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PLENARY MEETING

Namibia (Republic of)

TELECOM AFRICA (AFRICAN TELECOMMUNICATIONS APPLICATIONS, MANUFACTURING, RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT PROJECT)

Background information in support of the draft Resolution on Telecom Africa

Telecommunications and information technologies have not only altered the way society functions, but have become the leading sector in the global economy, creating wealth, jobs and opportunities at unprecedented levels. This has significant implications for investment and development in all sectors, especially in education, trade, social and political development, building and expansion of infrastructures, science and technology, information, agriculture, rural development, health, transportation and regional integration for the facilitation of peace and stability.

For Africa, given its vast population and immense human and natural resources on the one hand, and its substantial development challenges on the other, there is a critical need for versatile and effective communications and information resources custom-tailored to respond to her unique environment and continental dream. Africa, however, cannot take full advantage of the potential benefits of these new technologies without having its own indigenous state-of-the-art industrial capacity in these technologies.

The African Telecommunications Applications, Manufacturing, Research and Development Project (Telecom Africa) was created precisely to establish telecommunications industrialization in Africa by building significant, competent and globally competitive indigenous African capacity in communications and information technologies, with a genuine scientific and technological capability at the cutting edge. Telecom Africa is dedicated to the improvement and expansion of telecommunications infrastructure, services, applications, science and technology through research and development and the design and manufacture (for domestic and export markets), of a range of telecommunications equipment, accessories, software, applications and services, using state-of-the-art technologies.

Telecom Africa will cover the full range of telecommunications technology, including line and wireless telephony, video and data communications, computer communications and telematics (including Internet), private networks, broadcast and rural communications, including distance learning and telemedicine. It will pay particular attention to the provision of universal access to

communications services by all Africans, whatever their location or financial circumstances. Telecom Africa will promote general knowledge of communications and information science and technology in Africa through educational, vocational and public enlightenment programmes, in collaboration with schools and similar organizations. It will also establish a network of research and development with universities and research institutions in Africa and abroad. Its research and development programme will include a virtual research network.

Telecom Africa will also operate as a versatile value-added service provider, bringing relevant new telecommunications and information services and applications to tackle unique communications and development challenges in Africa.

Besides developing industrial capacity to meet Africa's unique circumstances by providing dedicated applications through research and development, the successful implementation of Telecom Africa will create much needed jobs at high levels of science, technology, finance and management, all critical to the development of a professional middle class, the backbone of a sustainable economy and effective democracy.

The African Telecommunications Applications, Manufacturing, Research and Development Project (Telecom Africa) was first introduced for information and support by Okpaku Communications, at the ITU African Regional Telecommunication Development Conference (AF-RTDC-96) in Abidjan, in May 1996 (Document 59-E, 59-F, agenda item 1.3, Committee 1). Since then, much progress has been made in advancing the project. Many productive discussions have taken place with ITU, especially the Telecommunication Development Bureau (BDT).

In the intervening period also, much ground has been covered in successfully building consensus on the continent, rallying the support, input and endorsement of many African governments (including Namibia, the Gambia, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Swaziland, Malawi, Mozambique, Côte d'Ivoire, Cape Verde and the Republic of Guinea), PTTs and the private sector. On 4 February 1997, the Government of the Republic of Namibia, by a cabinet decision, mandated its Ministry of Works, Transport and Communications to coordinate with the relevant SADC ministries and telecom operators and regulators, and with Okpaku Communications, to ensure the success of Telecom Africa. Most African governments and PTTs are expected to participate in Telecom Africa.

Telecom Africa also enjoys the active support of scientific organizations and regional and subregional institutions, including the OAU. The Council of Ministers of the Southern African Transport and Communications Commission (SATCC) of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) at its meeting of 3 July 1997 in Mauritius, committed itself to facilitating further development of the Telecom Africa Project through provision of access to information required for feasibility and viability studies and through business-to-business contacts. The Council reaffirmed that commitment at its recent meeting in Maputo, Mozambique, in January 1998.

Telecom Africa has worked closely with the Regional African Satellite Commission (RASCOM) in joint pursuit of building Africa's telecommunications capacity. It has also initiated extensive discussions with existing telecommunications manufacturing and services organizations in Africa, with a view to building maximum collaboration.

The result of all this meticulous effort at building a political consensus is a shared vision for Telecom Africa as an indigenous, continental collaborative effort to make Africa globally competitive as a genuine partner in the global community of telecommunications industrialization.

