CLOSING REMARKS BY

MS. NONKQUBELA JORDAN-DYANI

DIRECTOR-GENERAL DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNICATIONS AND DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES AT THE NOKIA SOUTH AFRICAN WOMEN IN ICT FORUM.

15 AUGUST 2023

Programme Directors, Ms. Nthabeleng Mokitimi-Dlamini and Ms. Irisha Luhanga,

Your Excellencies: The Former Deputy President and former UN Women Executive Director, Dr. Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka,

The Managing Director of Nokia South Africa, Mr. Toni Pellegrino, and leadership of Nokia

The Deputy Head of Mission, Finland, Ms Lissa-Maija Harju,

The Nokia Strategy & Technology Vice-President, Ms. Hilary Mine

The Eskom CIO, Ms Faith Burn

The Chairperson of SA Women in ICT Forum, Ms Sonwabile Mzinyathi,

Distinguished representatives and captains of industries,

Distinguished Guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good morning.

Let me start by expressing the great feeling of honour I have, to have been invited to come here and speak at this forum that is designed to honour and cherish the women of our country and beyond for the great work they do in that male dominated ICT sector. By the way ICT contributes a great portion to our fast-growing economy.

We are blessed to be in the presence of the champion of gender equality, Mama Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, who is also an epitome of humility, and a warrior of gender equality.

Ladies and gentlemen, we are here today celebrating Women in ICT in this historic month in the struggle for women emancipation. It was 67 years ago in this month where the great towering women (Mme Lilian Ngoyi, Helen Joseph, Rahima Moosa and Sophia Williams) led a march against all sorts of discrimination and fought for equality. We today stand here today proud and speaking about ICT because of those brave giants.

South Africa, even under democracy, continues to experience societal and economical inequalities, including decline in gender equality. Challenges faced in Finland and across the world, breaking barrier, sustaining position, growth, and promotion.

With women its seldom about the individual, women inherently act in the best interest of the greater society. The opportunities that abound for women are for the betterment of South Africa as a nation.

The struggle that the women of 1956 wedged against the apartheid regime will be in vain if we do not fight to be at the center of the South African economic mainstream; the struggle of women emancipation will also be incomplete without women playing part in the economic outlook of our country.

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) enables endless possibilities in society for everyone. As technology grow in value as a modern-day currency, women will harness it as they did access to finance, land, and education. The question is not what the opportunities are, the real question is what the barriers are to access digital technologies for women. Let's us work together as the society and break those barriers and unleash the infinite ingenuity of women in technology.

Program directors, as the Department of Communications and Digital Technologies, a leader in enabling a connected and digitally transformed country, we strive to ensure we create a lever for South Africa to be able to compete globally in the technology space and create opportunities for women and propel them to take a center stage.

A year ago, we launched a platform called Digitech. DigiTech is a platform for digital products/applications (Apps) developed by SMMEs in South Africa. A program aimed at

commercialising locally developed digital innovations. DigiTech serves as a digital distribution service developed, maintained, and operated by the South African government. The platform allows users to browse and download approved apps developed across operating systems. It further promotes South African developed digital products/apps to expand their adoption and use. Through DigiTech, the DCDT seeks to promote South African developed digital products in other markets whilst facilitating partnerships with other countries on co-promotion of local technologies.

Since 2021, the Department has invited SMMEs in the ICT sector to then register on the DigiTech platform online. Among the products which these SMMEs have are tools for social networking, fintech, mobile payments, smart city enablement, e-commerce, delivery and logistics, transportation, e-hailing, health care, AI imaging, e-learning, online booking, videoconferencing, and music aggregation. Because of their participation in DigiTech, SMMEs are benefiting from learning, mentorship, access to markets and technology partnerships with big entities such as Microsoft, Huawei, Cisco, as well as in SMME strategy session facilitated by the International Telecommunications Union (ITU).

As a result, there has been an emergence of new tools such as a pregnancy tracking app, an assistive device for enabling the deaf communities, technology-enabled language content, drone technologies, Workflow 360 management software, livestock tracking, games and gamification systems, reception check-in systems, and smart-government solutions, amongst others. One of the examples is an app called BTap, which offers local supermarkets, restaurants, and farmers an opportunity to sell directly to consumers, and customers have an opportunity to enjoy and choose from perishable and non-perishable foods. This app is developed by a young woman, Khomotso Sethoga. We remain intentional in leveraging digital opportunities for women, and as a result of their participation in DigiTech.

It is time for women to participate in the mainstream economy – and derive benefits!

Ladies and Gentlemen, at the United Nations 67th Commission on the Status of Women earlier this year, the theme was "Innovation and technological change, and education in the digital age for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls." The UN Director of Women highlighted amongst others, the need to harness technology for women emancipation.

