



MINISTRY
COMMUNICATIONS AND DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

From the desk of

Deputy Minister Pinky Kekana

ICT SMME Chamber

World Telecommunication & Information Society Day

Virtual Summit

11am | 17 May 2020

Good Morning to:

- The ITU Director for Africa, Mr Andrew Rugege
- The Secretary General of the African Telecommunication Union, Mr John Omo
- Speakers and Captains of industry
- Ladies and gentlemen, joining us online from all over the world

I am delighted for South Africa to join the world's ICT fraternity to commemorate the WORLD TELECOMMUNICATION AND INFORMATION SOCIETY DAY, or the acronym WTISD. This day is celebrated annually on the 17th of May, every year since 1969.

It marks the founding anniversary of the International Telecommunication Union, the ITU as we know it, on 17 May 1865, when the first International Telegraph Convention was signed in Paris.

This year the ITU's theme is: Connect 2030: ICTs for the Sustainable Development Goals, the SDG's.

The ITU in their official statement says, "The year 2020 represents a unique opportunity for ITU membership to commemorate ICT's contribution to the advancement of the Information Society, and to present the 'Connect 2030 Agenda for Global Telecommunication/ICT Development', specifically focusing on how technological advances in the coming 10 years will contribute to accelerate the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals of the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development."

The 2030 Agenda has recognised that the dissemination of information, communications technology, and global interconnectedness has great potential to accelerate human progress and to bridge the digital divide. The five strategic goals are Growth, Inclusiveness, Sustainability, Innovation and Partnership.

When referencing the SDG's, the World Economic Forum refers to 2020 – 2030 as the "Decade of Action", where ambitions and plans MUST turn into reality. We are, after all, in the midst of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, this global era characterised by rapid advancements in new technologies and global connectivity.

All around the world, governments and the private sector have to work together to make sure that technology is actively managed to align with societal needs, and address humanity's most urgent goals – the SDGs.

The SDG's have become even more critical in current times, of living with both a deadly virus and also the global economic devastation that looms large.

The International Monetary Fund estimates that South Africa's growth will be 6.6% lower, with a partial recovery projected only in 2021.

South Africa is fortunate to have visionary leadership in our President and AU Chair, President Cyril Ramaphosa who has dealt with the pandemic, in steering us away from a potentially massive catastrophe, thus far. All countries across the world have been impacted with varying degrees of impact, some worse than others, but we're all rightfully consumed with focussing on saving people's lives and nothing else.

This means then that all countries will regress in achieving their SDG targets. In line with the ITU theme for WTISD, if managed well, technologies can open up new pathways for regional integration, economic development and prosperity. South Africa's Minister in the Presidency and Acting Minister of Communications, Mr Jackson Mthembu says, "COVID-19 has hastened the global push into the Fourth Industrial Revolution. Used correctly, digital technologies have the potential to aid the containment of COVID-19 and mitigate some of the challenges brought upon by the spread of the virus,". Technology can help countries catapult and pivot, during the virus and beyond when we have to deal with it's resultant effects, which you will find aligns to the SDG's.

This very crisis that is delaying our response to the SDG's, is increasing the need for the targets to be met. It is technology that is the enabler for countries to achieve these targets of the SDG's, South Africa's NDP , and Africa's Agenda 2063. These, aside from innovative, efficient, and on-time service delivery needed by our people.

We know that technology is not only a solutions provider, but also an enabler, innovator, and disruptor, and there are so many ways that technology intersects the human world, to evolve our businesses and our lives.

Whether it's the optimisation of agricultural yields and farming, to Satellite-data, artificial intelligence and cloud computing in the protection of natural resources, and not to mention teaching and learning online, amongst others.

The pandemic has taught us just how extreme the digital divide is in our country, digital learning and online education, especially for the most disadvantaged of our country's children.

This leads me to the digital economy inequalities, from infrastructure of our villages and townships being as connected as the cities and suburbia, to addressing inequalities of access to technology and the internet, based on gender, income, location, and others.

As government, I thank the private sector for all they have done and continue to do, in partnering with us towards ending these digital economy inequities. Unfortunately, the road ahead is still very long, and even more has to be done, before ALL our people have connectivity and access.

In looking at just 2 of the SDGs, technology has the capacity to help us achieve the targets in this Decade of Action.

SDG 2 is ZERO HUNGER. Technology is critical to this goal being fast tracked. Globally, 45% of children under the age of 5 die from malnutrition. Artificial Intelligence and Robotics are innovating in things like Plant-Internet-of-Things, nutritious lab protein, microbiomes, and more - to solve the issue of protein availability meeting demand as populations grow, while simultaneously assisting in meeting the Paris Agreement Climate Change goals. We are not saying it IS, what will be used to deliver on this goal, it's examples of how technology provides holistic solutions to the world's most challenging problems.

The same could be said of SDG 3, our most critical goal for humanity at the moment – GOOD HEALTH AND WELL-BEING.

Advances in technology, including AI, blockchain, sensors and biotechnology, can advance human medicine along with healthcare analytics, optimised services, and utility access. There's a lot to be said about the timing of Covid-19.

I imagine that if this was a few years in the future, technology advancements at that point could potentially mean that vaccines could be developed in a few days rather than many months, or contact-less environments would already be in existence, meaning the spread of disease would be far more contained.

But, that's the future, and we don't know what it holds exactly, but what we DO know is that we only have a decade left to achieve the goals – there is no option, but to use and advance technology to fast-track us to the SDG's.

To celebrate this day is important – it's steeped in the history of human evolution, since that fateful day in 1865 when the Chair of the conference, France's Foreign Minister explained that the aim of the Telegraph Convention was to rationalise the handling of burgeoning international telegraphic traffic. Think what that decision 155 years ago, has done for the history of humankind since, as we all sit here in a virtual summit.

Today, we may be in the early days of Industry 4.0, but we also stand at the cusp of potentially extraordinary decisions - about policies, structures, and governance, that could have enduring and profound impact on our people and the future of South Africa, for many decades to come.

To the ITU, all our peer member countries around the world, the global technology fraternity, and all of you in South Africa who drive the growth and development of the ICT sector every day – I wish you a wonderful World Telecommunication and Information Society Day.

Go forth and conquer.

Thank you.