Opening Address by Ms. Khumbudzo Ntshaveni, MP, Minister of Communications and Digital Technologies at the 23rd Annual Southern Africa Telecommunications Networks and Applications Conference (SATNAC) under the theme Accelerated Digitisation – Current and Future Ways of Working

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The Group CEO of Telkom, Mr Sipho Maseko

The Group CEO Designate of Telkom, Mr Serame Taukobong,

Prof Zeblon Vilakazi, the Vice Chancellor and Principal of Wits UniversityAll the sponsors and distinguished speakers of SATNAC 2021

Ladies and gentlemen

Good morning

To the leadership of Telkom, thank you for the invitation to open this august Conference. Theonly thing you forgot to do though is to send draft Speakers Notes – more so when my addressis planned after the awe-inspiring welcome address by Prof Vilakazi. I do not understand whyyou put a politician to speak after a Physicist unless the intention was to cartoon my depth.

I have also noted that for the 22 speakers billed to speak today, only 2 are women including me who does not count because whoever is Minister on this portfolio, they would have been invited to speak. So SATNAC 2022, must have a panel of only women to talk about technology,science, and engineering and not women empowerment.

I am fascinated by the theme of the Conference: Accelerated Digitisation – current and future ways of working and the various topics that are up for discussion during the conference. I amof the view that the outcomes of this Conference should not just be for the benefit of Telkom Centres of Excellence, but they should be packaged and shared with other stakeholders who are not participating here as part of multiplying the capacity building effort.

I know that at a government level, we will benefit from the insights, in particular for aDepartment of Communications and Digital Technologies that has a mandate of bridging the digital divide. The prevalence of the Covid-19 pandemic has accelerated not only the need to bridge the digital divide but the pace we must collectively move in our quest to bridge the divide. For example, access to connectivity has become a basic need as it determines access toeducation, access to health and access to work amongst others.

As government we are on a review of our plans to ensure that all South Africans have access to internet/ connectivity at their home by 2024 at the latest. It will also require government to re-write the South

African draft Data Policy that was just at public consultation stage in early 2020. The re-write of this Policy must include a commitment on how much data size must thehome have access to at the most basic of price. The EU has committed to 1 terabyte to the homeby 2025, what size of data should South Africa commit to and given the developmentdisparities that are not only a result of class differences but the geolocation of the person? Weneed to use access to data to bridge the Urban-Rural divide.

Ladies and gentlemen,

We are fully aware that access to Spectrum will be a major game changer in improving accessto connectivity amongst other things. We are not only committing to the release of mobile spectrum but 5G spectrum for production. To this end, it is common knowledge that we are doggedly pursuing digital migration and the Analogue Switch-Off date of 31st March 2022 as announced by the State President in the 2021 SONA.

We have already switched off all analogue SABC sites in the FS. This past Friday, SENTECHachieved the SABC threshold to switch-off the only remaining SABC analogue site in the Northern Cape - outside Upington and I will be switching it off this coming Friday (26 November 2021). I have committed to the switch-off event in Upington because by switchingoff analogue in the Northern Cape, we will also be freeing the space to achieve non-interferencefor the Square Kilometre Array, this is but our small contribution towards the quantum leap technology target for South Africa.

On the issue of access to work through remote working, both public and private employers areseeking ways to ensure performance and productivity with direct supervision. In our case, where bulk of government administration and services are yet to digitise, we are confronted bya challenge of how do we leapfrog the public service into future ways of working, which futurehas become current.

At the public administration level, this requires a re-think of how-to re-skill people without thebasic skills on technology but also the introduction and embedding of artificial intelligence (AI) within the public service. As a country, we led the development of the AI Blueprint of Africa which was adopted on the 10th of November 2021 by the Smart Africa Alliance of the AU with the support of Prof Marwala-led panel of experts. We are now working earnestly to establish an AI Institute based across our academic institutions to harness the pace of innovation and knowledge generation that resides at universities.

Our commitment to AI is also driven by the knowledge that digitising public service from thepoint of citizen access will also require use of AI in the form of voice-command based access.What makes this challenging in South Africa and the rest of the continent whose majority are not English-speaking, neither are our English accents decipherable by the English-based virtualassistants such as Siri. As government, we are confronted by a fact that when government services are digitised and can be access through a vending machine, my mother must be able to buy electricity, water, airtime etc using a virtual assistant but conversing in Luvenda. I knowwe should have achieved full government service digitisation in 2010 but the fact that we mustdo it now, we must deploy digital services with the benefit of best of available technologies. Our universities must lead the pack in develop AI

technologies that can converse in our languages.

When Prof Vilakazi spoke about satellite technology, he referred to it as Going Back to the Future. I have termed it a Blast from the Past. Today, we are not talking about satellite technology for space exploration but to enhance connectivity, track and monitor events takingplace in other parts of the world, predict future events and thus plan for current actions. We arecurrently working on fast-tracking the development of SA-owned satellite and considering ways to condense a project planned over 8-10 years to 3 – 4 years but this depends on access to funding, which I hope the telecommunications, mining etc companies will come to the partyand co-fund this development. Of course, we cannot afford to deploy only one satellite and asgovernment, we will coordinate the efforts of South Africa's industry and other interested investors to even deploy SA-owned low orbit satellites.

On data front, Data has become the new Gold – because national sovereignty is closely linkedto data sovereignty. Therefore, the ability to mine (analysis), process and use data or big data is changing the face and efficiency through which services are rendered. So, this Conference must reflect on how the South African government must mine, process, consolidate and use data for socio-economic development of the citizens and to support economic production and growth.

This commitment is because the rapid deployment of 5G spectrum, satellite, AI, cloudcomputing technologies amongst others will help us not only to bridge the digital divide but also bridge the urban-rural divide and eradicated class-based development. We are committedto a future or the present where technology and science ensure that a child born by an unemployed mother in the rural areas can have the same access to education, health care and other public services as the child born by a government Minister. This is the aspiration our forebears committed to when they envisioned a prosperous, non-racial, non-sexist, equal, and prosperous South Africa. This is the South Africa; we are committed to deliver through accessto technology.

I thank you.

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