PAPER DELIVERED BY HON. SHERRY AYITTEY AT THE ITU SYMPOSIUM ON ICTs, THE ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE CHANGE AT THE LA PALM ROYAL BEACH HOTEL, THURSDAY, JULY 8, 2011

Mr. Chairman,
Colleague Ministers of State,
Mr. Malcolm Joshua, Director, Telecommunication Standardization Bureau, ITU,
Directors of Ministries, Departments and Agencies present here,
Distinguish Ladies and Gentlemen,

I thank you for the invitation to be part of this symposium on **ICTs, the Environment, and Climate Change,**

Mr. Chairman, Indications of a warming climate has been measured all over the world. Tropical cyclones increasingly strike coastal areas and create misery and loss of life, property and damage the ecosystem. Worldwide, approximately 100 million people live within three feet of sea level. Therefore sea level rise as a result of global warming and climate change threaten to displace tens of millions of people living in low lying areas especially in developing countries.

Those of us in Ghana are witnesses to the increasing threat of rising sea levels and sea erosion to coastal dwellers from Aflao to Axim and to their livelihoods.

Climate Change resulting in drought conditions continues to ravage the Sahel areas of Africa and the Northern parts of our country, and threaten agricultural production, food security and access to potable water.

We are all aware of the severe challenges now facing water resource availability and the environment, challenges that pose a fundamental threat to sustainable development. Socioeconomic advances cannot be sustained without clean air to breath, safe water to drink, healthy soils and a clean and stable environment to support work and life. Ensuring food security is a related and equally pressing issue – reliable harvests, crops that withstand pests, drought and climate change, and sturdy and productive livestock. Agriculture is of fundamental importance to developing countries, because a well-functioning agricultural sector is essential to ensuring food security, and is a major source of national income.

Water statistics are eye-opening: over one billion people in developing countries do not have access to safe drinking water. More than 2.2 million people, mostly in developing countries, die each year from diseases associated with poor water and sanitary conditions. About 70 per cent of all available fresh water is used for irrigation in agriculture, but 60 per cent of this water is lost to evaporation or is returned to rivers and groundwater aquifers. A 2005 study by the World Health Organization and UNICEF tells us that every US$1 invested in improved drinking water and sanitation services can yield economic benefits of up to US$34 depending on the region. Climate models in Africa show that 600,000 square kilometers of land classified as moderately water constrained will experience severe water limitations. By 2020, it is estimated that between 75 and 250 million people in Africa will experience increased water stress due to climate change.

This is where I believe the use of Information, Communication Technology (ICT) can be a sustainable way of mitigating global greenhouse gas emissions and climate change threats.

It is currently estimated that ICTs in themselves contribute around 2 to 2.5 per cent of global greenhouse gas emissions and this is likely to grow as ICTs become more widely available in terms of television and computer use in homes, offices and schools worldwide.

Despite the above observation, the development and use of ICT has helped to reduce the amount of carbon dioxide emitted by vehicles through the use of efficient and effective communication gadgets such as, mobile telephony, fax machines and the internet.

Mr. Chairman, ICTs can be used to develop improved seeds that can withstand diseases and boost food production. They can be used to develop and improve on storage facilities to reduce post harvest losses. Again though Climate change affects water availability and water quality ICT can be used to improve on water purity and availability and also to track underground water and improve on water quality so as to provide potable water to communities.

Mr. Chairman, the science of climate change has benefitted greatly from the parallel development of ICTs. **International Telecommunication Unions (ITU)** work in this area focused on the use of ICTs for weather forecasting, climate monitoring and predicting, detecting and mitigating the effects of natural disasters. ICT can thus be used to support farmers in rural communities in terms of predicting and disseminating information on planting seasons.

Mr. Chairman, it is clear that governments alone, particularly governments of the countries' most vulnerable to climate change cannot address the response measures to adaptations of ICTs for climate change mitigation. I would therefore like to use this platform to invite and urge civil society, NGOs, local communities to be sensitized and prepared to work with agencies of governments. I also urge government agencies to keep local agencies and civil society groups in the picture as important and critical participants and stakeholders.

Public awareness, continuous education and training will be critical tools to be employed to involve all sections of the public in the implementation process.

Mr. Chairman, as I said earlier, I would like to reiterate that ICT is a prerequisite for development in all its forms. Using ICT to monitor, mitigate and adapt to the negative effects of climate change remains a challenge to Africa and other developing countries as we lag behind developed countries in ICT usage and access.

Mr. Chairman, I will therefore in conclusion urge participants at this forum to deliberate on the issue of the development, deployment and the widespread use of ICT in vulnerable countries, particularly African countries so that we can benefit from using ICT in our struggle to deal with the effects of climate change to promote sustainable development.

I thank you for your attention.