DECLARATION ON LEVERAGING INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY TO SAVE LIVES

Representatives of governments, international organizations, private sector entities, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) met in Freetown, Sierra Leone from 26th -27th August 2015 for **the Regional Ministerial Consultative Meeting on Ebola: leveraging Information and Communication Technology** to save Lives to map out concrete strategies and adopt practical measures aimed at giving the use of telecommunications/ICT a central role in combating the spread of the Ebola virus and other diseases across the world as well as measures to facilitate disaster alert and management.

The Regional Ministerial Meeting discussed policy, regulation, technology, and deployment of telecommunications systems to prepare, mitigate, and respond to diseases and epidemics such as Ebola. The meeting comprised of an opening ceremony attended by His Excellency President Ernest Bai Koroma, a Ministerial Round Table on country case studies, a stakeholder partnership session and a working session on new approaches to using ICT for combatting Ebola such as Big Data and Internet of Things (IoT).

The International Telecommunication Union presented for the first time a new project, based on official sources. The project seeks to use Big Data for mitigation before, during and after the outbreak of diseases such as Ebola while safeguarding individual privacy. The project is jointly financed by the International Telecommunication Union and the Government of Japan.

Initially it will involve Mobile Network Operators in Sierra Leone, Guinea and Liberia. The project will also include a component of Tele-Health soon to be launched by ITU.

We, the participants at the *Regional Ministerial Meeting on Ebola: Leveraging Information and Communication Technology* to save Lives (Sierra Leone, 2015), thank the Governments of Sierra Leone, Guinea and Liberia, the International Telecommunication Union, Airtel Sierra Leone and the other Operators, for organizing this meeting and contributing to the ongoing project which will save lives. We immensely appreciate the effort made by all the Governments at this event for their invaluable contributions. We, unanimously in the spirit of humanity and solidarity, endorse the outcomes of the Meeting and uphold the 2014 ITU Plenipotentiary Resolution 202 (Busan, 2014) on Using Information and Communication Technologies to break the chain of health-related emergencies such as Ebola virus transmission. The focus will be on the use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) to enable the flow of information, especially in local languages, in health related emergencies so that life-saving information can be shared with local communities.

IN THE LIGHT OF THE FOREGOING, WE HEREBY MAKE THE FOLLOWING DECLARATIONS;

    a) While outbreaks cannot be entirely prevented, ITU and partners through telecommunication/information and communication technologies (ICT) should help reduce their impact through

monitoring, detection, and prediction of new virus outbreaks and other natural disasters.

b) The effort towards bridging the digital divide and the creation of a truly global information society should be closely linked with telecommunication/ICTs for the dissemination of information to raise awareness on epidemics such as Ebola virus and other diseases. This should include the provision of telephone and/data services to rural areas.

c) Effective disaster risk reduction through ICT including disease related, contributes to the post-2015 development agenda and the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

d) Combating Climate Change through mitigation and adaptation should be of high priority, in order to curb the emergency of new epidemics, linked to climate change and global warming.

e) Effective policies and regulations are essential in responding better to future epidemics outbreaks, as well as reducing vulnerability. The regulatory regime has to be continuously reviewed, and where there are barriers to the use of telecommunication resources for health disaster response and relief exist, these should be addressed. The barriers could include, but not be limited to, regulations restricting the movement of telecommunications equipment and personnel, at both national and international levels, and regulations on the use of relevant

frequency spectrum should be in accordance with the ITU Radio Regulations. It is important that while governments develop policies on health disaster management, the use of Telecommunications/ICT resources should be at the core of such planning.

f) Different technologies should be made available for emergency telecommunications and should be easily deployed in a timely manner when disasters strike thus the use of existing infrastructure, telecommunications/ICT systems, and frequencies allocated for emergencies should be optimized.

g) Cooperation and coordination at international, regional and national levels are essential for effective use of telecommunications/ICT for alerting as well as disaster response/relief as they maximize the use of limited resources to control virus outbreaks and save lives. The cooperation should involve government authorities, United Nations Agencies, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs). The private sector especially ITU Sector Members should play a very important role in this cooperation by contributing information to Big Data information and other resources for use by humanitarian teams.

h) Remote sensing and Geographical Information Systems using satellites are invaluable sources of information for decision making as they provide information with data needed for a rapid response to epidemic outbreaks and threats.

i) Close cooperation between Ministries of Health and those of Information and Communications should be encouraged and enforced so as to optimize the use of modern technologies to save lives' applications such as telemedicine and Ebola-Info Sharing play an important role in this effort.

j) Collaboration between Government, Regulatory Agencies, Mobile Network Operators, the International Telecommunication Union, and the World Health Organization should be encouraged.

DATED THIS 27TH DAY OF AUGUST, 2015