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Role of information technology to fight climate change stressed at UN meeting



ITU Secretary General Hamadoun Touré

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Delegates at a United Nations-organised symposium have renewed their [call](#) to world leaders to recognize the potential of information and communications technologies (ICTs) to help mitigate the effects of climate change and develop adaptation tools.

The symposium, organized by the UN International Telecommunications Union (ITU) and hosted by Ghana's Ministry of Communications in the capital, Accra, last week, considered the

role vis-à-vis the UN Climate Change Conference (COP-17) in Durban, South Africa, later this year.

In their final document, leading ICT specialists, as well as policy-makers, engineers, government officials, planners and regulators called for the adoption of a “closed loop” approach to manufacturing and recycling, which would reduce the need to extract and process raw materials.

The document also calls for the recognition of the value of ICTs in monitoring deforestation, crop patterns and other environmental phenomena.

Specific mention of ICTs in the COP-17 negotiating text, along with the adoption of an agreed methodology for measuring the carbon footprint of ICT equipment and its inclusion in national adaptation and mitigation plans, would provide an incentive to the ICT industry to invest in developing countries, help reduce the digital divide, and help fight climate change, according to the document.

“It is now clear to most observers that ICTs have a very important role to play here. Recognition of this at the international level will provide countries with a solid argument to roll out climate change strategies with a strong ICT element,” said Hamadoun Touré, the ITU Secretary General.

Malcolm Johnson, Director of ITU’s Telecommunication Standardization Bureau, told the symposium that “while the increasingly widespread use of ICTs has changed people’s lives dramatically and boosted economic growth, the success of technology means it is itself a growing contributor to greenhouse gas emissions.

“On the other hand, ICTs probably provide the most significant opportunity to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in the major high emissions industries of energy generation, waste disposal, building and transport. This is a message we must carry to COP-17,” said Mr. Johnson.

During the event, ITU launched a project on ICTs and climate change in Ghana which will be based on two pillars. The first will look at how ICTs can be used to help Ghana adapt to the effects of climate change. It will be led by the Ministry of Communications and sponsored by the information technology firm Research in Motion.

The second, to be led by Ghana’s Environment Protection Agency with sponsorship from Vodafone Ghana, will look at how telecommunications in the West African country can reduce their own greenhouse gas emissions.

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