



MINISTRY
COMMUNICATIONS AND DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

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SPEAKING NOTES

G20 DIGITAL MINISTERS MEETING ON COVID-19

Greetings Chairperson and all Excellencies.

We would like to thank the G20 Saudi Presidency for this excellent initiative, which once again confirms the wisdom of multi-lateralism. The world is looking to the influential G20 economies to provide leadership in responding to the COVID-19 crisis. This is not just a devastating global health emergency, it also is leaving an economic and social turmoil in its wake. To our developing countries, the challenge of responding to this pandemic has been especially daunting because we saw advanced economies with much stronger systems of healthcare, still suffering devastating consequences from this pandemic.

In South Africa, we had the fortune to learn lessons from other countries, enabling us to act before the disease became too prevalent. It is really clear that one of the most powerful tools at our disposal is our ICT sector. We need to provide up to date and accurate medical information, statistics, as well as information about new government regulations, to inform all of our citizens about the crisis. The response of communications service providers has been decisive, agreeing early on, to provide zero rated services for health and education purposes.

This has helped many citizens, who would otherwise have struggled in this regard. It has also ensured many of our young people are able to continue their schooling during the crisis, despite challenges regarding those in rural and poor areas.

In our view, telecommunications and IT based companies have mostly seen business boom following the lockdown in different countries, thus positioning them to contribute to helping the rest of our countries. We had therefore hoped that we could have included text encouraging the zero rating of telecommunications and data services for specified for public services like health, education and public service pronouncements in our G20 Digital Ministers statement today. This would have been critical for developing countries, who are struggling to put in place sufficient resources to fight the pandemic.

Technological solutions can play an important role in supporting measures to promote physical distancing, by helping to identify potential risk areas and activities that may need intervention. Similar measures can be used to supplement the arduous work of contact tracing, to alert those who may have come into contact with infected persons. In so doing, it is essential to utilise legal frameworks and technological solutions that can ensure that we are able to uphold human rights, including the right to privacy and to dignity, and to operate within existing health guidelines for dealing with pandemics. These measures and access to information can be critical as we seek to relax restrictions on economic activity whilst trying to curtail the spread of the virus. On behalf of the African continent we would like to encourage G20 countries to share their experiences and expertise with developing countries

and where possible, provide support with infrastructure, equipment, medicines, technical assistance and other resources. Apart from our emphasis points raised above, we fully support the G20 COVID19 Response Statement.

**Mr Jackson Mthembu (MP),
Acting Minister of Communications and Digital Technologies,
30 April 2020**