

The Arab Telecom and Internet Forum (2003):

**5th ITU Annual Meeting for Telecom Development in the Arab
Region**

in conjunction of

Al Iktissad Wal Aamal's 5th Arab Telecom and Internet Economy
Conference

Phoenicia Intercontinental Beirut

May 28-31, 2003

Organized By

ITU Arab Regional Office

Al Iktissad Wal-Aamal Group

In Collaboration With

The Ministry of Telecommunications in Lebanon

The Industry Scene (Regional ICT in transition)

In the last few years, the Middle East has witnessed unprecedented growth in demand for telecom services; an increase attributed to population growth, economic expansion as well as increased investment in this sector. Unlike the prolonged slump currently affecting the telecom industry worldwide, the telecom industry in the Middle East has been undergoing major changes, including sweeping market liberalization, privatization, and the gradual introduction of competition in most segments of the industry.

Investments have reached approximately \$15 billion in 2002. However, it has been estimated that the region would need to invest more than \$35 billion from 2000 to 2005 in order to meet the expected demand and adopt new technologies. These figures stress the need for continuous development of the Telecom and Information Technology (ICT) infrastructure.

Higher revenues and investments in the telecom sector will create a multiplier effect, spreading to the much-needed development of the Internet economy including e-commerce services. Goldman Sachs estimates that e-commerce would reach \$7.3 trillion globally in 2004. However, the Arab world is still lagging behind other regions in e-commerce transactions with only about 200,000 out of 300 million people conducting business online (0.07%). The potential for a strong e-commerce, as well as other e-applications such as e-education, e-government, e-services and e-health, requires increased legislation, online security and Internet accessibility.

The Arab Telecom and Internet Forum

This year, the two most influential events on Telecoms in the Arab region will combine their platforms to address these and many more issues concerning the vital ICT industry. This *Arab Telecom and Internet Forum* will take place in Beirut on May 28-31, 2003, and is being hosted by the Lebanese government represented by the Minister of Telecommunications, H. E. Eng. Jean-Louis Cordahi. This momentous event marks the first time the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) collaborates with the private sector to hold its annual meeting. Moreover, ARABSAT is holding its General Assembly Meeting in conjunction with the Conference. Arab Ministers participating in this Assembly will be taking an active role in the Forum sessions.

The 5th Annual Meeting for Telecom Development in the Arab Region

organized by the International Telecommunication Union's (ITU) Arab Regional Office will focus on the implementation of the resolutions arising from the last annual meeting as well as the most crucial issues related to telecoms in the Arab region. It will identify priorities for future developments in the expanding fields of ICT. Topics will cover: ITU activities in the region, Arab participation in/and preparation for major ITU activities, cooperation with regional and international organizations, special programs for Arab least developed countries (LDCs), WTDC-02 and Istanbul Action Plan, ITU Conference (Marrakech-02), ITU TELECOM World 2003 and World Summit on Information Society (WSIS).

The 5th Arab Telecom and Internet Economy Conference draws more than 500 industry leaders, regulatory policy makers, suppliers and renowned experts under one roof to discuss and debate issues of strategic importance to the development of the Telecoms and Internet industries. The Conference offers active telecom and IT institutions a unique opportunity for networking and building up business relations with the region's operators and major IT users.

Topics

- Communication and Disseminating Information
- Liberalization of Telecom Markets, Privatization and Effective Regulation
- Current Infrastructure and Future Trends in the Arab Telecom Sector
- E-Commerce: Benefits, Obstacles, Levels of Awareness and Breadth Of Service
- E-Government: Current Status, Main Gaps and Future Expansion Plans
- Impact of 3G and Other Technologies on Corporate and Individual Users
- Services Offered by the Telecom and IT Industries
- The Growing Concerns of Internet Security
- The Role of Arab ITU-D Sector Members/Private Sector in Telecom Development and in ITU activities
- New Trends and Technologies
- Ways and Means of Enhancing Internet Use in the Region
- World Summit on the Information Society, WSIS (Geneva 2003, Tunis 2005)

