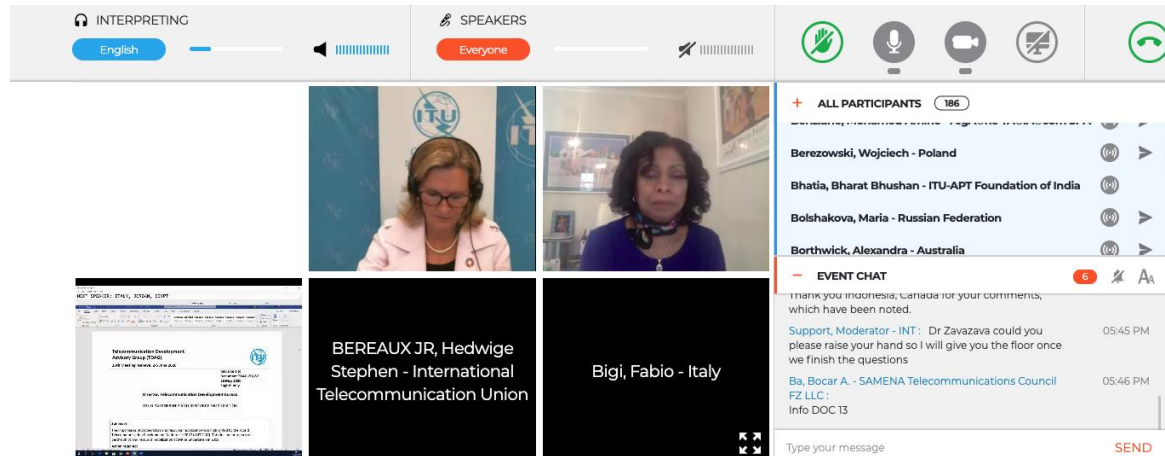


Virtual 25th meeting of the Telecommunication Development Advisory Group, Online, 2-5 June 2020



Today we joined – virtually – on the first-ever fully remote meeting of the Telecommunication Development Advisory Group.

This group plays a key consultation role in defining the actions of my Bureau in accelerating digital development. But since our last meeting in 2019, the world has changed beyond all recognition.

In many of ITU's 193 Member States, communities remain in full or partial lockdown. And when restrictions are eventually relaxed, we will all emerge into a world that is very different from the one we remember from TDAG-19.

The COVID pandemic has ravaged our populations, our healthcare systems, and our economies. No one is sure what the 'new normal' will look like, post-COVID –and for many, that post-COVID world still seems a long way off. But one thing this crisis has dramatically, irrevocably and indisputably reinforced is the vital importance of connectivity.

Those who enjoy the kind of high-speed connections that will enable remote participation in this year's TDAG are among the lucky few. Around the world, some 3.6 billion people still have no connectivity at all. And many, many hundreds of millions more struggle with access that is too slow, too costly, and too unreliable to make a meaningful difference to their lives during this crisis. If there's one thing the unprecedented events of the past few months have conclusively illustrated, it is the life-changing importance of being connected.

It is clear that we *cannot*, and *must not*, accept as 'normal' a situation where every second person on the planet has to manage without this vital digital lifeline.