



MINISTRY
COMMUNICATIONS AND DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

Private Bag X860, PRETORIA, 0001 – iParioli Office Park, 1166 Park, Hatfield, PRETORIA
Tel: +27 12 427 8000 – Fax +27 12 427 8016
Email: Media@DCDT.gov.za - URL: www.dcdt.gov.za

REMARKS ON THE CLOSING THE DIGITAL DIVIDE

OPENING REMARKS ON THE CLOSING THE DIGITAL DIVIDE: A SOUTH AFRICA APPROACH

7th BRICS Ministers of Communications 22 October 2021 @ 1pm RSA Time

Minister of Communications, (India) HE Mr. Devusinh Chauhan,
Minister of Communication (Brazil) HE Mr Fábio Faria,
Minister of Digital Development, Communications and Mass Media (Russia) HE Mr Maksut Shadayev
Minister of Industry and Information Technology (China) HE Mr Xiao Yaqing

Good afternoon, good morning, and good evening to yourselves,

We thank India, the Chair of BRICS 2021, for the able leadership under the prevailing difficult circumstances brought about by the global pandemic of Covid 19. We have managed to mitigate its impact in South Africa mainly with the successful non-pharmaceutical interventions and the telecommunications innovation of contact tracing recognised by the WHO as amongst the best in the World.

We have also used another telecommunications innovation to register South Africans for vaccination. Recently the same system is used to issue electronic vaccination certificates through both smart phones and feature phones.

The above measures, although recommendable, do not stop the fact that vaccination remains vital to the reopening of our economies and the economies of the world. South Africa and India continue to lobby for the temporal waiver of certain TRIPS obligations in the WTO in response to COVID-19, so that we protect our citizens through full inoculation. We would like to thank the continued show of unity by BRICS countries in many international platforms and organisations that seek to advocate the developmental agenda and the full implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals.

The Covid 19 pandemic has demonstrated the extent of the digital divide in South Africa and the rest of the developing world, mainly in the African continent in particular. The divide has

been evident during this period, between those with access to connectivity and those without; as basic services such as access to education, health, access to work and the ability to continue to operate one's business in the event of small businesses or SMMEs moved to virtual platforms.

In our country, those children from schools and families with access to the internet were able to continue with their learning with minimal interruption. Whereas the majority who did not enjoy similar access, have suffered huge losses in school days and thus impacting on their access to quality education. Therefore, for us access to the internet or connectivity, or bridging the digital divide, has become a first and foremost priority for our country.

We acknowledge that the economy is moving into a predominately digital economy. As a result of that, the government of South Africa has approved plans, which we are now implementing, to fast-track the much delayed Broadcast Digital Migration. We have now set ourselves a target of completion by 31 March 2022 as part of freeing the much needed spectrum which should be allocated. The allocation of this spectrum is scheduled to be completed, equally, in March 2022. This is so that we could use multiple technologies to give internet access to our people as we set ourselves a target to connect all South Africans.

Where we are to date, we are considering a program to fast track the connection of all South Africans or to ensure that all South Africans have access to internet connection within the next 24 months as part of responding to bridging this digital divide. Access to internet connectivity will not only enable access to services but will also open opportunities for applications and systems that are developed in South Africa and elsewhere in the world, to be accessible to all people of South Africa, promote collaboration in the Africa Continental Free Trade Area (ACFTA) including in BRICS.

We are glad that we have adopted the Digital Public Goods (DPGs) platform as best practice but also that the services, applications, and systems that will be developed within South Africa and the African continent in general will be able to enjoy this benefit and be able to be accessible throughout the world. This as part of making sure of economic collaboration, participation of SMMEs, sharing knowledge, sharing innovative systems, and sharing of our cultures which will enhance our relationships and cohesion.

The new economies are going to be digitally driven and therefore it cannot be that only systems from other countries dominate, but systems from all our countries should share equal benefit. As BRICS countries we have a responsibility to ensure that our countries and regions are not dominated by a particular region. We have a great opportunity to cooperate with each other to enhance each other's technological developments and innovations. As we spread these and make sure that the free world, and equally all society, is not that which is dominated by a particular culture but equally dominated by all cultures of the world and all cultures of BRICS countries.

I would like to reassure the commitment of South Africa, and the African Continent in general, in the partnership that we enjoy in BRICS and full cooperation, that the economic development of the future, as we put our countries forward, will be of equal footing, solid partnership and relationship.

As South Africa we are committed to this relationship in BRICS and all the agreements we have. We will see a way on how we add value and how do we significantly boost the economies of our countries, the Africa continent, to get a significant play in the new world of

the digital economy. those of our partner countries in BRICS, and the innovations and developments from the countries of BRICS, including the Africa continent, to get a significant play in the new world of the digital economy.

With that, thank you Chairperson.

Khumbudzo Ntshavheni, MP

Minister of Communications & Digital Technologies