



communications
& digital technologies

Department:
Communications & Digital Technologies
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

**KEYNOTE ADDRESS BY THE DEPUTY MINISTER OF COMMUNICATIONS AND
DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES, HONOURABLE PHILLY MAPULANE AT
HUAWEI ECO-CONNECT 2023, SANDTON CONVENTION CENTRE,
JOHANNESBURG, 06 JULY 2023**

Premier of Gauteng Province, Hon Panyaza Lesufi, Global President of EBG, Mr Wang Tao

CEO of Huawei Technologies SA (Pty) Ltd, Mr Will Meng and your leadership team,

Captains of the ICT Industry from the length and breadth of the continent, Partners and customers of Huawei Technologies SA,

Distinguished guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good morning

Introduction

Thank you for the invitation to this august gathering of a broad spectrum of business executives, worldwide business innovators, thought leaders, partners from across all spheres of the public and private sector. This year's instalment of the Huawei Eco-Connect Sub-Saharan Africa Summit is convened under an interesting theme, "Leading Digital for New Value Together".

This summit comes at a time when we've just emerged from a successful ITU Global Symposium for Regulators 23 which was held 6 weeks ago in Egypt, in the city of Sharm El Sheik. The GSR23 was a platform for the exchange of best practices and experiences by global regulators in order to deepen cooperation in digital governance on matters,

especially related to cross- border data flows, protection of personal information, ownership of data assets and other associated policy and regulatory issues.

Later this year from, November to December, we will be in Dubai attending the most important ITU World Radio Communications Conference-23. This is an important platform for the world to review the Radio Regulations, which is an international treaty governing the use of radio frequency spectrum as well as to look at the geo stationary satellite orbits.

We continue to learn from good practices across the globe in these multilateral forums as we seek to utilise them to ensure that there is global justice in .

Next Generation Networks Overview

We are living in exciting times when the world as we know it is mutating into something else right before our very own eyes. In dialectical terms we can characterise this rapid changes as a significant quantitative technological transformation to a qualitative digital era. The World bank estimates that the digital economy accounts for more than 15% of the global GDP and has grown over 2.5 times as fast over the past decade. ICT is expected to play a pivotal role in this extraordinary growth trajectory, contributing more than 50% to the digital economy. Digitalisation and particularly the deployment of the superfast 5G networks in commercial operations is revolutionising the world outlook.

5G has made it possible for networks and Technology companies like Huawei to revolutionise industrial production and the delivery of goods through the use of high-speed internet and Artificial Intelligence (AI).

As if this is not exciting enough, in the recent Mobile World Congress in Shanghai, China, Huawei piloted the next-generation 5.5G network capable of speeds that are ten times faster than 5G with uploads of around 10 gigabytes per second. This will expand accessibility to generative AI technologies and accelerate production of driverless and electric vehicles capable of reducing road accidents by as much as 80%, among others.

While the world is exploring the post-5G ICT environment, Africa and particularly the developing world is still grappling with the challenges of bridging the digital divide. We are acutely aware of the reality that our continent is lagging far behind. We live in a continent

that is struggling to rollout the slower 4G network that is currently at 30% penetration. We struggle to increase digital literacy and thus bridge the gapping digital divide. We struggle to increase the uptake of affordable smart devices.

It is for this reason that as a department, working with the ICT sector players, we have made the rollout of ICT infrastructure and bringing down the cost to communicate top of our priorities. As a country coming out from a painful past of apartheid racial segregation, we cannot allow the digital era to introduce another segregation of a section of our people. We are committed to building a digitally inclusive society. Our approach to digital inclusion and the creation of a digital society is driven by the belief that the telecommunications companies have a critical role to play in boosting coverage in underserved areas by also accelerating 5G deployments outside of urban areas to better address poor unserved communities across the country, with the aim of spreading the adoption of digital services.

We are acutely aware that in order for government to digitally transform our society and ensure an inclusive digital economy, the following fundamental pre-requisites has to be addressed:

1. There must be affordable, reliable and secure connectivity. Through our broadband policy intervention called “SA Connect” we seek to expand connectivity by rolling out digital infrastructure across the country to ensure 80% of South Africans have a secure, reliable and affordable high speed internet access in the next 3 years. This is central to our efforts to bridge the digital divide, ensure universal accessibility and to stimulate economic and social transformation, particularly in the underserved areas. We do recognise that this we cannot achieve alone as government, and therefore call upon industry to support government, not only as part of their universal access obligations, but also as part of extending a hand to ensure that as we progress technologically, we leave no one behind.
2. Affordable broadband services and digital devices: Due to our dire economic situation and the ever-increasing cost of living expenses, the meagre indigent’s resources are focused on the essentials required to survive on a day-to-day basis. Access to affordable and quality broadband services and smart digital devices is important in

assisting citizens access government services without depleting minimum resources at their disposal.

