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Ladies and Gentlemen

Good Afternoon.

It is my distinct honour and privilege to attend this Stay Together Summit.

South Africa has had to rear itself up, mobilizing every bit of our arsenal in order to compelling respond to a pandemic that emerged, proliferated across the world and reverberated through all sectors of our society and economy. The government of South Africa did its very best to respond with stealth and speed to this global threat as it reached our shores, putting in place large-scale plans to ready the country for a full-scale battle with this novel virus. Respected world and regional bodies like the World Health Organization, the African Union and individual countries were quick to applaud the country's more proactive approach. Strategies and plans were speedily crafted to provide financial relief for all parts of the economy, the workforce and society from the aged, to vulnerable children and the unemployed. Essential work was defined for all of the most important services to continue being delivered while the country moved into a full lockdown to flatten the curve of viral spread in the country.

The impact of these quickly implemented changes meant that the infection curve was indeed flattened giving the health system invaluable time to prepare for the inevitable exponential growth in infections that was sure to come in the near future.

There were other changes made in other areas in South Africa. With communications and internet connectivity taking on a new significance as millions of people sought to access lockdown regulations or health related information, information around social aid or notifications around schooling and university schedule or content changes. Others took to the Internet to register for unemployment benefits as layoffs increased while education started to go online in earnest. Workers began working from home even before the official lockdown level 5 commenced towards the end of March 2020. Even then, spikes in network traffic in traditionally suburban areas were detected. Network players in the South African telecommunications were forced to quickly prepare their networks for this sudden surge in demand for network services.

Several government and ministry led changes were introduced to ensure that communications were improved and sustained in the period of lockdown allow essential information sharing and productivity of vital industrial sectors to continue. In collaboration with network operators, education and health service websites were zero rated, operators were engaged to reduce the costs of data and more. Responding directly to the need for improved quality of service of networks in a time of heightened demand while ensuring schooling could continue targets were set for connectivity to 104 virtual schools at a guaranteed 10Mbps. Our country and our Ministry of Communications & Digital Technologies quickly constituted the Covid-19 Connectivity Task Team, placing them in charge of ensuring these connectivity goals and plans were enacted by coordinating the efforts and actions of industry. On the supply side of network

communications services specific actions were taken to hasten the speed of delivery of connectivity in communities. These included the designation of network communications workers as essential to allow them to continue maintaining and rolling out networks and the needed capacity enhancements, the reduction of the type approvals from the usual 30 days to just 4 days, greenlighting the rapid deployment of infrastructure without delay and the temporary deferment of wayleaves or payment of fees in this critical period where continued service provision was paramount. More especially, the availability of communications and digital services was expedited with the release of temporary spectrum comprising the remaining 446 MHz of IMT spectrum. This took the total available IMT spectrum from 504MHz to 950MHz. This powerful move by the Ministry of Communications & Digital Technologies and our regulator ICASA, of course, boosted the ability of the network operators to rapidly scale up their networks to respond head-on to the greatly increased demands of their customer base.

As we move on from the early response to a crisis of global proportions to recovery plans post-pandemic, the government of South Africa is acutely aware that the country must keep its foot on the pedal to bring about the changes needed to ensure its economy transcends simply recovering to where we were before the pandemic. Our economy must be invigorated and strengthened to deliver strong turnarounds. It is no secret that many African countries have battled sluggish economic growth rates since the global financial crises of 2008/2009. Against this backdrop combined with South Africa's history and the resulting deeply entrenched socio-economic challenges including poverty, income equality, high unemployment and generally low skills levels radical changes are called for to set the country on a new growth trajectory. An economic plan that aims to unlock greatly accelerated and intensive growth across existing dominant economic sectors while simultaneously stimulating

new ones needs out of box thinking. More so, this great endeavor needs whatever tools and resources available to support such aggressive growth forecasts. Rapidly evolved technologies such as those associated with 5G and the 4IR affords South Africa exactly the kind of disruptive opportunities needed for the country to leapfrog existing structural or systemic challenges to a new era of development and a new age of growth.

