



**ATU SG Speech at the International Telecommunications Satellite Organization (ITSO)
Assembly of Parties (AP-41)**

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ITSO Director General, Mr. Patrick MASAMBU,

Mario Maniewicz- Director, BR

Piotr Lipski- Executive Secretary- Eutelsat IGO

Laurent Parente- DG/IMSO

Oscar Leon- Executive Secretary-CITEL

Distinguished Guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am delighted to join you at the meeting of the 41st Meeting of the Assembly of Parties of ITSO, here in Washington DC. I appreciate the ITSO Director General, Mr Patrick Masambu, for extending the kind invitation to the African Telecommunications Union, which I have the privilege to represent today.

Satellite matters are dear to ATU and crucial to developing telecommunications/ICTs in the African region which remains the least connected continent. This explains why the African region is very keen on the continuation of the ITSO Agreement and to preserve the Common Heritage resources which are worth billions of US dollars.

We, as a Union, are excited to participate, yet again, in this 41st Assembly of Parties. This meeting allows us to explore, among other things, the protection of the Parties' Common Heritage and access to the Intelsat communications system on a bias-free basis.

More particularly, ATU is focusing on rallying the international community to contribute to enhancing the capacity of Region D to explore, invest in and operate satellite resources and services. We believe that African countries have the right to access international public telecommunications services to enable them to participate meaningfully in driving global connectivity.

Africa accounts for just 2% of the global satellite communications market. All of you would agree with me that this share does not reflect the mission and core principles of ITSO. We have to be equally concerned about the disproportionality and agree to change the status quo.

As demonstrated by ATU's accomplishments – including our contribution to the recovery and confirmation of high-value satellite resources which benefitted 31 African countries and 14



countries outside Africa – we continue to advocate for equitability in access and use of satellite resources.

In the WRC-27, whose African preparatory process has commenced, equitable sharing of satellite resources remains a priority, along with attendant topics such as aeronautical and maritime communication systems, high-speed mobile internet access through new IMT frequency bands, and High-Altitude Platform Stations (HIBS).

Africa's connectivity, driven mainly by submarine and fibre-optic cables, is concentrated in urban areas. Yet, only 40% of the Sub-Saharan African population lives in urban areas while a majority (60%) of the population lives in rural areas with limited or no access to Internet access.

Despite global efforts to expand connectivity, about 60 % of the population remains offline, with some African countries experiencing internet penetration rates below 20% thus highlighting the gravity of Africa's connectivity gap and the urgency with which we must invest in the development and expansion of satellite infrastructure to enhance satellite connectivity, particularly in rural and remote areas.

As part of our commitment to equitable access and use of satellite resources in Africa, ATU has developed various strategies, reports, recommendations, handbooks and frameworks. For instance, we developed a Strategy for the Optimum Acquisition, Retention and Utilization of Satellite Resources in Africa; a Handbook of Satellite Fillings and Coordination; and a Report on the State of Satellite Resources in Africa. We also produced a Report on the Status of Satellite Services Licensing in Africa and International Trends and a Harmonized Model Framework for the Licensing of Satellite Services in Africa.

These policy frameworks align with the African Union's African Space Policy, African Space Strategy and other continental strategies and frameworks, underscoring the role of satellite connectivity in accelerating the attainment of AU's Agenda 2063 and the UN's SDGs.

In a study by ATU on *Evaluating the Impact of Satellite Communication on Achieving Sustainable Development Goals in Africa* published in June 2024, we empirically established that satellite communication is a vital booster for transforming sectors such as healthcare, agriculture, education and disaster management. Enhanced satellite connectivity can accelerate the eradication of poverty and hunger, attainment of quality health and education and effective mitigation of climate-related disasters.

But these gains cannot be attained unless we jointly commit to addressing existing barriers to satellite connectivity, making satellite communication more accessible, affordable and reliable. Together, we can play a part in tackling policy and regulatory challenges – including those relevant to licensing and allocation of spectrum –, high costs of satellite equipment and services, limited electricity supply, as well as unique sociopolitical challenges.

I urge enhanced coalescence of efforts by all Parties and stakeholders, recalling that no country can address these challenges individually. Trusting ITSO to lead the way as always, I believe that Africa's capacity in satellite technology will advance, enabling us to bridge the digital



connectivity divide and attain sustainable socioeconomic growth and development for Africa – and indeed for the rest of the world.

Thank you for your attention and I wish all of us the very best in our quest to make this Assembly a success.

Thank you!