In attendance was the ITU 1st female Secretary General, who emphasised on the issue of developing or strengthening policies and programmes as well as specific strategies to increase women and girls' access to education and training; as well the achievement of gender parity in science and technology, engineering and mathematics; as well as applying a gender-responsive approach in the design, development, deployment, and use of technologies.

I am reminded of Verna Myers Allyship ted-talk

A: advocate and amplify

L: listen to build trust

L: learning to broaden views

Y: yield and make room for others

ITU has budgeted $17 billion to address the gender digital gap and to focus on the programmes such as generation-connects gap. Aligned to Hillary Mine's call on urgency to bring more women in technology. The ITU generation-connects put in place programmes that will challenge gender stereotypes and negative social norms to create an enabling environment for women's and girls' empowerment in the context of innovation and technological change, as well as education in the digital age. Through this initiative, as a collective global community, we hope to address the rural-urban divide, youth-older persons divide, challenges of affordability, access, skills and training, capacity-building, and accessibility. When we say ICT is a great equalizer, it is based on realisation that this technology provides new and greater opportunities, breaking language barrier and status; and simultaneously enhancing local content.

Madam Deputy President, the need for more focused efforts, more access, and more platforms for women in technology remains critically important. The Women In Tech reports that women held only 23% of tech jobs in South Africa, for example, out of 236 000 ICT (tech) roles, women only occupy 56 000 of them. In 2021, the tech world hired 83% men and 14% women, the rest belonging to other genders including non-binary and genderqueer groups (State of the Software Developer Nation Report 2021). Despite efforts to slim the gender gap in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) education, major inequalities persist.

On a lighter note, South Africa is producing more female ICT graduates. The country has the highest share of female graduates in Sub-Saharan African at 32%, and even more female ICT graduates, at 38%. This is what Mama Lilian Ngoyi marched to the Union Buildings in 1956 for, however we still need to do more.

Although reporting growth, the South African tech sector still sees less than 25% of tech jobs held by women, and simply not enough female entrepreneurs being produced within the industry. Gender is woven throughout the SDGs as it sits at the intersection of economic, social, and environmental issues. The gender bias in African tech, however, is reflected in how female entrepreneurs often struggle to raise funding compared to their male counterparts. Africa currently carries the highest female entrepreneurship rate globally at 27%, and 58% of the continent's self-employed population are women. Something the generation of 1956 didn't march for. And something which I intend to be intentional about. Charlotte Maxeke said "this work is not for ourselves. Kill that spirit of self and do not live above your people. If you can rise, bring some with you. Circulate your work and distribute as much information as possible." The real task for me as I drive digital transformation, is to ensure that we transform the sector and achieve gender equality in the digital economy.

The funding gap in African tech also indicates that despite the funding splash in African tech over the past few years, only 3% of all the investments made into African startups between 2013 and 2021 went to female-led startups and only 4% in 2022. Again, this is work in progress as I have engaged funding institutions (in government and partners) to be deliberate and set aside 40% of the funding to female tech entrepreneurs. In the programmes of the Department: digitisation, connectivity, cell-phone repairs and software development, digital skills: 40% this year is dedicated to women, and we will increase in following years to 50%.

Program directors, even though the digital age has generated unprecedented opportunities for the empowerment of women and girls, gender remains underrepresented across the creation, use and regulation of technology. Women are less likely to use digital services or enter tech-related careers, and significantly more likely to face online harassment and violence. This limits their digital empowerment as well as their transformative potential of technology as a whole.

It is still rather unfortunate that there are still instances where a woman leader has to work twice as hard to prove she can do the same job as her male counterpart; she works twice as hard

not because she has half the aptitude of her male counterparts, but because the corridors of power are not conducive to those of us who wear heels.

The system is built that half the time we are proving we belong at the table, and the other half displaying our intellectual prowess, imagine what we could achieve if we did not have to explain our presence at the table.

In conclusion, women have the opportunity in every subfield of tech; ranging from software development to machine learning and artificial intelligence. These include but not limited to project manager, quality assurance tester and business analyst. Women can also pursue careers as data scientists, computer systems analysts, information security analysts, as well as web developers.

Lastly, I wish to acknowledge the partnership with the private sector in empowering South Africa's young women through funding, access to skills programmes and mentorship opportunities, advocacy and awareness is making an impact.

Your legacy will always be "famous ringtone"- but I am happy that you have evolved to being B-2-B choice, ensuring that in the ecosystem of innovation and tech deployment, we as women of SA benefit. Thank you for being inclusive, committed to enhancing diversity and create platform for thriving innovation. And contribute to more resilient society.

Thank you.

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