OPENING ADDRESS BY MR PHILLY MAPULANE MP, DEPUTY MINISTER OF COMMUNICATIONS AND DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES AT THE 25TH ANNUAL SOUTHERN AFRICA TELECOMMUNICATIONS NETWORKS AND APPLICATIONS CONFERENCE (SATNAC), CHAMPAGNE SPORTS RESORT, CENTRAL DRAKENSBURG, KZN, 28 AUGUST 2023

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Theme: Accelerated Digitisation – *The Augmented Era: Navigating Artificial Intelligence in a Connected Society*

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Dr Mmaki Jantjies, Chairperson of SATNAC

Distinguished guests and speakers,

Ladies and gentlemen,

A very good morning to you all!

Thank you for the invitation to address you at this, the 25th Annual Southern Africa Telecommunications Networks and Applications Conference, commonly known as SATNAC.

This year's conference theme "***Accelerated Digitisation – The Augmented Era: Navigating Artificial Intelligence in a Connected Society***" seeks to cast the spotlight on the benefits and some of the pitfalls of one of the emerging technologies that is pioneering the industrial revolution we are going through, artificial intelligence.

This is my 2nd year attending SATNAC, last year we were another beautiful place, in George, the Western Cape, where the focus was on Cloud Computing. I must commend the organises for their unique ability not only to chose exquisite venues for SATNAC but to also come up with captivating themes.

MCKINSEY GLOBAL SURVEY ON ARTIFICIAL INTELIGENCE 2022

Programme Director, i thought that in line with the theme of this conference, I should foreground my input today by reflecting on the results of the McKinsey Global Survey on Artificial Intelligence of 2022.

The survey by McKinsey, which has been conducted annually since 2017, conclusively demonstrated that there has been an expansion of the use of AI technology in the past 5 years.

It shows that the adoption of AI has more than doubled since 2017, though the proportion of organizations using AI[1] has plateaued between 50 and 60 percent for the past few years. A set of companies seeing the highest financial returns from AI continue to pull ahead of competitors.

The power of AI starts with people and intelligent technologies working together within and across company boundaries to create better outcomes for society and citizens. However, the main question we must ask ourselves is:*Whether the world is fully prepared to seize the enormous opportunities that AI presents?* I think the answer to this fundamental question can be in the affirmative if all of us were to believe that AI is a technology of the future which can be deployed in a manner that will propel us, particularly from the developing economies like us, on a trajectory of sustainable development.

DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION

Ladies and Gentlemen, we are witnessing global changes that are pushed by a phenomenon we call digital transformation. We are indeed at an inflection point in history where the convergence of telecommunications, networking and cutting-edge applications is reshaping industries, societies and economies. Digital transformation is breaking traditional state boundaries and at the same time bringing challenges of governance, ethics and regulation.

Secretary-General of the United Nations, His Excellency, Antonio Guterres, opines that the world requires a new "Digital Global Compact" which will set the Future global interactions. He argues that what drives this need for global digital compact is what he characterises as the need for "Digital Cooperation". He further argues that this 'digital cooperation' will be driven by two factors that will determine the Digital Future, and that is Digital Transformation and Climate Change.

15th BRICS SUMMIT

We are meeting here today just after the conclusion of a very successful 15th BRICS summit on our shores last week, which concluded with the historic admission of 6 more countries to the family of BRICS nations, i.e Argentina, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Ethiopia and Iran. This move lends momentum towards a multipolar world and has serious implications for geo politics and the global balance of power, particularly given the combined economic strength of this BRICS + countries.This is remarkable moment. We are witnessing history being made towards a more balanced global order.

At this summit, Xi Jinping, the President of China announced the intention to form an 'AI study group' within the BRICS member countries. This initiative is aimed at closely monitoring the

progress and development of AI technology. One of the roles of this AI study group will be to catalyse innovation in AI within the BRICS member countries. Further details about the project are anticipated to be revealed in the near future.

President Xi Jimping stressed the importance of creating a robust AI governance framework and standardisation to enhance the security, reliability, control, and equity of AI technologies.
We must give salute to this visionary leadership of BRICS leaders to carve a creative and innovative path in contending with the reality of this new technologies.

As a precursor to the BRICS Summit, the Ministry hosted the BRICS Ministers of Communications Meeting in Cape Town in August 2023. The discussions in this year's meeting focused on digital inclusion, expansion and development of transformative technologies as well as internet governance and security.

In their declaration, the BRICS Communication Ministers recommitted their respective counctries to strengthening cooperation on Artificial Intelligence (AI) technologies and governance and urged member states to fully leverage the opportunities and benefits of AI and to also address some of the ethical concerns related to AI.

GOVTECH 2023

Ladies and gentlemen, from the 12th-14th September 2023 we will be hosting GovTech2023, at Inkosi Albert Luthuli International Convention Centre in Durban. Under the theme: *"Platform Economy for Digital Transformation and Inclusive Growth"* participants will be dissecting what possibilities the platform economy brings. In it we are hoping to continue the conversations we are starting here today to harness opportunities presented by AI-driven solutions to bridge gaps in healthcare, education, and public service.

ARTIFICIAL INTELIGENCE IN A CONNECTED SOCIETY

Distinguished guests, as government we note that the Telecommunications and ICT sector is changing in terms of its operations and business models. The traditional Mobile Network Operators are traversing new territories such as FinTechs, Online Platforms, Internet of Things and Artificial Intelligence. All these changing business models require an agile government and clear cooperation between industry and civil society, including the academia.

By fostering a connected society that embraces AI, we pave the way for inclusive growth and progress. In this regard, we have commenced with the full implementation of the recommendations of the Presidential Commission of Fourth Industrial Revolution (PC4IR).

