Deputy Minister of Communications and Digital Technologies, Hon. Philly Mapulane, MP, speech at the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) Global Symposium for Regulators (GSR-23 IN Sharm el-Sheikh Tonino Lamborghini Convention Center, Egypt)

Date: 06 June 2023

"Regulation for a sustainable digital future"

Chairperson, we meet here today when the digital transformation of the economy, society and technologies is at advance stage.

The other day Denmark's prime minister Mette Frederiksen used OpenAI's chatbot ChatGPT to write part of her speech to make a point about AI to highlight the risks of artificial intelligence; indicating that she found the chatbot "both fascinating and terrifying." It is indeed terrifying and highly fascinating considering that it has been mainstream since the last quarter of 2022.

The above comes at the back of AI generating the most famous photo of the Pope wearing the white winter-jacket; and a fake Donald Trump being arrested. But it had been generating fake voices and faces of people and used by others to spread mis/dis-information.

We have observed that it is important to develop digital sovereignty, whereas nations we have and continue to develop abilities to control our own digital destinies and may include control over what we decide is acceptable or not based on our laws.

The *role of Artificial Intelligence and the global social media giants* will be coming into focus, considering the volume of dis/misinformation and false images/or voice generated magic that may make people loose votes or be voted against.

Our Parliament has invited some of the leading social media giants to come and share with it its views and **approaches on content moderation, especially with regards to the upcoming election**. I think most countries do respect the freedom of expression, but it has to always come with responsibility as it is not absolute.

I am raising the above because they touch on the core of what we are discussing today and what we will be discussing in the next coming days as regulators / government / public / business or private sector / academia and research institutions.

From South Africa's side we have embraced the **Fifth-generation collaborative regulation (G5:"gold standard" for digital regulation)** across institutions and stakeholders as part of our digital economy approach as we tackle the challenges and opportunities of digital transformation. Government is deliberately collaborating with the regulators and public/private sectors to develop evidenced based policy frameworks.

Recently we used the regulatory sandboxes approach in providing a policy direction to the regulator, engaging, and collaborating with the Minister responsible for electricity and the broadcasting / telecommunications sectors, to see how they could be supported during the energy or electricity challenges.

Chairperson, due to time limitations let me further indicate the following from the South African perspective:

1. With regards to **ADVANCING DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION:** besides launching various Artificial Institutes with collaboration of Higher Learning Institutions; our 4IR Report by experts has encouraged the integration of the Internet, cloud computing, big data and Artificial Intelligence with the economy, to enable the upgrading and transformation of traditional industries as well as fostering new industries and business models. We are working with Industry to finalise on our Digital Economy Masterplan and the development of a digital strategy for the country; also addressing the issues of Data Governance.

2. We are also **EXPANDING DIGITAL CONNECTIVITY,** through our South African Connect programme to cater for a digital infrastructure that is high-speed and ubiquitous, secure and reliable, affordable and accessible. This is central to our digital economy as it will further stimulate the economic by ensuring universal access to the vast majority of our communities, including those who leave in the underserved and

rural areas. This expansion program lays the required solid foundation for social transformation, and meaningful social development.

3.   We also believe in PROMOTING **DIGITAL INCLUSIVENESS** as part of ensuring affordable and equitable access to digital technologies and services for all, particularly people living in remote and rural areas, including women, persons with disabilities and specific needs and the elderly, in order to bridge the digital divides. This is where we believe that we should be discussing the future use of Universal Access Funds, especially their contributions towards the provision of digital skills development and training for the citizens and the small and medium business enterprises to improve employment and promote entrepreneurship. Issues related to digital media and information literacy will also fit within this approach.

4.   Above all, Fifth-generation collaborative regulation encourages the exchange of best practices and experiences, and this is the line, the spirit we continue to push forward for this GSR23. We believe that there should be a **DEEPENING CO-OPERATION IN DIGITAL GOVERNANCE,** especially on matters related to cross-border data flows, protection of personal information, and ownership of data assets, and other associated policy and legal issues among others. Due to our Constitutional democracy, we continue promoting the respecting of the rights to privacy of individuals, and we believe that GSR23 is a relevant space to encourage fair and open discussion on policy, regulation, and practices to deepen cooperation in digital governance. The international legal frameworks for protection of global nature of Internet, should ensure that it remains accountable, safe and trusted Internet. The protection of children and the vulnerable should not be compromised, especially from all types of online harmful content that is detrimental to their health and growth in the digital spaces and encourage the public awareness-raising of the online risks faced by children, and to provide them a safe and healthy online environment.

WTSA20 held in March 2022 in Geneva agreed on only 2 new Resolutions, Resolution 100 urges Africa Member States to harmonize their emergency call number. South Africa is committed to the implementation of this new Resolution. We have implemented 112 as a common emergency number in South Africa as per ITU-T Recommendation and are ready to share our experience and assist our African colleagues in their implementation of WTSA RES 100.

During the ATU Council meeting held in Tunis in May 2022, just 2 months after the Resolution was adopted, we had our expert present the South Africa experience. Last week ITU TSB Director issues a Survey requesting African Member States to share their status with respect to a common emergency number in Africa. We are ready to assist and please feel free to contact us.

Indeed, we should continue to work together, support information exchanges and technical cooperation on all digital technologies, share best practices, conduct comparative studies together.

South Africa is observing all these trends with a keen eye and participatory mode. It is for this reason that in our efforts to promote and encourage the digital regulatory forum, where the Competition Commission can work well with ICASA, where the information regulator and the FPB work well on the protection of children data and its use, where the upcoming small businesses and the schools can work well with .zaDNA to get our youths and children having their own domain names for life and during their school days as meaningful participants of this digital economy.

We are also supporting the UN Secretary General "The Global Digital Compact which is expected to outline shared principles for an open, free, and secure digital future for all. We believe that through the collaboration of various sectors, we will make a significant difference for both developed and developing countries.

Thank very much for allowing us to share some of these critical points with you. Looking forward to the engagements on these.

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