UN telecoms agency urges use of technology to tackle climate change

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The United Nations International Telecommunications Union (ITU) said today that it will, with partners, urge delegates at the UN climate change conference in South Africa next week to harness the power of information and communication technology to promote measures to mitigate and adapt to global warming.

Modern advanced technologies can transform social, industrial and business processes to effect the changes needed to achieve environmental sustainability, ITU said in a statement ahead of the 17th Conference of Parties (COP 17) to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), which opens in the South African city of Durban on Monday.

While the potential of information and communication technologies (ICTs) to make a real difference is widely recognized by the technology community and government ICT ministries, it is still far from being understood and embraced by environmental lobby groups and policy-makers, ITU pointed out.

"ITU and its partners will be using COP 17 to promote ICTs as the 21st century's most valuable problem-solving tools. ITU believes it imperative that they be included as an integral part of global climate change policy," said the statement.

The UN body and the Global e-Sustainability Initiative (GeSI) have initiated the Global Coalition on ICT and Climate Change to send a coordinated message to the conference in Durban. Organizations in the coalition include the UNFCCC Secretariat, the UN Global

Compact, TechAmerica, as well as high-level representatives from the governments of Ghana, South Africa and Egypt.

The coalition's message is that ICTs, such as smart grids, intelligent transport systems and the 'Internet of things' have extraordinary potential to reduce the greenhouse gas emissions of other high energy-consuming sectors, and must be included in any meaningful climate change policies at the global, regional and national level.

The coalition will also demonstrate how the ICT industry is using technology to reduce its own carbon footprint.

"It is imperative that our massively inter-connected world also becomes a greener, more sustainable world," said Hamadoun Touré, the ITU Secretary General.

The so-called 'smart' technologies can help to bridge the digital divide and improve the lives of millions of people, Dr. Touré said.

"Look at the benefits which can be achieved with intelligent transport systems, or through the digitization of goods, processes and services. We need to move now to take advantage of the powerful tools already in our hands," he added.

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