

Welcome Address

**7th Caribbean Internet Forum
November 25-26, 2009
Kingston, Jamaica**

Building a Caribbean Broadband Platform for Regional Development

**Hopeton Dunn, Ph.D
Conference Chair**

Hon. Michael Stern, Minister of State in the Ministry of Industry Investment and Commerce

Dr. Heather Hudson, Member of the Keynote Panel and Professor of Communications Technology Management, University of San Francisco

Mr. Adam Montserin, Member of the Keynote Panel and E-Government, Advisor to the Caribbean Centre for Development Administration, CARICAD

Mr. Robert Shaw, Head, Human Capacity Building Division, International Telecommunication Union, the ITU.

Dr. Badrul Haque, Special Representative, World Bank

Mr. Courtney Jackson, CIF Board Chairman

Representatives of Ministries and Specialized agencies,

Visiting participants from overseas,

Students

Distinguished Guests. Ladies and Gentlemen.

Good morning!

Let me bid you a very warm welcome to the SEVENTH CARIBBEAN INTERNET FORUM.

As you know, the Conference has been presented each year by the Caribbean Internet Forum Board and is proudly hosted this year by the Telecommunications Policy and Management Programme in the Mona School of Business, the University of the West Indies.

We were ably supported by a diverse group of industry stakeholders who guided the planning of this event conceptually, leading to identification of key issues and topics relevant to the Caribbean region at this important time.

The theme of the Conference – Building a Caribbean Broadband Platform for Regional Development speaks to the instrumentality of the Internet in regional integrated planning for our people’s development and for the advancement of our economies in a globally competitive environment.

I had the honour recently to be among representatives of countries of the Global South and to chair the plenary session on ACCESS, at the just concluded Internet Governance Forum (IGF) of the United Nations in Sharm el Sheikh, Egypt. The event was attended by over 1,500 participants from all over the world, and it was pleasing to note the increasingly diverse uses to which Internet access is being put in the various continents and regions.

It was acknowledged that, as with telecommunications subscriptions, the great majority of the next billion users of the Internet will come from the countries of Global South, underlining the importance of our task of making sure that our citizens are connected and ready to use this resource to our benefit and advantage.

With an estimated 1.7 billion Internet users worldwide, it is known that the great majority of the world's population, or about 75%, are not yet online, many never having yet heard about the Internet.

Of those that are connected from all countries, we note that fixed line broadband Internet users had more than doubled from 150 million in 2004 to over 500 million in 2009. While there are 4.6 billion mobile cellular users, about 600 million of these users are mobile broadband subscribers. The trend is growing and mobile broadband has already exceeded wireline broadband usage, globally.

At the IGF Conference in Egypt, Yahoo's Jerry Yang noted that there are about 320,000 Internet Users in emerging markets. The number of users from these developing countries is projected to grow by 19% yearly. It means that we must become even more active in developing the policies and investment strategies that will prepare and enable our region to continue to play a leading role in these global developments.

INTERNET NOW SPEAKS ARABIC

One of the important challenges to growth of the NET is that hitherto, it has been dominated by domain name designations using the Latin alphabet.

An important outcome of the IGF meeting was the announcement by the responsible agency ICANN, that there had been a fast track reform mechanism which now enabled domain names in languages such as Chinese, Korean and Arabic. Indeed, Egypt, I believe has since become the first country to apply for a new domain in Arabic. This opens up access to millions more users and further democratizes this vital hub that we call the INTERNET. The relevance to the Caribbean, of course, is that this widens the potential market for eTransactions by Caribbean providers.

It is therefore clear colleagues, that the developing and developed countries are preparing themselves as we speak for a kind of strategic repositioning in the global economy, with a critical plank of that strategy being to enable their populations to enjoy the right to be part of this powerful platform of connectivity through effective access to the Internet.

It is therefore timely, that here in the Caribbean, we are convening today this conference, CIF-7, to deliberate on building the Caribbean Broadband Platform for Regional Development.

CIF-7 plenary sessions will examine ways in which this Caribbean broadband platform can be built despite the many constraints. We will be examining issues such as Infrastructure development, E-Government, Human Capacity Building, E-Commerce, Regulation, cyber security, and the Future of the Internet.

The range of conference sub-themes and the overarching discussions complement the ongoing work globally and signal an avenue for the collaborative development of an ICT network devoted to solving some of the key technological challenges facing the Caribbean.

I am fully confident that the geographical and professional diversity and broad spread of plenary speakers, session's panelists and conference participants will add to a rich cross-fertilization of ideas and will bring cogent analyses and solutions to the issues.

I welcome you all: our keynote speakers and all presenters and attendees. I thank our sponsors, and wish everyone an informative and fulfilling CIF-7!

Hopeton Dunn