

ATU Secretary General Speech at the 3rd African Preparatory Meeting for the World Telecommunication Standardization Assembly 2024 (WTSA-24)

12th August 2024, Sandton City-South Africa

- ◆ **The Guest of Honour, Hon. Solly MALATSI, Minister of Communications and Digital Technologies, South Africa;**
- ◆ **The Deputy Minister of Communications and Digital Technologies, South Africa, Hon Mondli GUNGUBELE**
- ◆ **The ICASA Chairperson Mr. Mothibi RAMUSI;**
- ◆ **ITU Director of the Telecommunication Standardization Bureau, Mr. Seizo ONOE, (online);**
- ◆ **The WTSA-24 Chair Designate, Mr. R. R. MITTAR (Online);**
- ◆ **The DG, Department of Communications, Ms. Nonkqubela JORDAN-DYANI of South Africa;**
- ◆ **ATU Member States and Associate Members participating physically and online;**
- ◆ **Ladies and Gentlemen,**

I am pleased to welcome you to the 3rd and final African Preparatory Meeting for the World Telecommunication Standardization Assembly 2024 (WTSA-24) here in Sandton City, South Africa. This meeting is crucial for finalizing our WTSA-24 strategies, and the ATU is honoured to create this forum for bringing together the membership, delegates, experts, and stakeholders to strengthen Africa's voice in this pursuit.

This far, our journey towards WTSA-24 has been marked by significant milestones achieved through rigorous and collaborative efforts. The stage for the success of this preparatory process was set by the Consultative Online Meeting in March 2023, succeeded by the 1st Meeting of the Working Groups in May 2023 which prepared crucial inputs for the Telecommunication Standardization Advisory Group (TSAG) meeting. The 2nd ATU Preparatory Meeting for WTSA-24, held in Nairobi, Kenya, in February this year laid the foundation for the discussions we intend to table at this meeting.

Throughout my discussions with stakeholders in Africa's telecoms and ICT community, it has become clear that Africa is committed to addressing key issues that significantly impact our people and the broader region. Many of these crucial topics will be on the table during WTSA-24 and I am delighted that we can discuss them in our meeting.

Hon, Minister, Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen, one of our primary concerns is bridging the standardization gap in order to ensure equitable technological advancements across the continent. In our work here, let us devise approaches that are tailored for Africa even as we seek to harmonize telecommunications standards to enhance cross-border interactions and ensure the interoperability of devices and systems. This alignment will lead to economies of scale, making digital services more affordable for consumers and ensuring widespread socio-economic benefits.

As a continent grappling with the significant impact of cybercrime, which costs African economies upwards of \$3.5 billion annually, we must urgently advocate for robust cybersecurity measures. It is our duty to protect Africa's digital infrastructure against the escalating threat of cyberattacks and some of the draft proposals to be discussed here speak to this important issue which we will also need to align to global interests in the matter at the WTSA-24.

Of course, I speak of global interests because we cannot deny their existence. We have actively contributed to previous ITU-led Inter-Regional Meetings in January and July this year, and we are currently planning for the third inter-regional meeting later in September. These meetings are necessary not only for aligning our strategies with other regions but also play a bigger role of helping us understand how our contributions fit into broader global goals.

Equally critical is the matter of transitioning from IPv4 to IPv6, as only 1% of networks in Africa are IPv6-enabled, compared to the global average of 29%. ATU has developed policy guidelines for the migration from IPv4 to IPv6; and as we continue advocating for per-country adoption, WTSA-24 will serve as a platform to address pending issues regarding this migration. Let us ensure we achieve these goals, as this transition will support the growing number of internet users and devices and give us the opportunity for better connectivity and future-proofing our networks.

Furthermore, combating spam and e-waste remains significant challenges. We reckon that the importation of substandard and counterfeit devices leads to a shorter lifespan and increased e-waste, posing environmental and health risks. The threat of e-waste management is becoming real and catastrophic, with Africa projected – and well on course - to generate about 12.4 million metric tons of e-waste by next year.

I urge our cooperation in developing robust regulatory and policy frameworks for sustainable growth and encouragement of innovation. As a collective effort, this will guarantee that all countries in Africa benefit from improved digital services, increased innovation, and job creation. ATU is devoted to supporting strong regulatory and policy initiatives in the area of standardisation and some of the draft proposals that will be discussed here aim to achieve that purpose. Together, we can position ourselves to drive meaningful progress and secure a prosperous digital future for all.

It's important to also note that as we head to WTSA-24, the terms of current chairs and vice chairs of key ITU-T study groups are ending, and consideration of new chairs and vice-chairs for 2025-2028 will be a key agenda item at WTSA-24. As part of our preparatory process, we have already received proposals from the membership in this regard. We have a duty to rally behind African candidates and ensure our representation and influence in global telecommunication standardization efforts.

I finally urge us to embody the spirit of flexibility and unity as we anticipate endorsing the African Common Positions for the WTSA-24. These positions are about our collective regional

interests and objectives, rather than individual or national agendas. While we may not agree on everything, committing to AfCPs means strengthening our regional cooperation and securing a resilient digital future for all African nations.

Finally, I want to reaffirm the General Secretariat's full dedication and support to this meeting. I also encourage you to provide the necessary backing to the working groups and their leaders as they coordinate the finalization of the AfCPs.

I wish you a week filled with fruitful and insightful deliberations.

Thank you!

Ndiyabulela!