



MINISTRY  
COMMUNICATIONS AND DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES  
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

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## **MEDIA STATEMENT**

### **MINISTER MTHEMBU PARTICIPATE IN G20 DIGITAL ECONOMIES MEETING ON COVID19**

On Thursday, 30<sup>th</sup> April 2020, the Acting Minister of Communications and Digital Technologies, Mr Jackson Mthembu attended a virtual Extraordinary G20 Digital Economy Ministerial Meeting. The meeting discussed the role of digital technologies in responding to the COVID19 global pandemic.

Minister Mthembu thanked the G20 Presidency, Saudi for this excellent initiative of convening the meeting, which was chaired by the Saudi Arabia Minister of Communications, H.E. Eng Abdullah Amer Al-Swaha. This meeting confirmed the wisdom of multilateralism as South Africa has greatly benefitted from lessons on how digital technologies can be used to fight COVID19.

Minister Mthembu informed the meeting that South Africa had the fortune to learn lessons from other countries, enabling us to act before the disease became too prevalent. "It is really clear that one of the most powerful tools at our disposal is our ICT sector. We need to provide up to date and accurate medical information, statistics, as well as information on new government regulations, to inform all of our citizens about the COVID19 pandemic," Mthembu said.

Minister Mthembu also highlighted the response of communications service providers who have been decisive by agreeing early on, to provide zero rated services for health and education purposes. This has helped many citizens, who would otherwise have struggled in this regard. It has also ensured that many young people are able to continue their schooling during the crisis, despite challenges regarding those in rural and poor areas. Through the use of geolocation solutions, telecommunications companies have worked with government

in the tracing and tracking those who have come in contact with those infected with COVID19 without infringing on the privacy and human rights of South African citizens.

Furthermore, Minister Mthembu advocated for the meeting to include in its statement a text encouraging the zero rating of telecommunications and data services specified for public services such as health, education and public service pronouncements in our G20 Digital Ministers statement today. Minister Mthembu stressed on the need for partnership with the international community, the various industries, especially the ICT sectors and the SMMEs to come together to develop and explore solutions to mitigate the spread of the virus. He further indicated that COVID-19 provides opportunity for affordable ICT infrastructure and digital technology solutions such as Artificial Intelligence, High Performance Computing, Robotics and IOTs to be explored.

“The African continent would like to encourage G20 countries to share their experiences and expertise with developing countries and where possible, provide support with infrastructure, equipment, medicines, technical assistance and other resources,” he added.

The meeting adopted the G20 COVID19 Response Statement which can be accessed on <https://www.dtps.gov.za/>.

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Issued by the Ministry of Communications and Digital Technologies  
Republic of South Africa

30 April 2020

