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Press Release for the Meeting of SADC Ministers Responsible for Communications, ICT And Postal Held in Maputo, Mozambique 1 June 2007

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The SADC Ministers responsible for Communications, ICT and Postals held their meeting at the Joaquim Chissano International Conference Centre in Maputo, Mozambique on 1 June, 2007. The meeting was officially opened by the Prime Minister of the Republic of Mozambique, Her Excellency Sra Luísa Dias Diogo. The Ministers and Ambassadors that attended the meeting were hosted by the Minister of Transport and Communications for Mozambique, Honourable Antonio Francisco Mungambe.

The meeting was preceded by the meeting of Senior Officials responsible for Communications, ICT and Postals on 31 May, 2007.

The Ministers meeting recognised the importance of Communications, ICT and Postal Services as central to socio-economic development and its impact on the attainment of Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The Honourable Minister for Mozambique took the opportunity to share with his colleagues developments in the sector with respect to infrastructure development and service provision. The Ministers commended Mozambique for the progress it has made since the end of civil strife in providing state of the art Communications, ICT and Postal Services which are affordable and accessible to a large part of the population in Mozambique.

The meeting reviewed the progress made with the installation of an optical fibre network and regional backbone that facilitates the connectivity of SADC Member States and carries the transit traffic within SADC. The network is implemented through the SADC Regional Information Infrastructure (SRII) Project. Ministers noted that the minimum long term network was 70% complete and urged the Southern African Telecommunications Association (SATA) to work closely with SADC Secretariat, Member States and other partners to raise funding for the completion of this network. The Ministers directed that the network components for Angola and Democratic Republic of Congo be accorded priority as these two countries had experienced major backlogs in terms of investment.

The Ministers also directed that the SADC Secretariat, assisted by the Communications Regulators Association (CRASA) formulate a framework for their approval to facilitate the development of the ?SADC Home and Away? roaming system, which would see SADC cellular prepaid subscribers roam in the region at affordable costs, consistent with developments in other regions like Europe and East Africa.

The Ministers also took the opportunity to review the progress made with the preparatory process for the installation of the NEPAD Broadband East African Submarine Cable (EASSy), which links SADC countries to North Africa and the Oceanic islands in line with the Kigali Protocol. The Ministers urged the SADC Member States that had not yet signed this protocol to make the necessary preparations to accede to the protocol when 50% of the original signatories have ratified so as not to be left out of the process.

The meeting considered the CRASA Report relating to implementation of the key provisions of the SADC Protocol on Transport, Communications and Meteorology, which provides for harmonisation of regional policies, legislation and institutional reforms amongst the SADC Member States, in order facilitate the much needed investment in the region by the private sector. The Ministers commended CRASA for having made major strides in the creation of autonomy of operators in the region, development of a Policy on Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women, harmonisation of technical standards and type approval and the establishment of a Broadcasting Affairs Committee which seeks to address the regulatory framework for broadcasting issues in a convergent ICT sector.

The meeting underscored the importance of and re-affirmed the need for all SADC Member States to institutionalise the concept of universal access in each Member State as an imperative for each operator's license, in order to promote access by all to Communications, ICT and Postal Services as a tool for development and called upon the SADC Member states to share experiences and come up with a common

and effective framework for the implementation and use of the funds set up by Member States for Universal Access.

The meeting also considered the report of the Southern African Postal Operators Association (SAPOA), which highlighted the state of quality of service in the postal area, efficiency of circulation of mail in SADC, security of mail in the wake of 9/11, facilitation of cross border and national money transfers through electronic postal transfers and strategies to combat terrorism in the postal sector. The Ministers recognised the progress made by SAPOA and its members in these areas, and in particular the support of the Universal Postal Union.

The meetings also reviewed progress made with preparations for the Universal Postal Union Congress to be held in Nairobi, Kenya, in 2008 and in particular the need to have a regional position with regard to key issues on the agenda. The Ministers encouraged Member States to identify areas of material support to the Government of Kenya to facilitate the hosting of this global conference, the first to be held in Sub Saharan Africa. Ministers directed SAPOA to coordinate the preparation for the Congress in consultations with South Africa as the Chair of the Africa Support Committee.

The Ministers also reviewed the state of implementation of the SADC ICT Declaration of 2001, as it relates to the regulatory environment, infrastructure development for ICT, Community participation and governance in ICT development, ICT in business development and human resource development in the sector.

The Ministers took the opportunity to consider the priority programmes and projects for 2008/2009 which included Communications, ICT and Postals infrastructure development, regulatory frameworks, harmonisation of the broadcasting regulatory and operating procedures as well as quality of postal services as espoused by the SAPOA Strategic Plan (2005-2008) as approved by the Ministers in Durban in 2005. Ministers approved the priority areas and directed the SADC Secretariat to make budgetary provision for these activities.

The Ministers expressed their satisfaction with the progress made in the Communications, ICT and Postal Sectors and commended the SADC Secretariat, SATA, CRASA and SAPOA for having worked together to facilitate this progress. The Ministers expressed appreciation to the Government and People of Mozambique for the warm welcome they received during their comfortable stay in Maputo. The meeting accepted the offer by Mauritius to host the next meeting of Ministers responsible for communications, ICT and Postals in May, 2008.

Joaquim Chissano International Conference Centre

Maputo, Mozambique

1 June 2007