



**ATU Secretary General Mr. John Omo Keynote Speech during the 10th Edition of
the Africa Digital Expo Held Virtually on 1st Oct 2020**

**Hon. Ministers present,
The organizers of the event,
Participants,
Ladies and gentlemen.**

I am excited to take part in this forum for the particular purpose of advancing my contribution on behalf of ATU with regard to the overview of the major trends in telecommunications and the outlook for 2025. My presentation today covering the boundaries of technological developments and their impact on African telcos is guided by a theme that I conceive to be well thought out and capable of stimulating productive discourse.

Therefore, I thank you for the invitation, and hope that the bearing of this conversation will retain lifelong value.

The African Telecommunications Union without a doubt recognizes the vibrant nature of African digital markets. As such, we are dedicated to the pursuit for every opportunity that has the ability to enhance growth in this sector. This is one such opportunity, and I must say that it is the pride of the Union to share applicable knowledge with leading African and renowned international experts, as well as explore our collective potential.

There is nothing that provides us better prospect to examine the vision of a future we desire than the chance to look at where we are today. Individually, I hold the opinion that if we must be ahead of the rest of the world, then we have no choice but to look beyond what we have and instead look at what we can have.

Allow me to concern my speech with some of the key subjects that I am convinced have the aptitude to shape our future as a continent.

Today, we are at a developed stage of liberalizing the telecom sector in Africa. Our actions in this regard are continually exceeding our words. I am proud of Africa to this extent. Indeed, we are convinced that for the continent to remain open to both local and foreign investment in the telecommunications sector, we must pursue the full grasp of market liberalization. Economists argue that Africa's untapped potential is intense. This is one reason why the focus around the globe is quickly shifting towards us. We must be prepared for everything that comes with this kind of attention. As one of the major markets for telecommunications, we must make it as an institutional obligation for all our states and nations to ready our contribution in providing what the market needs, and increasing our ability for uptake. As multi-national organizations set up shop in our continent, we must equal their power by empowering our own local initiatives. This, I conceive, is the responsibility of governments, the private sector, and even pressure groups-which play a significant role in realigning us when we lose direction. The creation of the necessary environment for business on a free trade basis to flourish must acquire status in our list of priorities in order to grow Africa's telecommunications infrastructure rapidly and ensure a competitive environment that will reduce price and make services affordable to most. This, I reiterate, is achievable!

Of course, as we look ahead, we will be of great service to ourselves if we examine the multi-stakeholder operator environment as a question, one which we must provide an answer to. ICT policy and strategies in Africa has for a long time, admittedly, been a product of the public sector in many of our countries. This is why we must look at other different and equally useful directions to supplement our traditional approach. The success of ICT in our continent is dependent on how best we can enhance our outreach to other sectors such as the civil society, international organisations, the media, financial institutions and the broader untapped private sector. However, even as we seek their input, it is our duty to provide a workable environment that will enable them to fit in through our responsibility towards; environmental sustainability, policy formulation and guarding the regulatory setting. This should be able to make any partnerships that we seek to be strategic, mutually beneficial and less discomfoting. Just like the African people, the ICT house should also reflect our spirit of magnanimity, an identity that we cherish.

We believe that such opportunities will enable training of viable workforce within the continent, broadening our market, as well as promote awareness on the benefits and usage of ICT services.

Equally, the question of cyber security remains a big puzzle for most of the world. While we appreciate the advancements made to guarantee us a secure online space, it is the understanding that most of Africa is built up by developing nations; that must keep us awake at night every day. Our challenges are unique, and sometimes even bigger compared to those faced by other countries. Perhaps even fewer nations in Africa prioritize cyber security, let alone escalate it to a top question of national security. Many of our countries operate manually in many sectors, and a lot of them correspondingly lack critical infrastructures that utilize digital control systems, and therefore forceful and intentional interest in cyber security may not make so much sense. Accordingly, it is upon us to determine how best we can implement cyber security in a tailored way that will appeal to the uniqueness of our situation as a continent. This direction of thought appreciates the fact that a lot of businesses today have moved from the sometimes cozy, and sometimes dusty, office spaces to the massive online dais. What they need more than anything are solutions that will protect the growing number of transactions that take place on their platforms.