PC4IR recommended that as a country we need to position ourselves and get the benefits from artificial intelligence and emerging technologies. In this regard, we established the Artificial Intelligence Institute of South Africa (AIISA). We have further taken an approach to build a collaborative AI network system which will be aligned to our key economic and social sectors. We have realised that the values of AI should be to provide the analytical, diagnostic, predictive and automation systems within our country as directed by the PC4IR report.

We have commenced the building up of AI network through establishing AI Hubs or Centres of Excellence aligned to a specific sector that would allow for localised AI innovation solutions.

The first collaboration was with the University of Johannesburg (JBS AI Hub) and Tshwane University of Technology (TUT AI Hub) because of their location within the key economic special zones. They have also demonstrated their readiness on AI on these sectors. There will be more AI Hubs that will be launched throughout the country as an effort to ramp-up the adoption of AI as the technology of choice.

Since these Institutions of higher learning are centres of knowledge and development and they play a very critical role in ensuring that the future we envision as a country and the continent is realised. We have launched Artificial Intelligence (AI) Hubs with each institution for purposes of enhancing the

economic sector through a series of catalytic projects by using technology. For instance, the TUT AI Hub is linked to the sectors of automotive, health, transportation, digital identity, and mobility, while the Johannesburg Business School (JBS) AI Hub is linked to manufacturing, mining, criminal justice system amongst others.

As we navigate this path, we must be mindful of the ethical considerations that come with AI adoption. Ensuring that AI technologies are developed and deployed responsibly is a priority for our government. We believe in a future where AI benefits all citizens, regardless of their background or location. Let us collectively strive to build an AI ecosystem that respects human rights, privacy, and dignity.

Ladies and gentlemen, as we delve into the discussions and presentations over the course of this conference, I encourage each of you to reflect on the unique role that South Africa plays in shaping the augmented era. We are a nation rich in diversity and culture, and this diversity serves as a wellspring of creativity and innovation. The BRICS Summit we hosted serves as a testament to our rich diversity, innovation and creativity.

Our potential to harness AI for the greater good is limitless, as we leverage our collective strengths to address the unique challenges faced by our society.

The SATNAC conference offers a platform for exchange, learning, and collaboration that will undoubtedly contribute to the advancement of AI in our connected society.

BROADCAST DIGITAL MIGRATION

Driven by the quest to attain universal connectivity for all South Africans irrespective of their geographic location and economic class, I am pleased to announce that we have reached a milestone agreement with the broadcasters on a two-stage approach to finally conclude the broadcasting digital migration that will see all analogue television broadcasting above 698mhz terminated by end of July, paving a way to an end to dual illumination by the end of next year.

This momentous agreement allows the country to move forward with the release the much needed high-demand spectrum that was auctioned to mobile network operators in March last year. The release of spectrum will allow the telecommunications operators to decongest our networks and deploy 4G and 5G networks across the country**.**

Government is further implementing SA Connect, the national broadband policy initiative with the objective to close the digital divide with special focus in providing broadband connectivity to the underserviced areas. We must equally appreciate the role played by Telkom in connecting our people to the internet. Your

investment in partnerships to connect us to the globe through submarine cable networks has not gone unnoticed.

POLICY INTERVENTION TO PROPEL THE DIGITAL ECONOMY

On the policy front, we have approved the implementation of the Digital Economy Master-Plan that sets out the framework for our approach and interventions to grow up the digital economy.

We have also published a Draft White paper on Audiovisual and Online Content for final public inputs. I wish to emphasize that since this sector requires a new digital regulatory framework and regulator, we have not reduced any of the powers or relevance of our current regulators. We want to strengthen their powers and relevance in this new regulatory environment. All of them are equally important in our view and need more strengthening so that those that want to avoid regulation do not engage in regulatory forum-shopping or undermining any of our regulatory authorities' powers and mandates as we finalise the legislative and legal frameworks during 2024/2025.

TELKOM CENTRES OF EXCELLENCE

We are gathered here today to celebrate the achievements of the Telkom Centres of Excellence (CoE) programme. Established in 1997, this initiative started as a collective programme

between Telkom, the telecommunications industry and government to promote research in communication technology and allied sciences, and to provide facilities to encourage young scientists and engineers to pursue their research interests in South Africa.

As government, we are proud of the work Telkom Centres of Excellence programme has done over the past 25 years, to build a skilled workforce for the future. To date, this programme is the largest coordinated ICT research effort in South Africa.

We calling on other technology companies to emulate the example of this programme and develop a new pool of innovators who will contribute towards this rapidly growing digital economy.

RELEVANCE OF RESEARCH

Last year I challenged the students, researchers and academics who are part of SATNAC that we do not desire that our academic institutions produce graduates who are only qualified to write peer-reviewed papers that does not contribute in any meaningful way to addressing challenges faced by society. We called on the generation of research students such as the ones among us

today, to research key policy areas in a manner that your research informs government policy. I hope that you have positively heeded this call and the research papers you'll be presenting today will specifically respond to key policy gaps that we need to respond to.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, I wish to extend my gratitude to the organizing committee for their dedication in putting together this remarkable conference. I also express my appreciation to the esteemed speakers, researchers, innovators, and delegates who have come from far and wide to be part of this transformative dialogue.

Let us seize the opportunities presented by the augmented era with a sense of purpose and responsibility.

Together, we can navigate the intricate pathways of AI and connectivity to build a South Africa that stands as a beacon of progress among the nations of this world.

Ladies and gentlemen, it gives me great pleasure to officially open this gathering of leaders and visionaries of one of the fastest growing sectors of our economy, which we call the Digital economy in this, the 15th SATNAC 2023, taking place on the foot hills of this majestic mountains, the Drakensberg mountains.

I wish you all of the best in your engagements.

I thank you!

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