



ECTEL Observes 20 years amidst the COVID-19 Pandemic

As the Eastern Caribbean Telecommunications Authority (ECTEL) marks its twentieth year of existence, it is mindful that this commemoration is being done against the backdrop of the global fallout from the novel coronavirus (COVID-19). Since the declaration by the World Health Organization (WHO) of the virus outbreak as a public health emergency of international concern, countries have closed their borders and individuals have been mandated to stay at home to contain the spread of the virus.

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) estimates that 1.5 billion children from 188 countries have been affected by country-wide school closures due to the pandemic. This has necessitated a rise in e-learning with teaching being conducted remotely or on digital platforms. Many businesses have also adopted remote working arrangements in order to curb the spread of the virus. With this sudden shift from the classroom and from traditional work arrangements, the need for robust electronic communications networks and services have gained increased prominence.

In the Caribbean, as in the rest of the world, the adoption of e-learning strategies and telecommuting policies in response to the pandemic, has highlighted the crucial need for effective electronic communications networks and services, especially broadband, internet and digital] services. Established by Treaty signed on May 4th, 2000 in St. George's, Grenada, ECTEL is mandated to ensure that the people of the Commonwealth of Dominica, Grenada, St. Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia and St. Vincent and the Grenadines benefit from affordable, modern, efficient, competitive and universal telecommunications services.

Since its establishment twenty years ago, and under the existing Telecommunications Act and accompanying regulations, ECTEL has made notable progress in meeting its mandate by advancing the liberalisation of the sector through the enactment of modern





harmonised legislation, the issuance of non-exclusive licences for many telecommunications services, ensuring fair pricing and promoting consumer choice through such initiatives as implementation of the Price Cap Plans, and more recently, the launch of Mobile Number Portability in all the Contracting States.

With the growth in demand and adoption of remote technology such as language apps, video tutoring, video conferencing tools and online learning software due to COVID-19 pandemic, there has been a noteworthy upsurge in demand for access to broadband services, and for electronic devices to facilitate such access. In response to this demand, ECTEL has been working with the National Telecommunications Regulatory Commissions (NTRCs) in utilising the Universal Service Funds to provide subsidized broadband internet access and digital devices to students and other vulnerable members of society. Further, ECTEL will, in the coming weeks, provide assistance to its Contracting States for the purchase of personal protective equipment (PPE) for frontline staff.

ECTEL recognises that the demand for broadband and digital services will continue to grow. Consequently, issues relating to the reliability of access and technology to function remotely, the quality and pricing of such services will emerge and increase in significance. ECTEL remains committed to promoting access to quality and affordable electronic communications services in its Contracting States under the existing Telecommunications Act and Regulations. More importantly, ECTEL will endeavour to advance the promulgation of the newly developed Electronic Communications Bill and its suite of Regulations to address the challenges brought about by new and emerging issues such as COVID-19.

In December 2019, the heads of governments of the Contracting States signed a Protocol to amend the ECTEL Treaty to facilitate the passage into law of the Bill and accompanying Regulations. These new legislative instruments will empower ECTEL to address issues such as licensing, quality of service, consumer protection, net neutrality, spectrum management and the impact of new and emerging technologies such as 5G and Internet of Things (IoT). This will ensure that our citizens receive efficient and modern telecommunications services at an affordable price.





ECTEL expresses our thanks and gratitude to the frontline personnel and reiterates the call by our Member States' governments to follow all safety protocols to contain the spread of COVID-19. Our thoughts and best wishes also extend to all the citizens of our Contracting States during this difficult period.

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