Facts & Projections*

- Liberalization efforts have been accelerating in many Arab countries, as several government-owned operators like Maroc Telecom, Jordan Telecom and the Saudi Telecom Company have been partially privatized, and some markets have been recently opened for competition, such as in Bahrain (2003).
- An increasing number of telecom operators are now vying for more customers in the ever-expanding GSM markets with some preparing to introduce competition into the fixed sector.
- To meet the expected demand for telecom services and new technologies, in the next five years, operators in the region would need to invest more than \$35 billion.
- Currently, there are over 22 million GSM subscribers in 10 Arab countries (Egypt, Saudi Arabia, U.A.E., Kuwait, Oman, Bahrain, Lebanon, Syria, Jordan and Morocco).
- Revenues for the telecom sector in 2002 were \$1300 billion (globally), 80% from services and 20% equipment.
- The number of Arab Internet users is expected to exceed 25 million by 2005; Egypt will lead with the single largest Arab Internet Community of over 6.5 million, while Saudi Arabia will follow with almost 4.5 million.

(Sources: ITU, Arab Advisors, Madar Research)

About ITU Arab Regional Office

The ITU's Telecommunication Development Bureau (BDI) has well-established programs of activities to facilitate connectivity and access, foster policy, regulatory and network readiness, expand human capacity through training programs, formulate financing strategies and e-enable enterprises in developing countries. This is indeed a winning combination for bridging the Digital Divide.

The ITU Arab Regional Office, established in Cairo since 1991, has identified the following priorities:

- Assisting in the development of ICT in the Arab region through policy advice and expert missions.
- Improving human resources development and management, through regional seminars, workshops and training courses and ICT-based training (e-training).
- Promoting regional cooperation for the harmonization of development programs and maximum utilization of available local expertise.
- Piloting specific telecom programs.
- Responding to the pressing needs of Arab countries, in particular, LDCs.
- Increasing awareness of the ICT role in economic and social development.
- Promoting private sector activities in the Arab region.

About Al Iktissad Wal Aamal

Al Iktissad Wal Aamal Group's mission is to promote economic growth in the Middle East, and to create a platform for the international expansion of Arab trade and industry.

Since 1988, Al Iktissad Wal Aamal has been organizing approximately 10 conferences a year throughout the Middle East and abroad. Events cover a wide range of topics on investment, IT and telecoms., banking and finance, business administration, patent and copyright, the food industry, insurance, engineering, oil and gas, privatization and consulting.

Highlights From The 4th ITU Annual Meeting for Telecom Development in the Arab Region

The meeting was held in Damascus, 27 – 30 October 2001, and inaugurated by the Minister of Communications, the BDT/ITU Director. A total of 16 Arab States in addition to 18 Arab ITU Sector Members and representative of international and regional organizations participated in the meeting.

More than 120 participants discussed the Operational Plan for ITU Arab Regional Office, Arab Book, Regulatory Challenges, The World Telecom Development Conference, Database and Statistics, Role of private sector/ITU sector members, LDCs, Telecom Standardization (ITU-T), Cooperation with Council of Arab Telecom and Information Ministers.

Highlights From The 4th Arab Telecom and Internet Economy Conference

Al Iktissad Wal Aamal organized the 4th Arab Telecom and Internet Economy Conference in collaboration with the Lebanese Ministry of Telecommunications, the Arab League and with the support of the International Telecommunication Union. The Conference was held under the patronage of HE Rafic Hariri, Prime Minister of Lebanon. Mr. Hamadoun Touré, Director of the Telecommunication Development Bureau, ITU and HE Jean-Louis Cordahi, Lebanon's Minister of Telecommunications joined Mr. Hariri for the opening ceremony.

Representatives of several major Arab Telecoms. companies participated in the sessions to follow on the Challenge of Investing in a Liberalized Telecom Market, the Regulatory Development in Arab Telecom Market, Mobile Telecoms. in Arab Countries Beyond 2G and Information Security Awareness and Solutions.