



MINISTRY
COMMUNICATIONS AND DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

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**POLICY STATEMENT BY MINISTER OF COMMUNICATIONS AND DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES,
HON. KHUMBUDZO NTSHAVHENI, AT THE 6TH ORDINARY SESSION OF THE ATU
PLENIPOTENTIARY CONFERENCE (CPL-22)**

DATE: 25 JULY 2022,
VENUE: ALGIERS, ALGERIA

Thank you, Mr Chairman

Your Excellencies, the Ministers, Deputy Ministers,

Ambassadors,

Heads of delegations, Distinguished delegates, Ladies and gentlemen, Good afternoon.

Honourable Chairman, allow me to extend my sincere appreciation on behalf of my country, the Republic of South Africa, our delegation, and myself for the hospitality extended to us by your government, and office. South Africa has endearing memories of the hand of friendship and solidarity that the government and the people of the People's Democratic Republic of Algeria extended to us during the time when we needed friendship and solidarity most to overcome our painful past.

This important Plenipotentiary Conference of the African Telecommunications Union (ATU CPL-22) takes place during a very busy year in the calendar of the information and communication technologies sector. It is a year of major conferences such as the World Telecommunication Standardisation Assembly ("WTSA"), the World Telecommunication Development Conference

("WTDC"), the International Telecommunications Satellite Organisation ("ITSO") Assembly of Parties and the International Telecommunication Union Plenipotentiary Conference ("ITU PP-22"). These conferences will help members to reflect on strategies and measures aimed at, *inter alia*, connecting the unconnected in order to achieve sustainable development. Most importantly, we must use these Conferences to solidify our ability to work together and cooperate for the advancement of the collective best interest of our continent Africa and her people.

I wish to share with Conference a few milestones South Africa has achieved as a country in our unrelenting efforts to deliver a truly digital economy that is inclusive and transformed.

South Africa is implementing a countrywide broadband connectivity programme called **SA Connect** to among others ensure that all South Africans have access to the internet by 2024. In this programme, telecommunications mobile operators will spend in excess of US\$1.3 billion in social obligations to connect all public schools, health facilities, public libraries, government centres and traditional authorities by June 2025. The South African government will further spend in excess of US\$161 million in the next 36 months to deploy over 33 000 community Wi-Fi hotspots benefiting more than 5,8 million households. These deployments will be done through small and medium enterprises as part of expanding economic participation in the sector for previously disadvantaged communities who are mainly black, women and youth.

Driven by our quest to attain universal broadband connectivity for all South Africans irrespective of their geographic location and economic class, we are releasing the much needed **high-demand spectrum** to allow the telecommunications operators to decongest our networks and deploy 4G and 5G networks across the country. To ensure all South Africans have access to high performing networks and could benefit from use of latest technology, the South Africa government has started industry consultations on the shutdown of both 2G and 3G networks targeting completion by 2024 subject to industry input.

In order to further enhance our broadband connectivity reach, South Africa is at an advanced planning stage towards launching its own **Geo communications satellite** through our signal distribution company, SENTECH in partnership with the South Africa National Space Agency (SANSА) and other relevant key stakeholders. This satellite will address both media and broadband connectivity objectives and will entrench our technology and data sovereignty. It will further reduce satellite capacity leasing costs, not only for government but other industries reliant on communication satellite technology for their businesses and improve information security for our country. We will be engaging other countries in our continent to partner us to achieve continent-wide technology and data sovereignty.

In order to accelerate service delivery and promote government digitisation, South Africa has annually held the **Govtech Summit** since 1999. This is a premier platform for government and the private sector to share expertise on technology to improve government planning, e-government, the quality of life, create jobs and business opportunities as well as create space for inclusivity in the transformation agenda. This year's edition of the Govtech Summit will be held from the 13th – 15th September 2022. We have planned on extending the platform to African governments and industry engagement on government technologies for collective development.

As recognized by the sixth World Telecommunication/ ICT Policy Forum (Geneva, 2021), new and emerging telecommunications/ICTs services and technologies will underpin the digital economy of the future and enable advances in technologies and services including Artificial Intelligence (“AI”), IoT, 5G, Big Data and OTTs.

Last year, South Africa spearheaded the Artificial Intelligence Blueprint for Africa through the Smart Africa Alliance, which seeks to guide African countries on harnessing the use of Artificial Intelligence. In furtherance of this objective, South Africa will launch the **SA Artificial Intelligence Hub** in partnership with academic institutions and industry players this year. The AI Hub will provide a platform for South Africa to respond to the opportunities brought about by developments in AI and confront AI challenges through country's initiatives while participating in national, regional, and global public- private sector partnerships.

As a region we need to continue to align our work, resources and priorities with the opportunities and challenges presented by today's digital transformation. This will help in meeting the needs and expectations of the ATU membership and the people we serve. This spirit of cooperation prevailed in the 40th meeting of **ITSO Assembly of Parties** which took place from 28 to 30 June 2022, in Washington DC.

The positive responses achieved in terms of the future of ITSO, the common heritage, the funding agreement, and the extension of the term of office for the DG, were largely a response to the proposals and lobbying by the Africa group and effective coordination by ATU before and during the 40th meeting of ITSO Assembly of Parties. It is this spirit of singular focus and unity that I hope we will take to the ITU Plenipotentiary in Romania.

Honourable Ministers, Ladies and Gentlemen, South Africa is currently an elected member of the ITU Council and holds a seat in the ITU Radio Regulations Board (“RRB”). We are standing for re-election to ITU Council and RRB, so as to advance the African interest and developmental goals.

We commit to carrying out our mandate of contributing to regional integration by focusing on amongst others, the following:

- An inclusive ITU championing issues of development as well as driving broadband connectivity for all through:
 - ✓ equitable access to radio frequency spectrum on a principle of fairness,
 - ✓ efficient use of satellite-orbital resources by all,
 - ✓ extensive fibre networks for safe data traffic.
- Supporting a more equitable standardization to allow countries to develop own technological capabilities based on the principles of interoperability, technology neutrality and interconnectivity to global systems. The use of ICTs to achieve sustainable development goals and minimise the impact of climate change.

South Africa is also currently an elected member of the ATU Council. We are standing for re-election to the ATU Administrative Council for the 2023-2027 period.

It is with humility that I hereby request your support to vote for South Africa's re-election to the ITU Council, the ITU RRB and the ATU Council.

Thank you, Chairperson.

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