ATU SG's speech delivered at the National Communications Conference in Mozambique

17 May 2024

Distinguished PANELISTS

Distinguished guests,

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is my great pleasure to be the keynote speaker at this important two-day National Communications Conference here in the city of Maputo. I convey warm greetings from the ATU General Secretariat in Nairobi, wishing you the very best in your pursuit to enhance the telecommunication/ICT sector in Mozambique.

This meeting here today is a clear demonstration of our desire for change in the ICT sector, and it also speaks to our conviction that digital transformation is attainable. I deeply appreciate the Mozambique Communications Regulatory Authority and the ICT Ministry for organizing this forum, allowing thought leaders, policymakers and experts to explore opportunities and challenges relevant to the theme - "Digital Transformation, Innovation Sustainability."

This event is special because it falls on the day the whole world celebrates World Telecommunication & Information Society Day, a day set aside to take stock of the state of ICTs globally and to also energize our resolve to work together to achieve sustainable global connectivity. In essence, this forum is not just important to the people of Mozambique but to everyone across the world.

Today, we are also marking the 155th anniversary of the ITU, to which Mozambique and ATU belong as Member State and Regional Telecommunication Organization (RTO) respectively. Therefore, from this standpoint - we have the opportunity at this forum, to contribute to the global digital connectivity agenda of connecting nearly one-third of the global population that remains offline.

We recognize and are proud of the transformative efforts being undertaken by the Government of Mozambique in the realm of ICT, aiming to improve digital infrastructure and connectivity across the country. Under the able leadership of the Ministry of Transport and Communication, the inter-ministerial digitalization working group has done laudable work in implementing the ICT Policy and the eGovernment Interoperability Framework for Mozambique.

Additionally, through the Government's progressive collaboration the world's longest subsea fibre-optic cable system, the 2Africa cable, successfully landed here last year. The 45,000km cable will, upon completion, connect 33 countries on the African continent to Europe and Asia, providing reliable Internet to millions of people across Africa.

However, as I already mentioned, connectivity challenges in Africa are far from over. Nearly 40% of the 2.6 billion global offline population is in Africa. Likewise, issues of affordability, low digital literacy and skills, and cybersecurity abound across the continent barring a significant population of Africans from accessing the Internet and harnessing ICTs.

The global cybersecurity workforce, for example, is estimated at 5.5 million people as of last year. Despite this, Africa has a huge cybersecurity skills gap and loses nearly USD 4 billion annually to cybercrime. Africa lags behind other regions in cyber resilience, making it one of the leading targets of cyber criminals in the world.

Equally, high costs of internet-enabled devices and mobile data plans are barriers to connectivity in Africa. This explains why nearly 800 million people in Africa do not use the internet despite living in areas covered by mobile broadband networks.

Disturbingly also, Africa has the widest gender gap in connectivity in the world. Only 24% of women in Africa have access to the Internet, leaving out more than 190 million women in Sub-Saharan who are unable to use the Internet. With this significant number of women excluded from accessing/using digital services, the deep-seated inequalities and gaps in the physical world are being replicated and, or aided by the internet. This denies Africa the benefits that would be realized if these women were to use ICTs in contributing to digital and socioeconomic transformation.

Africas indices in the adoption of new technologies such as 5G, IoT, AI, which could help us in leapfrogging these challenges is slow and below the global averages.

Our work is cut out for us! I urge you to continue collaborating with the private sector as well as regional and global ICT organizations—including ATU and ITU—to empower and mobilize the much-needed resources to enhance digital connectivity. And, as I like saying, these collaborative efforts need to be cognizant and accommodative of the marginalized groups, including women, youth and persons with disabilities and responsive to your specific needs and priorities as a country.

At ATU, we are constantly demonstrating that meaningful collaboration is the way to rid Africa of the digital difficulties bedeviling it. Our engagements with you as our Member State, and with other Member States as well as the international community are resulting in prudent allocation and management global radio spectrum, fair development and coordination of standards and sustainable digital transformation and economic development.

We have improved our capacities in digital sound broadcasting, recovered the lost high-value satellite resources for broadcasting satellite systems—Mozambique being one of the 31 African beneficiary countries—and identified and availed for use in FM broadcasting more than 18,000 new radio frequency assignments. As we mark World Telecommunication & Information Society Day, we must celebrate these among other great achievements we have made as a continent.

Let us take the necessary measures and dedicate available resources to ensure that we reap tangible benefits from our collective efforts. We cannot merely hold boardroom discussions. We must go out there and get things done. That is the essence of our being here today—to remind us that there is still a lot of work to do beyond the equally important discussions.

I take this opportunity as I conclude to thank the Mozambique Communications Regulatory Authority for inviting me on behalf of the ATU General Secretariat to participate in this Conference.

Mozambique and Africa can and will certainly achieve universal digital connectivity if we keep pulling together.

Thank you.