

**ADDRESS BY DR. BITANGE NDEMO,  
PERMANENT SECRETARY, MINISTRY OF INFORMATION AND  
COMMUNICATIONS, DURING THE OPENING CEREMONY OF  
THE AFRICA PREPARATORY MEETING FOR THE WORLD  
TELECOMMUNICATION DEVELOPMENT CONFERENCE**

**HELD IN NAIROBI, KENYA  
9<sup>TH</sup> – 10<sup>TH</sup> FEBRUARY 2006**

**ATU Secretary-General, Mr. Akossi Akossi**

**Head, ITU Regional Office for Africa, Brahim Sanou**

**Executive Vice-chairman/CEO, Nigeria Communications  
Commission, Ernest Chukwuka Ndukwe**

**Heads of Delegations**

**Distinguished delegate**

**Invited guests**

**Ladies and gentlemen**

**All protocols observed**

It is a great pleasure and honour for me to address this important gathering being held to prepare for the World Telecommunication Development Conference in March.

On behalf of the Government and the people of Kenya, I wish to take this opportunity to welcome you all to Nairobi and to this beautiful country in general. It is always a pleasure for us to host our fellow brothers and sisters from the various parts of our continent. We are grateful to the ATU Secretariat for, once again, choosing to Kenya as the venue of this meeting. Please feel at home. I hope that you will find time to sample our hospitality. Our resolve is to be on hand to assist in anything possible to make your stay enjoyable.

Kenya recognizes the centrality of telecommunications in building stronger economies and improving the livelihood of the general masses. As a country, we remain committed to seeing strong telecommunications unity among African countries. We will, therefore, continue to provide the necessary assistance to ensure a better ATU for the benefit of all member states. Kenya's conviction is that Africa requires a voice that will articulate our needs, aspirations and also bring us together in dealing with the inherent challenges.

As you all know, the World Telecommunication Development Conference is taking place this March in Doha, Qatar, to focus effectively on ICT issues that matter most. Preparatory meetings have been held in various regions to identify regional development needs and priorities to boost Information and Communication

Technologies (ICTs). Kenya has been keen to follow and participate in the preparatory process for this conference.

Ladies and gentlemen, as we take stock of our developments, allow me to highlight some of the recent achievements we have witnessed in the Kenyan communications industry:

Kenya has recently reviewed the ICT policy to align it to the changes and the worldwide trends. The new draft Communications Bill is also awaiting discussion in parliament.

We have also opened up the Voice over Internet protocol market segment for competition. This was undertaken with a view to not only benchmark internationally, but to further liberalize the sector so that consumers can benefit from emerging and new technologies.

As you may well know, the Global Digital Solidarity Fund was launched last year by African heads of state under the chairmanship of Chief Olesgun Abasanjo of Nigeria. The fund was established with the aim of promoting access and application of information and communications technologies for development. Kenya joined the financing initiative as a founding member particularly motivated by for the anticipated benefit the fund will bring to Africa.

The fervor for introducing competition in the market has not waned either. Kenya still anticipates expansion in the fixed and other telecommunications services. To this end, the internet backbone, the

international gateways have been liberalized, and in addition, Government is restructuring the incumbent National fixed line telecommunications operator in preparation for its privatization.

More recently, a consideration was taken to repackage the Second National Operator (SNO) tender to align the licence to market realities. The regulator will be issuing fresh tenders following a reassessment which revealed that the previous tender as packaged would not accommodate current market trends and the technological realities of convergence.

On the universal access front, a strategy has also been developed to make the requisite interventions in the market to narrow the rural-urban digital divide.

In a nutshell, the regulatory framework is continuously being reviewed to create more vibrant participation in the various market segments and increase the potential in those markets.

Distinguished delegates, The phenomenon is not unique to Kenya. In general, the African telecommunications landscape has undergone dramatic transformation in recent years. The liberalization of the communications industry in most nations of Africa has witnessed an explosion in the uptake of telecommunications services in most of our countries. The mobile telephone segment has, in particular, witnessed tremendous growth. Competition has increased and certainly increased the breadth of value-added telecommunications

services available to the people of Africa. Africa is notably one of the fastest growing regions in mobile subscriptions. However, these are only a few strides. We still have a lot to accomplish in the efforts to bridge the existing gaps, not only with the developed countries but also between the rural and urban areas.

I would like to commend the BDT, and specifically the Africa Regional office for the tremendous support and more so for the boosting the efforts to harmonize our positions to Doha. We will all agree, that Africa remains behind many other regions in telecommunications development. I would not emphasize further, the need to have strong positions and solid proposals to the august Doha meeting.

The main challenge for Union members, therefore, is to redouble our efforts towards ensuring that we develop with sustainable programmes for the benefit of the membership. At the Preparatory Meeting in Abuja, last July, we as Africa agreed on the need to review the reform process to improve National, Sub-regional and Continental backbones in order to enhance connectivity, reduce the cost of services, and similarly, more investments into the ICT sector. We also agreed, that priority should be given to creating an enabling environment, infrastructure and capacity building as well as cooperation and partnership.

We will recall that consideration was further given to our input to the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS). WSIS, reiterated in its Tunis Commitment, its unequivocal support for the Geneva Declaration of Principles and Plan of Action which most of us are

party to. Solid proposals with regards to various regional initiatives were made at the Abuja meeting, and I believe all these issues will be the framework of discussion in this forum.

Ladies and Gentlemen, your task here is an important one as it will constitute Africa's proposals that will feed into the Doha Action Plan and indeed the next Four-Year Telecommunication Development Operational Plan.

As we concretize these proposals, let us also remember to bring into perspective the various constraints including market structures, fixed line networks, the internet connectivity challenges and low penetration levels that still prevail in the continent. We must recognize the need to brace ourselves to benefit from the technology explosions but more importantly ensuring that we have the requisite capacity and resources that will carry us to the next stage.

The role of the ITU, particularly the development sector, is critical in this process as it is tailored to meet the needs of the developing countries. The WTDC is an opportunity for Africa, among other developing nations, to chart the course for its future in telecommunications. This calls for a shared vision but more importantly, commitment, stronger partnerships and collective efforts in enhancing the ICT platform in Africa. I believe this spirit is present as is testified by your presence here today.

With the elaborate agenda ahead of you, I am sure you will have sufficient work in your hands for the next two days. I take this

opportunity to wish you fruitful deliberations. I, nonetheless, hope you will find time for sample the social scene in Nairobi to make your stay memorable.

With these remarks, ladies and gentlemen, It is now my pleasure to declare the African preparatory meeting for the WTDC, officially opened.

Thank you for your attention.