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ictQATAR Seeks Public Comments on VSAT Licensing Framework

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ABOUT US

ictQATAR, The Supreme Council of Information and Communication Technology, is Qatar's telecommunications regulatory authority and initiator of multiple information and communication technology programs designed to drive industry and advance the lives of Qatar's people. ictQATAR aims to promote an advanced ICT society through the development of infrastructure and skills, the delivery of e-services and education, and the fostering of a regulatory environment conducive to sustainable growth. For more information please visit our website www.ictQATAR.qa

Proposal Developed in Response to Demand for VSAT Services, Considers Issuing Three VSAT Licenses

Doha, Qatar (9 February 2009): The Supreme Council of Information and Communication Technology (ictQATAR) has issued a proposed licensing framework document for Very Small Aperture Terminal (VSAT) services and is seeking comments from interested parties. VSAT is a wireless, satellite-based system that can support organizations, businesses and other groups, with dispersed offices and remote sites, to have internal telecommunications (voice and data) connectivity. It is commonly used by large organizations with multiple or remote locations, such as banks, retail stores and oil and gas companies. Government entities, such as foreign ministries, also frequently utilize VSAT services.

Due to the current market restraints in Qatar, demand for VSAT services far outpaces the supply. Following the upcoming VSAT market liberalization and increased supply, substantial growth in demand for VSAT services is expected over the next 5 years. One expected area of growth is the use of such technology for communications in respect of off-shore oil and gas rigs.

"ictQATAR has been approached by a number of VSAT service providers interested in entering Qatar's market and has also identified demand for this service. We recognize that telecommunications plays a critical role in Qatar's growing economy and the rapidly advancing VSAT technology has the potential to be of great benefit to many here. As part of ictQATAR's ongoing process of liberalizing Qatar's telecommunications market, we are proposing a managed approach to the licensing process for VSAT services within closed user groups to build a solid investment and competitive platform for the VSAT market. This will allow new service providers into the market in a controlled and sustainable way," said Ahmad Sultan, Licensing Section Manager in the Telecommunications Regulatory Authority at ictQATAR.

Presently, long-term provision of VSAT services has not been explicitly licensed in Qatar, but it is implicitly authorized to the incumbent holder of the license for the provision of public fixed telecommunications networks and services (Qtel). As part of the proposed VSAT Licensing Framework, ictQATAR proposes the issuing of three new licenses for VSAT service provisioning. These new licenses would enable entities to provide VSAT services to third parties, such as corporations and businesses, for internal communications within closed user groups. The VSAT operators would not be able to provide public telecommunications services. The licenses will be issued through a competitive and transparent process.

ictQATAR anticipates that this proposal would attract investors experienced in VSAT to enter and service the market in Qatar. Following an initial period of establishing market competition, ictQATAR would review the market and consider whether increasing entry opportunities would be sustainable.

ictQATAR also proposes to continue issuing the temporary "Special-Event" VSAT permits for satellite uplink that can be used for a single occasion, such as a major news story, conferences or sports event occurring in the country.

In addition to seeking public comments on the proposed VSAT Licensing Framework, ictQATAR is also inviting organizations or potential investors to express their interest in the VSAT license at this time. The full proposed VSAT Licensing Framework document is available online at www.ictQATAR.qa and the deadline for submission of comments and expression of interest is 23 March 2009.

To provide feedback on the proposed framework or express interest in a VSAT license, organizations or individuals should email ictQATAR at consult@ict.gov.qa. Feedback and expression of interest can also be submitted via post or courier to:

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