



**MINISTRY
COMMUNICATIONS AND DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES
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MINISTER MALATSI'S GOOGLE AI IN ACTION SPEECH

Programme Director,
Google Leadership,
Captains of industry,
Valued partners from academia and civil society,
Representatives of Government,
Ladies and gentlemen,

Good morning.

It is truly an honour to deliver this keynote address at Google's flagship AI event on a topic that is so central to the future of our nation's digital transformation.

We are at a pivotal moment in history. The era of Artificial Intelligence is no longer on the horizon – it is here, and it is reshaping how we work, learn, live and govern.

Just as the steam engine powered the first Industrial Revolution and reshaped economies and societies – data and algorithms are now fuelling a new revolution driven by AI.

Not long ago, the idea that a machine could learn and reason was the stuff of science fiction. Today, this is our daily reality.

AI is being used by SARS to detect fraud and prevent illicit tax refunds, protecting billions in public funds and helping dismantle criminal networks.

In healthcare, AI-powered early detection systems are reducing misdiagnoses and saving lives.

AI is already woven into the fabric of our society, changing lives and transforming industries.

Yet, for all the promise AI holds, we must also remain aware of the inherent risks it presents. AI, if left unchecked, could deepen the very divides it promises to bridge.

It can automate bias, reinforce inequality and erode trust.

We, as government and the private sector, must ensure that the AI we build does not become another source of exclusion, but rather a powerful equalizer of opportunity.

The promise of AI must reach everyone, not just the few. No one should be left behind in this revolution.

That's why our approach to AI is firmly guided by ethics, transparency, safety, sovereignty and the protection of the constitutional rights of every South African.

We are determined that this new technology will not undermine our values, but rather amplify the best of them.

To achieve this, we must develop South African AI for South Africa. AI that understands our languages and responds to our lived realities.

This means AI trained using South African data and guided by local expertise to address our own priorities – from food security and public health to service delivery and job creation.

When AI works for a small business owner in Gqeberha, helps deliver better healthcare to a grandmother in rural KwaZulu-Natal, or enables child in Moletjie to receive a world-class education, then we know it is truly empowering.

These everyday impacts are the real measure of success.

If harnessed with wisdom and shared purpose, AI can drive inclusive development, democratize access to services, and create a more equitable society.

Earlier this year, we released a Draft National AI Policy that lays out a bold roadmap for the future. It aims to leverage AI for inclusive economic growth, job creation, cost reduction, and a digitally empowered Africa.

However, translating policy into action requires investing in robust digital infrastructure and connectivity across the country.

It means integrating AI into education at all levels, with training programs that equip South Africans with the skills to thrive in an AI-powered world.

It also means building and funding local AI institutions like the AI Institute of South Africa and supporting the startups and small businesses that drive innovation in this space.

We must lay the groundwork so that **every citizen can participate in and benefit from the AI revolution**.

But government cannot do this alone. Our journey into an AI-driven future must be a journey we walk together. It is a national mission that requires **collaboration** across all sectors of society.

To our partners in the private sector, like Google: we see you as essential engines of innovation. Your work in localizing AI for African languages and creating open platforms is not just good for business.

It is a public good that fosters local innovation and ensures AI is relevant in the South African context. We need your continued partnership as we develop home-grown AI solutions.

To our researchers and academic institutions: you are the crucibles of ideas that will shape our nation's future. We must work together to translate your breakthroughs into practical solutions for our most pressing challenges.

The collaboration between government and academia will be vital in turning research into results that improve people's lives.

And to our industry leaders: your role in building digital skills is critical. We must design training pathways that prepare our youth for the jobs of the future.

Together, we share a responsibility to ensure no one is left behind in this technological transformation.

South Africa has the talent to not only participate in the global AI revolution, but to lead it. Let us not merely consume AI developed elsewhere; let us build AI that speaks our languages, solves our problems, and tells our stories.

Let us move forward together with a shared vision, powered by innovation, and guided by the conviction that technology must serve humanity — not the other way around.

As I conclude, I want to commend Google for creating the **AI in Action** platform. This forum goes beyond dialogue and helps align our national aspirations with the technological forces shaping the global landscape.

It is through partnerships and collective efforts like this that we will ensure that the promise of AI delivers real progress for all our people.

Thank you.