What is necessary also as we look forward, is our capacity to enhance quality of service given that ICTs today are a major part of the world. This is critical. Technology is continually becoming enshrined in people's daily lives. So far, we have done quite well with policy formulation that ensures international standards, and adherence to regulations on issuance of licenses is complied with. More needs to be done. ICTs end users need to be more aware of their rights than they are, and measurement standard for ICTs providers needs to be set higher to attain optimum results while also guarding the vulnerabilities of everyone involved. Our consultation options therefore deserve more fortification than ever before even as we seek for scalability, interoperability, security, and portability for our designs.

Going forward also, unbundling the access to infrastructure is, as expected, a key factor in boosting open market competition and the development and diffusion of advanced broad-band services. This means that we must examine the possibility

for new operators to have special access to pre-existing network infrastructure without duplicating them, and with the intention to provide value-added services. Local loop unbundling is receiving attention in Africa and operators are interested mainly in physical access to copper loop, which gives the opportunity to offer broadband services extensively. This is not without its issues, which we must deal with at no cost of hesitation if we must hope for the development of the broadband services market.

In the recent months, we have had the misfortune of suffering the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic. I mention this because in truth, as the ICT community, this was a test presented to us. We have survived the test. Particularly, I refer to access to network and connectivity in our homes. Certainly, there is increased investment in LTE, and in Africa specifically, not only during this period of the pandemic but over a longer period of time. We can authoritatively conclude that the distance between fibre optic cable and end user is getting shorter. This is good for the continent, but we must make it better by ensuring elaborate deployments and increased uptake while also providing adequate security for the end user.

Finally, late July ATU held an online forum which we called, “ATU Regional Online Forum on OTTs.” OTTs are an integral part of ICT, and as a Union, we appreciate this fact given how fast they are transforming the sector. Their appearance on the markets has shaken up the habits as well as the classic models and raised questions at the legal, economic and technical levels. As such, we must look at ways that will enhance the legal environment of OTTs in order to achieve better impact. This will also be useful in protecting them against shortcomings such as; lack of protection of personal data, lack of ability to identify the entity responsible for quality of service, the impossibility for States to identify users without referring to OTTs who may or may not communicate the requested information, the impossibility of enforcing security injunctions, and the hardship in determining a tax base. This can be looked at as an opportunity for us to determine our own course, which the ATU supports, as I am certain many of us do too.

This is my concept, and largely the understanding of ATU on the capacity of our future. Indeed, I applaud the organisers for creating this forum for the purpose of

exploring our future through the theme, "Trends in African Telecom Sector and 2025 perspectives".

Aware of the importance that ICTs play a decisive role for the sustainable development of our continent, African Member States through AUC and ATU organs, have resolved to be among the actors of the 4th Industrial Revolution. To this end, Africa adopted in February 2020 its digital transformation strategy and aims to have its 4IR strategy by 2021 to better apprehend and integrate new technological trends such as machine learning, IoT, Artificial Intelligence (AI) etc. and make them an asset for digital development in Africa. Telecom networks of the future must therefore embrace the technology in order to survive such as the hosting of data networks in local clouds and data centers, the speed up of the migration to IPv6 where networks have to be compliant in order to compete for more resources.

In here there are many experts. It is my hope that we will engage at this level with the humility to keenly listen to their contributions, as well as initiate space for our own voices to be heard. My dream for this forum equals the dream I have for this continent: success and prosperity.

May I also inform you that Africa (Ethiopia) will for the first time host the next ITU WTDC-21 conference in the last quarter of 2021 and I would like to urge us all to be well prepared and involved to push our regional issues and agendas for the next period.

Once again, thank you for having me offer the keynote address to this panel and I wish you every success.

Thank you!