



MINISTRY
COMMUNICATIONS AND DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

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REMARKS BY THE MINISTER OF COMMUNICATIONS AND DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES, HON. KHUMBUDZO NTSHAVHENI DURING SONA DEBATE, 15 FEBRUARY 2023

His Excellency, the President of the Republic

Honourable Speaker of the National Assembly

Chairperson of the NCOP

The Deputy President of the governing party, the African National

Congress

Honourable Members

Fellow South Africans,

Ndi Masiari

In the not-so-distant future, we should be able to use predictive technology of Artificial Intelligence to amongst others detect undue conduct in this House to strengthen the work of the Speaker in upholding the decorum of the House and maintaining order. In this regard, we have established the **Artificial Intelligence Institute of South Africa (AIISA)**, which was launched on the 30th of November 2022 in partnership with the University of Johannesburg and the Tshwane University of Technology, in part as an acknowledgment that AI technology holds the greatest potential of resuscitating socio-economic recovery and development of the country and secondly, in line with the Recommendations of the Presidential Commission on the 4th Industrial Revolution.



Homegrown AI solutions are being developed within the AI Institute of South Africa to support the application of AI across sectors and harness innovation-based production for commercialization. The immediate beneficiaries of the work of the AI institute and in support of the great strides underway to improve the quality of basic education, of course- the masters of contradictions would want South Africans to believe otherwise, and supported by the Chemicals Industries Education and Training Authority (CHIETA), youth linked to the AIIISA JBS-Hub have developed a **virtual science laboratory** that will be rolled-out to STEM schools without science laboratories, and this will enable learners to perform science experiments virtually instead of the current situation where they only read science experiments in their textbooks, thus using technology to bridge societal gap. The TUT-hub will be launched in March 2023 and 4 new centres of excellence of the AIIISA will be established in the 2023/ 24 financial year.

At this point, I would like the house to join me in extending well wishes to Professor Tshilidzi Marwala, the incoming Rector of the United Nations University, who has contributed immensely to this country, region and the African continent's progress in artificial intelligence, machine learning and emerging technologies. We look forward to his continued contribution in the development of science and technology in South Africa and Africa in general. Tsela tsweu,

Prof, Nwali a fhatutshedze u bva na u dzhena havho.

Honourable Chairperson

When our nation was weeping the sudden departure of our beloved Mama Winnie Mandela, there were those who took to the podium to ask for a signal from Mama to divide the women of our nation: I want to assure Mama Winnie that analogue signal will soon be a thing of the past. We have concluded the consultations on the **Analogue switch off for the Broadcast Digital Migration** in full compliance to the order of the Constitutional Court, but most importantly 44% of the Set-Top-Boxes installers are women – these we do to make sure Mama Winnie multiplies and that women do not continue to be victims of GBV due to their economic dependence on men.

The SABC is starting to take advantage of the increase in the number of channels on the DTT platform that is the direct outcome of the broadcast digital migration. SABC News has launched a 24-hour news channel on the DTT platform in all indigenous languages,



meaning that for the first time in the history of broadcasting in this country, millions of South Africans no longer wait for evening news bulletins and current affairs shows to receive news and information in their own languages. We are engaging with the regulator to find mechanisms to ease the participation of more content producers as television channel owners, and the technology is ready to increase channel capacity on the DTT platform.

Digital migration is enabling the transformation of the broadcasting sector to ensure that Edu- and infotainment becomes the base for a viable and sustainable creative industry. SENTECH will soon launch a homegrown OTT platform that will be anchored by NEMISA but will be available to other content producers. NEMISA continues to train upcoming content producers include training unemployed youth on podcasts, vlog and storytelling using mobile devices. Our goal is to eventually make this platform home for quality films, documentaries, and children's stories, in addition to the SABC-Plus. The launch of this OTT platform will be in the first quarter of 2023/24 financial year.

Honourable Chairperson

The telecommunications companies have 5-years to complete the roll-out 4G and 5G networks including to the rural areas – this from the spectrum release through BDM and to connect South Africa to high speed broadband.

