



**MESSAGE FROM THE SECRETARY GENERAL
ON THE OCCASION OF AFRICAN TELECOMMUNICATIONS/ICT DAY 2026
7TH DECEMBER 2026**

Theme: "Digital Lifelines: Broadband for Every Household in Africa"

Dear Members and Partners of the African Telecommunications Union,

When I write to you each year ahead of 7th December, I normally begin with the theme and the work before us; this year I cannot do that without first acknowledging that it is the eighth time I am sharing this message as Secretary General, and the last. Since taking office in January 2019, it has been an honour to serve this Union, and I approach this final African Telecommunications/ICT Day in office with deep gratitude for the confidence you have placed in me and for the work we have been able to do together.

Many of you have received me in your countries, opened your ministries and regulatory authorities to the Secretariat, and made time for conversations that were sometimes easy and sometimes difficult. I have listened to your priorities, asked for your support and received it generously; I have also been challenged, corrected and persuaded. Those experiences have made Africa's digital transformation very personal to me because, behind every continental position and every policy decision, there is eventually a person, a family, a community or an enterprise waiting for that decision to improve daily life.

This year's theme, "Digital Lifelines: Broadband for Every Household in Africa," is one I identify with deeply. We have spent much of the past eight years working on the conditions for connectivity at continental, regional and national level, but the household is where those efforts are finally tested. A student should be able to learn from home, a parent should be able to reach a public service without travelling a long distance, and a small enterprise should be able to trade online from the community in which it operates. Broadband begins to fulfil its purpose when that possibility is reliable, affordable and available where people live.

The International Telecommunication Union's 2025 report on digital development in Africa gives this challenge a scale we cannot ignore. Only 38 per cent of people in Africa were using the Internet in 2024, compared with a global average of 68 per cent. Fourth-generation mobile networks reached 71 per cent of the population, yet only 49 per cent of rural residents had fourth-generation coverage compared with 98 per cent in urban areas. The median price of an entry-level mobile broadband package stood at 4.2 per cent of gross national income per person, more than twice the international affordability target, and fixed broadband stood at 15 per cent.

What concerns me most about these realities is the gap between network presence and actual use. A household may sit within coverage and still remain offline because the service costs too much, the device is beyond reach, electricity is unreliable, the available speed is poor, or the people in that home do not yet have the skills or confidence to use the service. The theme asks us to look directly at the reasons for these gaps and to judge progress from the point of view of the household, not from the map of coverage alone.

That thinking is also consistent with the direction our Member States set in Abuja in July, when the Conference of Plenipotentiaries adopted the 2026 Abuja Declaration on Meaningful Connectivity for Africa. The Declaration placed attention on closing both connectivity and usage gaps, especially in rural, remote and underserved communities. This Day gives us an early opportunity to carry that commitment into national conversations centred on what families can actually access, afford and use.

I therefore encourage every Member State to use the 2026 commemoration as an opportunity for national stocktaking on household connectivity. Discussions should examine the cost of devices and services, the quality and reliability of broadband, the policy and fiscal choices that can lower barriers, and the quality of the data available on household access, prices, speeds and patterns of use. The International Telecommunication Union has also drawn attention to the shortage of recent household data in Africa, and our decisions will only become stronger when they are grounded in an honest picture of who is connected and who is still waiting.

The continental commemoration will take place in Harare, Zimbabwe, back-to-back with the African Telecommunications Union Innovation Awards. I invite Member States and Associate Members to use that platform to share national priorities, initiatives, partnerships and commitments that can move reliable and affordable broadband closer to every home. The value of this Day has always depended on what our membership chooses to do with it, and I hope the 2026 observance leaves us with actions that can be followed after 7th December.

Eight years in this office have taught me that the African Telecommunications Union is strongest when its members own its work. I have seen that ownership in the long hours spent building African common positions, in experts travelling to preparatory meetings, in ministers and regulators making time for the Union, in partners supporting our programmes, and in countries opening their doors when the Secretariat has asked to work with them. Whatever progress has been recorded during my tenure belongs to that collective effort.

My term will end on 31st December, and the work we have built together will continue under the leadership of Eng. Kezias Kazuba Mwale, whom you elected as Secretary General and in whom, through that decision, you placed your confidence to carry the Union forward. I ask you to extend to him the same generosity, candour and support that you have extended to me, and to remain just as present in the life of the Union, because its strength will continue to depend on Member States that participate, question, propose, host, contribute and stay engaged when difficult continental choices have to be made.

Thank you for welcoming me into your countries, for standing with the Secretariat, for the support you gave our programmes and positions, and equally for the honest disagreements that made our decisions better. Serving you, and serving this continent through the African Telecommunications Union, has been one of the great honours of my professional life.

As we mark the forty-ninth African Telecommunications/ICT Day, I hope every Member State will give this theme its own national meaning and add something concrete to the continental effort.

John Omo

Secretary General

African Telecommunications Union