It is with fervor that we anticipate the ushering in of the Fourth Industrial Revolution with its myriad of new technologies, 5G for sure but also with the expansion of existing high value, high speed Broadband technologies like 4G and fiber as the foundations for a fully digital society and economy are constructed. Developing a solid, stable base comprising the right communications and connectivity technologies and developing and implementing 5G networks into the many industries and verticals of South Africa's economy will, no doubt, be a mammoth, highly complex undertaking. There are some key milestones which South Africa is working towards however along with our vibrant and committed digital ecosystem and ICT industry in the country. These are:

1. **Improving the positioning of ICT digital infrastructure:** During this new era, connectivity has become a core requirement in society trailing only the known essentials of food, water and shelter. With clear, correct, quality communications taking on new importance as the pandemic spreads ICT digital infrastructure becomes key to winning or losing the battle against the pandemic. The reality is that ICT is now as important as water, energy, roads and rail are to South Africa's future growth and ability to respond to our people's needs. Our new normal is highly dependent on how the maturity of our communications foundation across the country. ICT is now *essential* national infrastructure. Furthermore, as the country wages its current war with this viral outbreak and mitigation measures are put in place to reduce

its effects and impacts on our society and our economy, preparing South Africa for future shocks that will (inevitably) come is just as vital. A comprehensive and shock-proof ICT infrastructural foundation is inherently linked to building this future resilience of the country to quickly and effortlessly respond to any other disasters that may befall South Africans.

2. **Promoting digital infrastructure upgrades through industry policies and building networks in advance:** Part of our preplanning for coming shocks involves ensuring networks are scaled up to withstand massive, sporadic surges in network demand in the future. As mentioned, the emergence of the pandemic in South Africa led directly to huge demands being placed on the network operators in the country with even dominant market players worrying about meeting user demands. South Africa is at exactly the right time and space at this point to craft the necessary industry policies to promote large-scale and widespread ICT infrastructure upgrades (including connection and computing needs).
3. **Investing in digital infrastructure to promote economic recovery:** The country is well aware that sound investment in digital infrastructure and in the ICT industry can effectively drive investment growth in other industries, thereby promoting economic growth across sectors. Investment in digital infrastructure delivers both short term benefits for the industry but also longer-term benefits seen in GDP and employment in countries. The multiplier effect has been demonstrated time and time again where countries invested heavily in ICT with benefits on both economic growth as well as employment for example China, USA, UK etc. South Africa will therefore continue to pursue its connectivity goals to reach the last person in the country with a quality, high speed Broadband connection that allowed that person to access the world of information and opportunities on the Internet.

For South Africa to advance its socio-economic development goals addressing its short term needs for positive growth and then strengthening economic expansion, the groundwork must be laid now. With the country already having a robust, future-focused regulatory environment implementing the necessary policies and new business models to stimulate growth in the ICT sector and enabling its dispersion into other sectors has become a priority. Directly investing in digital infrastructure, particularly in areas less likely to attract private investment (namely rural areas) allows the government of South Africa to demonstrate its commitment to this digital future it aims to build for all South Africans. The people of South Africa will be able to enjoy the benefits of quality, high speed Broadband networks reaching them wherever they are, whomever they are. In a country with 11 official languages and even more different cultures and people living together, being able to reach each one, everyone from the big cities of Johannesburg, Tshwane and Cape Town to the small towns of Cata, Nyavani or Nkandla is equally important. Reaching our people in their own languages with content relevant to their unique needs while availing cutting edge solutions and services in health, education, small business endeavors or their various workplaces is all-important. Creating an environment that enables rapid network development including network expansion and capacity improvements allows the results of these efforts to be realized more swiftly. It is incumbent on us as the Ministry of Communications & Digital Technologies to bring the industry together and the digital ecosystem of South Africa to figure the ways to bring this vision and this goal for a fully connected, digitalized South Africa to fruition.

These are the elements the government of South Africa and the Ministry of Communications & Digital Technologies can put in place now while laying the groundwork for strengthening research and development, science and technology to increase ICT patents particularly for solutions nuanced for the

South African and greater African context will work together with the development of an increasingly skilled workforce and quality, STEAM-centered education-system to usher the country into a new era of job creation, employment small business stimulation. As South Africa embarks on this journey to craft this new growth path that will bring about an age of unprecedented and unrestrained growth, we understand that our efforts now will have resounding effects in the years to come. With digital infrastructure, digital technologies and digital services being key to unlocking immeasurable value for the country, my ministry will continue serving our country through the provision of technologically enabled world class services with a pace setting digitalization agenda we will be following. We will rest when that last person in the smallest rural village uses his or her smartphone to access and transact with his or her social grant, apply for new public services or stay in contact with loved ones who many have to the big cities pursuing their own dreams.

Thank you