

# New Year Message: Tremendous Progress Together, but Much Left to Do



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**L**et me begin by wishing all members of the ITU Association of Japan a very happy and prosperous New Year.

Recent times have certainly been challenging for many of us. Geopolitical tensions are at their highest in decades, economic and job concerns are rising, the impact of the global pandemic continues, and food security looks precarious for much of the world. Environmental and climate concerns can no longer be ignored.

The growing combination of threats and uncertainties has only increased the urgency of our work to connect the world.

The crucial need for connectivity has brought more people online more quickly. At the same time, it has focused the minds of leaders on the need to bridge digital divides, which today keep almost one-third of humanity totally offline and many hundreds of millions more without meaningful connectivity that could help them build a better future.

We still have a long way to go to reach our dream of a fully connected planet. But let's also start the year by recognizing what a long way we have come since 1994, when I first joined the ITU regulatory team. Back then, only some 20 million people – less than 0.1 per cent of the global population at that time – were Internet users. Today, an estimated 5.3 billion are online, and that number grows with every passing week.

The progress achieved to date reflects the tireless efforts of ITU staff, as well as the steadfast support, commitment, and hard work of ITU members.

All that terrestrial telecommunications infrastructure; all those software protocols, satellite systems, undersea cables; all those agreements on the shared use of resources like radio-frequency spectrum – in short, all those complex networks empowering billions of people and supporting millions of businesses around the world – are founded on the crucial technical, regulatory and development work that takes place under auspices of ITU as the United Nations specialized agency for information and communication technologies. I believe this is something in which we can all take enormous pride.

Throughout the course of this long journey, I cannot overstate the contributions of the Japanese government and the ITU Association of Japan in supporting our work.

Over many years, Japan has been a leading champion of innovation and digital development. It has put its considerable talents and resources to work to pioneer new technical standards through our ITU Standardization (ITU-T) and Radiocommunication (ITU-R) study groups; helped forge

thought leadership on telecommunications policy issues through our many regional and global events; and worked alongside ITU on the ground to mitigate the impact of natural disasters, address human and environmental challenges, and expand meaningful connectivity to those most in need.

At the height of the global pandemic, Japan came forward as a founding member of the Connect2Recover initiative, working alongside ITU and partners to reinforce digital resilience in the world's least developed countries, landlocked developing countries, small island developing states, and countries undergoing transition or facing disruption.

I extend my most sincere commendation and gratitude to Japan for its commitment and support in helping us building a connected and trusted digital future.

We've made tremendous progress together, but there is still so much left to do, especially for those who are unconnected, vulnerable or otherwise digitally excluded.

The ITU Strategic Plan for 2024-2027, adopted during our 2022 Plenipotentiary Conference in Romania, encompasses two core strategic goals: Universal Connectivity and Sustainable Digital Transformation.

Achieving these goals entails significant challenges. But those will be far from insurmountable if we all work together towards a shared global vision. As we approach 2030, the target date for the UN Sustainable Development Goals, we must seize our chance to leverage the power and potential of digital technologies to ensure that no one is left behind.

The actions we take today will lay the foundation for the future – not just for us, but for generations to come. As UN Secretary-General António Guterres said: "We, the leaders, must deliver for we, the peoples."

I know that, as always, ITU can count on Japan to bring an exceptional level of energy and expertise to the challenges ahead. I look forward very much to working with ITU's new leadership team, including distinguished engineer Seizo Onoe, our new Director of Telecommunication Standardization, as we all seek new ways to advance the power of technologies and connectivity to change the world.

Once again, I thank the Government of Japan, the ITU Association, and Japan's many ITU sector members and partners for their invaluable role in promoting digital development and driving innovation.

May this year, and the many years to come, be prosperous, progressive, and peaceful for all.