

**ADDRESS BY HON. DR. BENJAMIN AGGREY NTIM, MINISTER OF COMMUNICATIONS, GHANA DELIVERED AT THE HIGH-LEVEL SEGMENT OF ITU COUNCIL 2007, GENEVA, ON 4 SEPTEMBER 2007.**

Your Excellency, Chairman of Council

Your Excellencies, Colleague Ministers

Your Excellency the Secretary General of ITU

Your Excellencies the Elected Officials of the ITU

Your Excellencies Members of the Diplomatic Corps

Distinguished Delegates

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I wish to express my gratitude for the opportunity offered me to join the august members of ITU Council 2007 to contribute in discussions to enrich the decision making process of the ITU as we all strive to build an inclusive information society. This year marks Ghana's golden jubilee year and I bring you the salutations of our President H. E. J. A Kufuor, the people of Ghana and my two predecessors, Hon. Kan-Dapaah and Hon. Prof. Mike Oquaye.

As ICT and Telecommunications policy-makers for our respective countries and ITU regions, we owe it as a duty to the entire world to harmonise our policies and developmental agendas in our desire to use ICT to promote world peace, sustainable development and progress.

In this regard, it is essential that we develop consensus in our attempt to bridge the digital divide within our countries and also, between our nations and those of the rest of the world.

Your Excellencies,

It is in furtherance of our commitment to have a joint-up world that I welcome the creation of the High-Level consultative platform for Council 2007 as a brilliant innovation.

Permit me therefore to seize this opportunity to commend the Secretary General Dr. Hamadoun Toure and his team, for the insightful arrangement that provides an opportunity for us to re-focus on the remit of the Union and also to re-affirm our collective commitment to the promotion of an inclusive and sustainable Information Society for our citizens.

For us in Africa, the challenge is clear. ICT/Telecommunications is not a matter of choice, it is a necessity. We recognise that ICT is an indispensable tool for enhancing development and providing opportunities in the achievement of our collective developmental objectives, in particular the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) as well as the Action Lines of the WSIS.

Ghana, on her part, pledges to work together with member countries in harmony, for the realisation of the goals of the ITU; and I salute all elected members of Council 2006-2010 who have assembled here to contribute their quota to the development of global ICT and electronic communications policies.

Ladies and Gentlemen;

At the last Plenipotentiary Conference, by consensus, we all agreed that if we have to achieve the development of an inclusive information society then infrastructure development is key to ensuring universal, ubiquitous and affordable access to ICTs and thereby contribute to social and economic prosperity of our respective nations.

In this regard we recognise that Governments owe it as a duty to their citizens to play key collaborative roles in pursuing infrastructure development programmes in the communications sector, including the energy sector, which will involve the participation of the private sector and the development partners if governments are to attract and attain the needed investment support to promote tremendous growth of the telecommunications sector. In Ghana this growth has been phenomenal in recent years and telephone subscription has reached a figure of 6.7 million this year which represents a teledensity of 32%. Competition, arising from liberalisation, has been the driving force behind this growth.

Aware that resources for ICT infrastructure development are expensive and difficult to come by, in undertaking infrastructural development programmes, as policy makers, we are reminded not think of the interest of our respective countries alone, but those of the sub-regions and the regions in which we find ourselves in a harmonised manner, so that our infrastructural development programmes will impact on the rest of the globalised world.

It is for this reason that I want to commend the ITU Secretary General and his team for planning a major event to bring multi-stakeholder partners from all parts of the world to take practical steps to connect Africa as a whole to the rest of the world at the Kigali meeting planned for the end of October 2007.

We in Ghana find this planned event a positive development as it is expected to be the beginning of the implementation of a continental connectivity programme which will be devoid of duplication of efforts. A connectivity programme driven by the ITU which will involve the African Union, the private sector, the donor community, the development partners, all nations as well as the civil society who will, with one accord contribute to develop the needed infrastructure to be used for ICT deployment to unite Africa to the rest of the World.

And let me mention here that as a show of Ghana's commitment to this programme, the Government of Ghana, in extending fibre connectivity to link all parts of Ghana, ultimately aims at ensuring that the high speed broadband facility, when linked to the SAT III submarine fibre optic cable, terminating on the coast of Ghana, will enhance connectivity solutions to all countries in the ECOWAS sub-region and subsequently to other networks outside the region. We therefore commend the complementary infrastructural activities being carried out by our immediate neighbours in Burkina Faso and Nigeria.

Your Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

We again reckon that for us to use ICTs as tools for the promotion of wealth to reduce poverty among our populace, among the critical success factors is the development of the enabling legislative policies and the supportive regulatory environment to positively cultivate and build local entrepreneurial and foreign investor confidence on our continent. In Ghana the government has made a policy decision to establish community information centres in all 230 constituencies. 72 of this have been completed.

In this regard, I will wish to use this opportunity to urge the ITU to consider the even progress of all ITU regions as the world plans to move into an era of technological convergence.

As we commence a journey of migration of networks from analogue technology platforms to digital technologies we in Africa and indeed in the developing economies need to be mindful that for us to create the needed environment for broadcasting, internet and telephony as well as data to be delivered from one platform we again owe it a responsibility to the civil society at large to create an environment of open access so they would not be denied their right to information necessary to enhance good governance.

In this regard I urge Council 2007 to strategise on how to create a balance in the developmental move towards convergence of technology so we can offer the needed support to private sector players in a manner such that they will not also feel the financial burden of the migration all alone. This done the private sector players will not pass on the entire cost of the migration to our citizenry who require affordable access to communications as a right.

The ITU must again assist developing countries to respond to these challenges by facilitating the development of the requisite human resources in key skills areas so that developing countries can respond to the challenges of research and development in the process of modernising the telecommunications sector.

Distinguished Delegates,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We have every opportunity to benefit from shared experiences under the umbrella of the ITU which is now adopting a multi-stakeholder approach to evolve ICT and Telecommunication policies, standards in our quest to provide innovative ICT tools to propel the rapid development and transformation of our economies into a knowledge-based information-rich one.

Under the guidance of the ITU, let me emphasise that we strongly believe that we would be on course to meet the targets of the WSIS so let us strategise and focus to harmonise the usage of our intellectual, material and financial resources. This is precisely why we are all here at Council 2007 and I wish Council fruitful deliberations.

In conclusion, the main issues or key words for this short but grand debate on challenges to infrastructural development in the ICT sector must include the extent of governments commitment and the priority they allocate to the

development of appropriate enabling environment, promotion of public private partnerships, liberalisation leading to competition in the ICT sector, sub-regional, regional and international cooperation, development of indigenous skills and the promotion of research to maintain competence in the new and emerging technologies in the sector.

I thank you for the audience.