of people virtually everywhere.

Throughout the years, the role of the ITU has continually evolved to encompass new technologies and ways of doing business. With the role that telecommunications networks now play in the delivery of a myriad of sectors such as banking, transportation, tourism and home shopping, the importance of the organization has increased correspondingly.

Today, the growth and pervasiveness of the Internet has grabbed the attention of the ITU. According to WITSA's *Digital Planet*, the number of worldwide Internet users grew by over 993% between 1996 and 2001. The global online shopping community grew by over 40% in 2000 alone.

This Statement lays out the views of the World Information Technology and Services Alliance (WITSA) regarding the International Telecommunication Union's role related to the Internet. The Internet today is a global facility available for the public good. It is approximately 80% owned and operated by the private sector. Therefore, WITSA believes that at this time, the ITU should

continue to play its current role with regard to the Internet by participating in and providing expert advice to the Government Advisory Committee (GAC).

## About WITSA

WITSA is a consortium of 50 information technology (IT) industry associations from economies around the world. WITSA members represent over 90 percent of the world IT market. As the global voice of the IT industry, WITSA is dedicated to:

- advocating policies that advance the industry's growth and development;
- facilitating international trade and investment in IT products and services;
- strengthening WITSA's national industry associations through the sharing of knowledge, experience, and critical information.

## Issue

A number of proposals have been made to date within the ITU that would expand its role with regard to the Internet<sup>1</sup>. These have taken the form of proposals that would:

- replace market-driven commercial negotiations used for exchanging Internet traffic with a regulatory methodology;
- grant a role for the ITU in assigning Internet names and numbers supplanting or competing with the current private-sector function<sup>2</sup>;
- bring some elements of Internet services under existing ITU processes, Study Groups, and potentially, international agreements, and;
- expand ITU definitions of 'public' to include Internet-based services thus subjecting them to ITU-administered international treaties.

While none of these proposals have received widespread support within the ITU to date, WITSA is concerned that an underlying theme is to introduce some degree of oversight or control into a function that today is being performed by the private sector in an open and competitive market environment.

---

<sup>1</sup> Internal USCIB Research Paper, excerpted; *Proposals Related to International Internet Regulation*; August 2002

<sup>2</sup> The ITU has a legitimate role with regard to ENUM

Although the private sector is represented within a number of bodies in the ITU, and in some performs the bulk of the work, the private sector is not a voting member of the decision-making bodies such as the Council and the Plenipotentiary Conference. Thus, involvement by the ITU in many of the proposals made to date would have the effect of introducing government-driven regulation and rule making into an environment that is today private sector led.

While the Internet uses the underlying telecommunications infrastructure, it is primarily a service layer that has its own standards, protocols and unique functionalities. Coordination and management of the key technical functions of the Internet belong in the private sector where they currently reside.

The Internet has become an essential component of economic activity and will assume an even larger role in trade and commerce in coming years. To date, the Internet has grown in a largely unregulated environment, and has shown an ability to thrive in a wide variety of market environments under competitive conditions. This freedom has produced impressive results over a relatively short period of time, delivering innovation, productivity and opportunity to a growing numbers of users in all parts of the world. Notably, the Internet has grown fastest in markets where there is competition for the provision of underlying telecommunications facilities, as well as for access and related services.

## **Recommendations**

--WITSA believes that the Internet must continue to thrive in an open and competitive marketplace unencumbered by unnecessary regulations.

-- WITSA recognizes and appreciates the contributions of the ITU as a participant in the Government Advisory Committee (GAC) of ICANN. WITSA believes that the appropriate role of the ITU should be to continue as an active participant and expert advisor to the GAC.