

REMARKS BY HONOURABLE MINISTER OF COMMUNICATIONS, SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY, MR. KHOTSO LETSATSI, MP, AT THE OFFICIAL OPENING OF A COLLOQUIUM TO MARK THE WORLD TELECOMMUNICATION AND INFORMATION SOCIETY DAY (WTSID) AND ITU 150 YEARS HELD AT MASERU SUN CABANAS ON THE 15 MAY 2015

Mr. Programme Director, allow me to pay my respects to:

His Majesty, King Letsie III

Right Honourable The Prime Minister Dr. Pakalitha Mosisili

The Honourable Deputy Prime Minister, Mr. Mothetjoa Metsing

The Chairman and Members of the Board of the Lesotho Communications Authority

The Principal Secretary for the Ministry of Communications, Science and Technology, Mr. Tšeliso Khomari and other Principal Secretaries present

The Chief Executive Officer of LCA , Mr. Monehela Posholi

Managing Directors and Chief Executives Officers of Business Entities

Distinguished Guests

Ladies and gentlemen.

We are today marking a very important day in the history of the communications sector. We are commemorating the World Telecommunication and Information Society Day. This day is celebrated annually on the 17th of May to observe the founding of the International Telecommunication Union (ITU). This year's commemoration is a special one in that it marks 150 years since the founding of the ITU.

History tells us that on the 17th May 1865, the first International Telegraph Convention was signed in Paris by its twenty (20) founding members and the International Telegraph Union, the first incarnation of ITU, was established. In 1932 at a conference in Madrid, it was decided that a new name would be adopted to reflect the full range of the responsibilities of ITU: The name that was adopted was and remains International Telecommunication Union. The new name came into effect on the 1st January 1934.

On the 1st January 1949, an agreement between the newly created United Nations and ITU as the specialized agency for telecommunications took effect. For a century and a half since 1865, the ITU has been at the centre to spearhead advances in communications – from

telegraphy through to the modern day of satellites, optical fibres, mobile phones and the Internet.

Ladies and gentlemen, distinguished guests:

Since 1865, the ITU has worked to enable the growth and development of telecommunication services, networks and technology around the world. The focus of its programmes and activities are in three main areas, namely, standardization, radiocommunication and development.

1. Through standardization, it sets international standards that facilitate interoperability of equipment and systems on a worldwide scale, as well as defining tariff and accounting principles for international telecommunication services.
2. Through radiocommunication, it ensures optimal, fair and rational use of the radio frequency spectrum, as well as coordinating matters related to radio communication services and wireless services, and
3. Through development: it implements programmes designed to improve telecommunication infrastructure and capacity building in the developing world, in particular.

Lesotho is a proud member of the ITU and attributes most of her successes in the communications sector to its association with the ITU. Lesotho has enjoyed support and been exposed to some best practices that it adapted to drive the commendable development of the sector witnessed today. In 1999, the government of Lesotho adopted the Lesotho Telecommunications Policy that ushered in the liberalisation of the communications sector. Consequent thereto, in 2000, the Parliament passed a piece of legislation which established the Lesotho Communications Authority with a mandate to regulate the communications sector in Lesotho.

The legislation gave the Authority the mandate to: grant and issue licences to operators; promote fair competition; approve tariffs; manage the radio frequency spectrum; empower and protect consumers; type-approve terminal equipment and handle other related matters. Since then, the communications sector in Lesotho has developed rapidly in terms of network coverage, increased variety of services being offered and in the number of people having access to communication services. The question lately is no longer whether you have a mobile telephone, but what your mobile number is!

The government also privatised the then incumbent telecommunication entity which had also acted as a regulator of radio frequency spectrum through disposal of seventy percent (70%) majority shareholding. These policy interventions and decisions were aimed at accelerating socio-economic development in Lesotho using the communications sector as one of the key drivers.

Over the past years, the sector has gone through two major policies. In addition to the 1999 policy already referred to, the Lesotho Communications Policy of 2008 was adopted. The 2008 policy gave rise to the Communications Act of 2012, which provides for the regulation of the communications sector, as a whole, in Lesotho.

While policy interventions brought significant changes on the ground, there were some challenges of uneven penetration of communications in the country. In order to address these challenges, in 2009, the Universal Service Fund was established. The objectives of the Fund were to provide access and connectivity to communications services in unserved and remote areas of the country. The focus of the Fund has been the rollout of network infrastructure to boost coverage. It is gratifying to note that communications services are now available in some of the remotest areas of Lesotho such as Matsoku; Ha 'Matsa; Manemaneng; Rankakala; 'Malefiloane and Moremoholo, to mention just a few.

In the broadcasting sub-sector, for a long time after independence, there was only one radio station in the country, namely Radio Lesotho. New radio and television stations have since been licenced bringing the total number to 24. Out of these there are three community radio stations at Mafeteng, Thaba-Tseka and Botha-Bothe as well as a host of private and commercial radio stations. Let me hasten to acknowledge the apparent challenges brought about by liberalisation of the broadcasting sub-sector and assure this gathering that this will be addressed through all possible means. If it is a question of streamlining the legislative instruments, that will swiftly be undertaken.

Another significant development has been the process of migration to digital terrestrial television broadcasting. This process was initiated by ITU. In 2006, Region 1 of ITU comprising Africa, Europe, the Middle East and the Islamic Republic of Iran agreed to migrate from analogue to digital broadcasting by the 17th June 2015. This is to free the much needed radio frequency spectrum from broadcasting for use in mobile services while concurrently introducing enhanced quality in the terrestrial broadcasting sub-sector. The government of Lesotho has embarked on a massive programme to migrate terrestrial

television broadcasting to the digital platform in order not to miss out on the apparent benefits associated with the migration process.

Through policies of sector reform, market liberalisation and privatisation, Lesotho is now proud to have registered significant milestones in the subscribers and coverage to mobile telephony. The communications sector has the potential to provide services to primary economic sectors such as trade, education, health, tourism, and agriculture. It offers opportunities for young men and women to make innovations for the future which will, in the process, alleviate the unemployment challenges that we face as a nation. It is without doubt an enabler of economic growth.

Ladies and gentlemen, distinguished guests:

The communications sector has not been without challenges. While the last real increase of tariffs was last recorded in 2006, some studies indicate that tariffs, especially internet charges are still high. Internet growth, especially in rural areas, is quite slow. To truly harness the full potential of ICT, Internet and broadband in particular should be fully exploited as they hold the key to unlock that potential. We are optimistic that when the draft broadband policy is adopted by Cabinet, it will spur recognisable growth and more activity in this critical area.

The rugged terrain of our country does not offer easy solutions to communications. Faster development of communications needs road access, electricity access and better planning of our settlements. Our sparsely populated areas that are spread over a difficult terrain makes infrastructure roll out very costly. We are most grateful to our network operators for their commitment towards significant investments in communications infrastructure throughout the country over the years.

In conclusion, ladies and gentlemen,

As we commemorate the 150th birthday of ITU today, we should look back to the founding of ITU with pride. We all note with gratitude the innovations that the ICTs have made in our everyday lives. Let me thank the organisers of this event, Lesotho Communications Authority, the presenters and exhibitors – the two network operators, for organising our celebrations in Lesotho as a member of the ITU family.

Permit me therefore, Director of the programme and distinguished ladies and gentlemen, to declare today's colloquium held under the theme "Telecommunications / ICT: Drivers of Innovation" officially opened and wish you all fruitful deliberations.

I thank you for your kind attention.

Khotso, Pula, Nala.