

Sierra Leone: Mobile license fees questioned

Contributed by
Friday, 10 November 2006

The recent announcement by the Ministry of Finance (MoF) of a US\$ 500,000 license renewal fee for mobile operators in Sierra Leone could be counter-productive.

Creating license fees without consultation with industry stakeholders (operators, the regulator, the sector ministry and the trade ministry) is clearly not consistent with best practices. Most significantly, the licensing of telecom operators is not the responsibility of the MoF. Licensing is the responsibility of the independent telecom regulator, the National Telecommunications Commission (NTC), according to the Telecommunications Act of 2006 ("the Act"). License fees are supposed to constitute the financial backbone of the independent regulator. The amount the regulator would receive through parliamentary appropriation will only make up a small percentage of the regulator's total budgetary requirement.

Since the Act gives the power to regulate the telecommunications sector to the NTC, the government should allow the regulator to carry out the complex tasks involved in regulating, monitoring and serving the telecom operators. The Act clearly defines the role of the regulator and should provide the legal clarity to prevent conflicts among the regulator, stakeholders and other institutions. The MoF should work with the NTC to address the issue of mobile operator licensing.

Source: Concord Times - WDR/Intelecon Regulatory News