3. Skills and capacity development: An inclusive digital transformation and digital economy requires the capacitation of citizens to ensure meaningful utilisation of digital devices and affordable connectivity. With the emergence of digital technologies, we would like to see our citizens leveraging digital technologies to address societal problems as well as innovating in income-generating digital products and services. Many traditional sectors of the economy are digitising and therefore require digital skills. We would like to see our sector stakeholders beginning to join hands with us to provide skills for many of our citizens, especially unemployed graduates, youth, women and people with disabilities.
4. Small, Medium and Micro Enterprises (SMMEs) Support. SMMEs play a very important role in areas of innovation, economic growth and employment. Most importantly they are easily accessible to citizens because they are spread out in townships and rural areas. In our partnerships with the industry, we would like to see accelerated support to the SMMEs, from creating special targeted packages for them in terms of accessing digital technologies (e.g. cloud services) at special rates, providing venture finance for SMMEs, leveraging digital platforms of multinational companies to offer their skills as well as digital products and services as well as being given the opportunities to be part of the global value chains of multinationals.

Policy and legislative interventions

Ladies and gentlemen, let me share with you some of the initiatives we are undertaking to create a conducive environment for the digital economy to thrive.

We have recently reached a historical milestone agreement with the broadcasters that has paved the way for the final conclusion of one of the oldest programmes in government, the Broadcast Digital Migration (BDM). According to this agreement, all analogue television broadcasting above the 694MHZ shall be discontinued on the 31 July 2023. This approach is accepted to be a win-win approach as it will enable Analogue Switch Off progress,

release spectrum and allow the broadcasters to recover from post COVID economic decline and load-shedding impact.

Importantly this agreement will free up the much-needed high demand spectrum that is set to improve the ability of mobile telecommunications operators to build robust networks with better penetration and reach as we chase our goal of ensuring that all South Africans have access to affordable internet by 2024. Affordable, reliable and secure connectivity is the backbone of the digital economy.

As we are about to finalize the **Next Generation Spectrum Policy**, we note with excitement that Huawei intends to launch a full set deployment of commercial 5.5G network equipment in 2024. Huawei's Director and President of ICT Products and Solutions, Yang Chaobin notes that these future networks will enable a 10-fold improvement in latency, positioning accuracy and reliability, and will enable an increase in the number of connected things from the current 10 billion to 100 billion in 2030.

The fact that Huawei worked with more than 30 operators around the world on technological verification and application pilots for these technologies, is in line with the decision that the Minister endorsed that the DCDT should commence urgently with the implementation of the **Digital Economy Master Plan**, which was the first one to be agreed to by the industry and public sector partners. We look forward to your partnership in ensuring that the Plan succeeds. From this day, we wish to see many of you focusing or increasingly shifting to 5G for SMMEs.

The report that 5G will overtake 4G in 2024 to become the dominant mobile technology in China, is not far removed from our policy intentions of wanting to address the issue of how do we deliberately and collaboratively address the discontinuation of copper to fibre and 2G/3G to 4G/5G. This will give us a competitive edge and allow our citizens to be permanent residents of the digital economy.

We have also taken a decision to accelerate implementation of the recommendations of the **Presidential Commission on 4IR**. The report had acknowledged the need for legislative and policy review, and the critical role of AI-native technologies that allow AI capabilities to be delivered to digital networks to better serve several industries, connect people better

and create incredible new business opportunities in domains like IoT, sensing, and advanced manufacturing.

We see Huawei as part of our industry partners that we should work with to expand network coverage in rural and remote areas across South Africa with the main goal of closing and narrowing the digital divide by providing better and faster digital services.

The Presidency has given us strict directives to ensure that we finalise during 2023 the recently published ***Rapid Deployment Guidelines Policy Direction to ICASA*** in order to allow for the rapid deployment of digital infrastructure in South Africa and allow for co-building and co-sharing agreements to be signed by the domestic carriers in the municipalities where they will also be laying fibre.

We published the ***Electronic Communications Amendment Bill for public comments*** to address, amongst others international roaming, competition issues and the cost to communicate. We think this might allow operators to think about coming up with 5G inter-network roaming service trial to enable customers to access other telecom operators' 5G networks and continue using 5G services when outside the range of their original operators' 5G network.

Conclusion

We will soon be hosting the 9th BRICS Communication Ministers Meeting, in Cape Town. I am confident that when it concludes on the 4th of August 2023, we will have reached an agreement on how we should co-operate and collaborate to promote digital economy development to benefit from the huge wave of innovation and digitalization opportunities.

The Eco-Connect Summit provides a platform for communication in the digital economy and digital fields. I hope the audience of industry stakeholders will engage freely and contribute to the development of South Africa's digital economy.

I wish this Summit the best!

Thank you.

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