In the meantime, through Broadband Infraco (BBI) and funded by the Broadband Access Fund of the Presidential Employment

Stimulus (and Hon Hlengwa, it is not managed from the Presidency), we are facilitating the rollout of 3000 community wi-fi hotspots across 16 districts of our country and connecting 50 000 households on fibre-to-the-home and wi-fi to the home technologies. In addition, through the **SA Connect programme**, we are going to roll-out 14,024 community wi-fi hotspots in the 2023/24 financial year across 16 districts. The other 19,515 community wi-fi hotspots will be rolled out in the 2024/25 financial year in 36 districts – completing the over 33, 000 community Wi-Fi hotspots that will enable South Africans to have universal access to the internet by 2025. The BBI is partnering with Internet Service Providers (ISPs) as part of our plan to transform the telecommunications sector by strengthening the emergence of viable and sustainable mobile virtual network operators (MVNOs). The ISPs participating on the SA Connect programme will backhaul on Sentech/ BBI infrastructure network. Mama Winnie won't need to send any signal- this government will ensure network availability to all including to rural areas.



The cost to communicate are not decreasing at the pace that government wants and to mitigate this, in the first quarter of the new financial year, we are going to issue a Policy Direction to the regulator ICASA to study models that other countries are adopting to fast-track the reduction of cost to communicate without relying on market forces.

Government has completed stakeholder consultations on the consolidation of different emergency numbers to a single emergency number for the country in a manner that harnesses our competitiveness in call centre operations and partnership with the private sector. We will soon provide Policy Direction to the regulator, ICASA to amend the Regulations related to emergency numbers. This will improve the rate of responses to emergency calls including through the use of interactive voice responses.

Honourable Chairperson,

We appreciate that the Post Office is a critical service channel for our people, in particular for those in rural and remote areas. For the Post Office to achieve this, we need it to operate as a viable business and all efforts are being made to rebuild this important service agency to a sustainable business. At present, personnel expenditure constitutes 68% of total Company expenditure.

Obviously, this situation is untenable and requires open and frank engagement between the leadership of the post office, workers and workers representatives to consider all options for purposes of returning SAPO into a viable entity that will create more jobs in the future and provide the e-commerce logistics backbone for the country. At the moment, the options are do we save some jobs or lose all jobs, and do we close some post office branches or close all post offices?

Our commitment to the viability of the post office is because its branch network provides the base network infrastructure for the Postbank. As we await the National Assembly to finalise the Postbank Amendment Bill, we continue to work with the Reserve Bank to finalise the corporatization, licensing and repurposing the

Postbank not only as fully fledged bank but as a State Bank. The Postbank will commence with the revamping of 100 post office branches to ready itself for its new role. In addition, to the repackaging of its product and service offering, the Postbank has commenced with the on-boarding of township businesses such as spaza shops to form part of its payment channels. This is part of the first steps to ensure that townships and small businesses are not stepchildren in the economy of this country due to financial exclusion.



Honourable Chairperson,

During the Debate, Honourable Malema stood here and criticized the response and the actions of the Presidential Protection Services in stopping the storming of the stage by the EFF in a manner that compromises the security of the person of the State President. I don't even want to comment on the attempt to justify same by Honourable Steenhuisen for I will have to ask when is he attaining his post-matric qualification, to assist him with tools of analysis. As Mama Winnie has once said "any acceptance of humiliation, indignity, or insult is acceptance of Inferiority". We are not inferior, and we won't accept attempts to make this President inferior. We are descendants of great and resilient leaders.

A self-respecting member of this august House, addressing the joint sitting for that matters, rises here, and declares that Apartheid – declared a crime against humanity, to be not at all bad. It is a pity that in this house, some members seem to be brainwashed and behave like parrots after the puppet -master. I am bound to sing:

"Emancipate yourselves from mental slavery,

None but ourselves can free our minds.

Have no fear for [white supremacy]

Cause none of them can stop the time'.

Bob Marley, the Redemption Song.

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