**REPUBLIC OF KENYA**

 **SPEECH BY MINISTER FOR INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATIONS HON. SAMUEL POGHISIO EGH, MP, DURING THE OFFICIAL OPENING OF ITU WORKSHOP IN NAIROBI ON 26th JULY 2010 AT THE INTERCONTINENTAL HOTEL9.30A**

**Mr. Charles J.K. Njoroge**

**CCK Director-General**

**Distinguished delegates**

**Ladies and gentlemen**

I feel greatly honored to officiate at the opening of two events of the International Telecommunications Union (ITU) events. The events are the ITU-T workshops on Quality of Service, and electromagnetic field, climate change and environment; and the associated meetings of ITU-T Study Groups 12 and 5 Regional Group for Africa. The subject matter of these meetings is not only crucial for Kenya but the entire African region given the fast uptake of the ICT services in the continent. I, therefore, wish to thank the ITU for giving Kenya an opportunity to host these important meetings.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The opening up of the ICT sector in most African countries has played a significant role in expanding the reach of ICT services. This growth has been largely driven by private sector participation in infrastructure development in Africa in the last one decade. As a result, the last 10 years have seen many more people connected to ICT services that what governments in the region could do in four decades. Africa today is home to 450 million mobile subscribers up from 16 million in year 2000.

In most countries in the region, the ICT sector is one of the fastest growing, accounting for the highest proportion of new jobs and driving virtually all other sectors of the economy. In addition, the ICT industry is a major source of revenue for governments, and has surpassed the traditional sources of revenue in the old economy in most countries in the region. Most encouragingly, the sector has enormous potential for further growth given that half of the populations in our countries are yet to be covered. The future of the ICT sector in Africa is therefore quite rosy.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The fast growth of the ICT market in Africa has been supported by extensive expansion of ICT infrastructure. The African landscape is today heavily dotted with transmission masts, particularly in cities and high population density areas. Masts are now a fixture in our neighborhoods, and the continuing expansion of telecoms infrastructure is already raising both environmental and health concerns. In Kenya, for instance, residential associations and environmental interest groups are already raising hurdles for mobile network operators by resisting the erection of masts in their neighborhoods, citing aesthetic and health concerns. The industry, therefore, has a challenge of allaying these concerns through sensitizing the public and interest groups on the health impacts of telecommunications infrastructure. I am happy to note that these issues will be discussed at length in this meeting.

I am aware that this meeting will also discuss the issue of electronic waste. This, ladies and gentlemen, is now a matter of profound concern to many governments in the region. In the last 10 years, African governments have been preoccupied with the issue of universal access.

While this aspiration is yet to be realized, the high sales of cheap mobile handsets have created concerns on how to deal with the ensuing problems of electronic waste. Given the short lifespan of mobile handsets and costumers’ desire of keep up with the latest trendy handsets, the problem of electronic waste will remain with us for a long time.

The transition to digital TV broadcasting is expected to compound this problem in Africa as we dump our old analogue TV sets for new ones. The dumping of second hand computers in the form of donations is not helping matters at all. Africa must find a sustainable way of dealing with the problem of e-waste. One way of dealing with this problem is by strengthening type approval function within our national regulatory bodies to bar the entry of sub-standard equipment into our markets. Our national standardization authorities also need to be more stringent in vetting imports of ICT equipment. I am positive that your meeting will deliberate this issue at length with a view to safeguarding our interests as a region.

Distinguished delegates,

Allow me at this juncture to draw your attention to the important question of quality of service. It is heartening to note that the ideal of universal access now appears within reach more than ever before, given that most countries in the region have surpassed the 50% penetration threshold. Despite the prevailing level of competition, a vast majority of mobile networks in Africa are yet meet the minimum thresholds for Quality of Service. This could be partly ascribed to high rates of service subscription, which have exerted pressure on the mobile network resources of service providers.

As governments we have a responsibility of safeguarding the interests of consumers to ensure that they get value for their money. National regulatory authorities should, therefore, sensitize consumers on how best to take advantage of the prevailing competition in the market. Regulators should create competitive pressure in the market by exploring mechanisms to facilitate subscribers to change networks without any ensuing inconveniences. These mechanisms include licensing number portability service providers. I am gratified to report that Kenya has already licensed such an operator and the service will be in operation by the close of this year.

As I conclude, I wish you all fruitful deliberations as you discuss issues of immense significance to the continent. I am positive that by the end of the meetings, you will come up with common positions that advance the welfare of our people. It is also my hope that you will spare some time to enjoy the hospitality of our people and sample the social scene in Nairobi.

With those remarks, it is my pleasure to declare the two ITU workshops and the meetings of ITU-T Study Group 12 and 5 Regional Group for Africa officially open

Thank you for your attention