

The General Director's Statement



A. Andreas Avgousti
General Director

Once again it is my privilege and pleasure to welcome you to the annual report of the Telecommunications Regulatory Authority of the Kingdom of Bahrain – the TRA. This is our third report and, in many ways, marks a new stage in our development and that of the telecommunications market in the Kingdom.

However, we would never have reached this point without the constant support and active participation of our Board of Directors, and the leadership of their Chairman, Dr Mohammed J. K. Alghatam. The TRA also has a small but very dedicated and hard-working team of 18 staff. Indeed, the workforce is the TRA's most valuable asset. I would like to take this opportunity to thank both the Board and the staff for their contribution to everything we have achieved this year.

In 2004, we passed some major milestones that delivered a fully liberalised telecommunications market in the Kingdom of Bahrain. In 2005, our focus had to be on putting in place all the basic ingredients to underpin that. It was a steep learning curve for us all – in particular the TRA, Batelco as the monopoly supplier, the new

entrants, and of course the consumers. I believe the progress of the industry, including the TRA, was remarkable.

Now we must move from that start-up phase into one of consolidation, market growth and forward planning. It is, in a sense, 'the end of the beginning'. Our basic aim remains the same – to promote a vibrant competitive telecommunications market that stimulates innovation and economic growth while delivering a choice of world-class telecommunications services to the people who live and work in the Kingdom of Bahrain. Competition must be fair and non-discriminatory, consumers well-informed and protected where necessary.

But now we need to make sure that the TRA has the right priorities and processes in place to drive progress in this next phase. Are we operating efficiently and serving both consumers and service providers in the best way possible? It is still early days for competition in Bahrain and Batelco is still dominant in most parts of the market. There are balances to strike between making access easy for market entrants and providing proper

safeguards, between loosening regulation and protecting consumers.

For this reason, 2005 began with the visit of a panel of three internationally-recognised experts in telecommunications regulation – Professor Martin Cave and Mr Christopher Wright from the UK and Mr Ian Martin from Australia. Together they formed the independent TRA Development Review Panel for 2005, tasked with scrutinising our activities and recommending improvements. They were able to meet representatives of all the key organisations – from operators to consumer protection bodies, from Government Departments to the Chamber of Commerce – and, of course, the TRA itself. All discussions were held in confidence so that views could be freely expressed.

In March we published the Panel's full report, which provided some valuable insights. The Panel recognised the rapid progress we had made and our high standards of transparency, openness and impartiality. It recommended various priorities for action, including speeding up access and interconnection issues for new entrants, clarifying spectrum availability, focusing on dispute resolution and looking at price controls.

We were able to incorporate these into our first annual work plan, which we put out to consultation at around the same time as we published the Panel's report. By the end of the year we had already made good progress on some of the issues identified as priorities by the Panel.

The Panel recognised and commended the TRA on the steps we have taken to forge links with other telecommunications organisations

in the region and beyond. In 2005 we have increased these links. We hosted a workshop for the International Telecommunications Union, attended a number of high-level meetings for regulators and spoke at several international conferences.

Closer to home we have made a number of important steps forward for consumers. A good example is Carrier Pre-Selection. We were able to issue the Code of Practice in November, thanks to the hard work of our first Telecoms Consumer Advisory Group. At the end of the year we were able to confirm that the levels of radiation from mobile telephony antennas were within the internationally accepted standards.

Towards the end of the year we were preparing for the visit of the 2006 Panel. I am confident that they will be impressed with the progress we have made this year. The TRA is certainly more determined than ever to make the Kingdom of Bahrain the hub of international telecommunications for the region and a centre of excellence for choice and quality of service. We characterised last year as one of TRAnSformation in the Kingdom's telecommunications. Perhaps this year is more about direction of TRAVel, but we will carry on TRAIblazing for telecoms in our region of the world.



A. Andreas Avgousti