

ITU 150th ANNIVERSARY

In our capacity as ITU Sector Member and Consultative Organization, following we transcribe the press release on the occasion of its 150th anniversary:

ITU marks 150th anniversary with global celebrations ITU150 Awards presented to Martin Cooper, Robert E. Kahn, Mark I. Krivocheev, Ken Sakamura, and Thomas Wiegand, Bill Gates accorded special recognition

Geneva, 18 May 2015 – ITU celebrated its 150th anniversary on 17 May, marking a long and illustrious history at the cutting edge of communication technologies.

“ITU has earned its global reputation for resilience and relevance,” said United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, applauding the agency’s many contributions as the oldest member in the United Nations system. “Telecommunications – as well as information and communications technology – drive innovation. The digital revolution has transformed our world. New information and communication technologies can help boost the economy and protect the environment.”

“The remarkable history of ITU exemplifies its stellar role in connecting the world to the most advanced and innovative means of communication, from the days of the telegraph to the Internet and mobile broadband, which now allows us to be in touch anytime, anywhere with friends, family, colleagues and even things,” said ITU Secretary-General Houlin Zhao. “Throughout our 150-year history, we have promoted international cooperation, working to achieve practical solutions to integrate new communications technologies as they develop, spreading their benefits to all.”

ITU was established on 17 May 1865 with the signing of the first International Telegraph Convention in Paris to facilitate the transmission of telegraphy across international borders. ITU was initially headquartered in Berne and moved to Geneva in 1948, soon after it became a specialized agency of the United Nations in 1947. Ms Doris Leuthard, Minister of Environment, Transport, Energy and Communications of Switzerland, delivered the keynote address on behalf of the host country.

The ITU 150th anniversary was marked by celebrations in some 50 countries around the world. A special ceremony was held in Paris to mark the signing of the First International Telegraph Convention on 17 May 1865. A ceremony was also held in Madrid, attended by King Felipe VI of Spain, to commemorate the re-naming of the International Telegraph Union as the International Telecommunication Union in 1932.

Looking towards the future as the leading UN specialized agency for telecommunications and ICT, ITU is focused on driving innovation together with the Union’s 193 Member States and membership of over 700 private sector entities and academic institutions. A panel discussion focusing on ICTs as drivers of a sustainable future was anchored by BBC correspondent Imogen Foulkes, brought in key thinkers and doers: Philip Walton, COO, BRCK; Luis Von Ahn, CEO & founder, DuoLingo; Gabriela Styf Sjöman, CTO, Telecom Italia Group; Jian Wang, CTO, Alibaba; and Ulf Ewaldsson, CTO, Ericsson.

ITU 150th anniversary Awards

ITU accorded recognition to the Founding Member States that signed the convention in 1865. With the re-drawing of national borders over the years, the original twenty are now represented by sixteen countries: Austria, Belgium,

Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Russian Federation, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and Turkey. Long-standing industry members were also recognized, including Telecom Italia (hailing back to 1925), Exelis and Telefónica (since 1929); and Sirti (1931).

The ITU 150 Awards were presented to eminent laureates who have contributed to ITU's work: Martin Cooper, Robert E. Kahn, Mark I. Krivocheev, Ken Sakamura, and Thomas Wiegand. Bill Gates was given special recognition for his contributions and his ongoing work with the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

Martin Cooper is a pioneer in wireless communications and referred to as the 'father' of portable cellular telephony. He is an inventor, entrepreneur and futurist who conceived the first portable cellular phone in 1973. Cooper knew then that people needed the freedom that comes from anywhere, anytime telephony.

Robert E. Kahn played a pioneering role in the development of the Internet. Kahn has developed the concept of a digital object architecture to provide a framework for interoperability of heterogeneous information systems and is the co-inventor of Knowbot programmes – mobile software agents in the network environment.

Mark Krivocheev is best known for his pioneering work in forging a world television digital standard and for HDTV standards, which have made it possible for us to receive high quality sound and picture in our homes.

Ken Sakamura designed the TRON open computer system architecture, which will be useful for ubiquitous computing of the future, and helped produce a series of Recommendations, including ITU-T H.642 "Multimedia information access triggered by tag-based identification", which is a critical element as we move to the age of the Internet of Things and Big Data.

Thomas Wiegand has contributed significantly towards the standardization for multimedia and co-chaired for the development of the ITU-T H.264/MPEG-AVC video coding standard, which facilitates video streaming on mobile devices and was recognized with a Primetime Emmy Award from the Los Angeles-based Academy of Television Arts & Sciences.

Bill Gates, co-founder of Microsoft, led the company that became the worldwide leader in business and personal software, services, and solutions. As co-chair of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, he shapes and approves grant-making strategies, advocates for the foundation's issues, and helps set the overall direction of the organization.

Sponsors of ITU150 celebration recognized

The 150th anniversary was generously sponsored by Azerbaijan, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. Other sponsors included The Telecommunications / ICT Regulatory Body, Côte d'Ivoire; Ministry of Communications, Ghana; Postal and Telecommunications Regulatory Authority of Zimbabwe; Inmarsat Global Limited; Close Joint-Stock Company National Radio Technical Bureau; Huawei Technologies; Rostelecom; Rohde & Schwarz; Telecommunications Regulatory Agency, Central African Republic; NTT Group.