

Rashid Ismailov

Russian Federation

Candidate
for the post of
ITU Secretary-General

What is your view on the role of digital technologies in a rapidly changing world?

Modern technologies are changing people's lives more than ever before. The pace of innovation is accelerating; manufacturing, logistics and consumption are being profoundly restructured; and technology and business models rapidly transformed.

Some countries have achieved extraordinary levels of digital development, many have reached adequate levels, but others remain at a level that calls for attention and support from the international community.

Meanwhile, we are living in a vast, highly complex digital world, never before so separated from the physical world, with its familiar laws and tangible possibilities for interaction elaborated over thousands of years.

The biggest potential for conflict today lies in how to reconcile human beings with digitalization. Just look at how technologies can facilitate corporate or state manipulation. Rather than development for its own sake, we must improve the quality and security of human life and work, regardless of technical upheavals.

Even as digital technologies open new horizons, they pose unprecedented challenges to the existing world order.



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How should ITU evolve to maintain relevance in today's world?

ITU must provide strategy, guidance, and vision – not a bureaucracy inscribed in a unipolar world.

Ongoing technological development intensifies security problems, with 5G use giving these questions increasing urgency. Fraud in the Internet of things – self-driving cars, roboticized manufacturing, telemedicine – can threaten lives and health, not just a subscriber's personal data.

As a smartphone user, imagine one day finding your apps deactivated, cloud storage shut down, your access restricted. Your whole infrastructure has disappeared, along with all your data. And that's just the tip of the iceberg. Now imagine digitalization has become all-encompassing. You're unable to access to your identity, including your avatar in the digital universe, because some corporation blocks you.

ITU will play a key role in the next few years, spearheading standardization and recommendations across numerous applications.

Digital regulation is like codes for aviation or outer space use. No country can pursue its own ends exclusively. Rather, we work in the same field, interacting on equal footing.

If elected, what are your top three priorities and how do you plan to achieve them?

My "Five Steps to ICT Humanization" programme outlines priorities aimed at strengthening each individual's role, expectations, rights and potential.

First and foremost, information and communication technology (ICT) and telecom development must support a **human-centric digital economy and society**.

ITU and other organizations should work harder to **bridge the digital divide**, with broadband access enabling everyone to engage in the digital economy.

We must **strengthen ITU's role** in regulating radio spectrum use and satellite orbits, as well as in developing globally agreed norms and standards to ensure availability and affordability. Standards must adhere to international rules and principles, facilitating security and interoperability.

Strategic planning is vital to **anticipate technological advances**, help identify standardization gaps, and focus ITU members on bridging those gaps.

I also propose **reforming the ITU management model** to improve the organization's flexibility.

With seven years remaining in the UN Decade of Action, how can ITU, as the UN specialized agency committed to connecting the world, help accelerate progress on the Sustainable Development Goals?

Telecoms and ICTs are essential to meet the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, and ICT access itself has become a development indicator. The World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) process – with its Action Lines linked to Agenda for Sustainable Development – should continue until at least 2030.

Technologies bring immense benefits, and I believe strongly in bringing infrastructure to all countries that need it. If elected, I will do everything to meet UN sustainable development objectives. My industry experience puts me in an excellent position to drive this effort.

Implementation of WSIS outcomes – through the process guided by ITU – is due for high-level review by the UN General Assembly in 2025.

Tell us about your achievements in leadership and building consensus.

My experience, encompassing the private sector and government, as well as ITU itself, helps me appreciate the needs of business and state representatives. I understand the interests of countries seeking to develop their own infrastructure, but also the direction the whole world is going and today's core ICT issues.

My six years in the Ministry of Communications and Mass Media – and heading the Russian delegation to ITU – were crucial to my life experience. As Chair of the ITU Council in 2018, I took into account the interests of all Member States and obtained consensual decisions under extreme time pressure.

Time is our most valuable resource as human beings. How we deal with it determines the quality of our lives.

My academic background was in history, with a specialization, unusually, in numerical and computerized research methods. Although I later worked in commercial organizations, on major technology projects, my humanities education helped me find a common language for the things that matter to people.



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What else would you bring to the table as the next ITU Secretary-General?

An important aspect of my programme is management reform. I propose a two-term limit for ITU's elected officials, regardless of their changing positions (aside from current incumbents).

We must attract new participants to ITU's work. Since the organization began, its elected officials have come from just 24 countries.

This means the management has yet to admit 169 Member States, which speaks volumes about the current international balance – and is indefensible given the importance of ICTs for all economies.

Individual term limits are a basic principle underpinning the rotation of power, with great significance in current politics.

ITU needs to train and promote young people, support mentoring, build on the expertise of the older generation, and hire interns reflecting geographical and gender balance.

Most ITU Member States lack sufficient digital sovereignty to aspire to an independent role in the global information space. ITU is their last hope for inclusion, if only based on the "one country, one vote" principle.

Is there anything else you would like to add?

There is no holding up progress. For Russians, this old observation is associated with Yandex founder Ilya Segalovich. Although Ilya is sadly no longer with us, he was the kind of visionary we need today. The future of digital must align with human development.

I am honoured to be nominated by my country as a candidate. Russia, as a founding ITU Member State, and I, as a candidate for Secretary-General, feel a responsibility to reshape ITU for the benefit of all people on Earth.

I am committed to strengthening ITU's human resources and efficiency. With over 30 years of experience in ICTs, I believe I can prepare ITU for emerging challenges and steer it beyond new horizons.



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