Telecom Africa is a private sector driven and managed African public/private sector partnership which includes governments, PTTs and the African private sector (individual and institutional) and minority non-African participation. Telecom Africa thus offers tremendous opportunities for

partnership, collaboration and investment by global telecommunications and information technology companies, financial and management companies, institutional and individual investors, as well as research and development institutes and organizations. It also welcomes the support and investment of development and donor agencies and foundations. This global partnership approach is designed to ensure that Telecom Africa, right from the start, is an integral part of the global community of telecommunications organizations.

As a commercial venture, Telecom Africa is committed to financial success on the basis of sound investment and management strategies, policies and practices, while providing much needed new, better and more appropriate services at affordable prices. Telecom Africa will be built on a platform of global competitiveness and excellence. Much effort will be devoted to the development of exceptionally competent staff at all levels, and the development and upgrading of a critical human resource capacity. From an operational standpoint, Telecom Africa will prove a valuable partner to global institutions in such areas as joint research, testing, software and content development, and joint venture manufacturing, especially in the production of terminal equipment and accessories to support the growing array of emerging mobile communications. Telecom Africa has commenced to identify pilot projects and to seek resources and partnership in this regard.

At the African Regional Telecommunication Development Conference in Abidjan in 1996, Telecom Africa outlined the prerequisites for success as vision, demand or market, human resource, capital, strategic planning and, above all, political will. A commonly shared and transparent vision has been established. The political will of Africa's leadership has been established. The strategies for the successful launching of Telecom Africa have been devised.

To complete the pre-implementation process and its master plan, Telecom Africa plans to carry out a series of studies. These include:

• a financial feasibility and viability study;

• a global human resource survey of African male and female telecommunications and information expertise;

• a strategic technology review and aging analysis of present and future telecommunications technologies;

• a study of prospects for an African telecommunications standards (to harmonize technologies and promote interconnectivity);

• a review of potential challenges to building industrial capacity in Africa and how to overcome them;

• a review of existing manufacturing and research activities in Africa in telecommunications and ancillary technologies (as a basis for collaboration);

• a review of potential global partnerships (technological, research, financial and management).

Since AF-RTDC-96, Telecom Africa has maintained an on-going dialogue with ITU, especially BDT. Given its vast resources (including its enormous knowledge, information base, experience and ability to promote global partnerships through its membership), ITU's support to facilitate these critical efforts will take Telecom Africa past the critical threshold and set it well on its way to realization. In the process, ITU will achieve its stated commitment to facilitate telecommunications industrialization in Africa, as spelled out in the African Green Paper.

ANNEX 1

**A sampling of positions taken on Telecom Africa by
African governments and institutions**

Africa does not boast of any significant manufacturing capacity in the telecommunications field. The manufacturing component of Telecom Africa, when implemented, should lay a foundation for skills and technology transfer.

– The Organization of African Unity (OAU)

This vast and ambitious development project has to be realized as soon as possible … We cannot be buyers of telecommunications equipment forever.

– The Republic of Nambia

Zambia would not afford to be a bystander in a project of great importance like this one.

– The Republic of Zambia

Telecom Africa has our complete interest in this project, because one of the obstacles to developing telecommunications in Africa has been Africa's dependence on technology that results in high costs for equipment and, very often, the fact that this equipment is not adaptable to our environment.

– The Republic of Côte d'Ivoire

We cannot find anything that is too difficult for Swaziland to provide in order for this project to take off.

– The Kingdom of Swaziland

If the Telecom Africa Project can be implemented, it may become a big step to minimize the lack of technological initiative in Africa.

– The Republic of Cape Verde

Mozambique encourages this initiative since, apart from developing the telecommunications sector, it creates jobs and expertise within the (African) countries.

– The Republic of Mozambique

Guinea subscribes to, and will participate in, the development and implementation of the project. Guinea is totally at (Telecom Africa's) disposition to carry out this idea which will save Africa in general, and more particularly, Guinea.

– The Republic of Guinea

Malawi welcomes the establishment of industrial capacity in Africa.

– Republic of Malawi

Africa has a high level of competent and highly qualified, tried telecommunications systems and software engineers, most of whom have been instrumental to the success of major international companies. What has been lacking all along is the establishment of companies that draw their resource persons from among this great pool of Africans. We entirely support Telecom Africa.

– The African Regional Center for Technology, Dakar, Senegal

ANNEX 2

DRAFT RESOLUTION ON TELECOM AFRICA

The World Telecommunication Development Conference (Valletta, 1998),

considering

a)   the critical importance of telecommunications infrastructure and industrial capacity for modern development;

b)   the great strides that have been made in the globalization and liberalization of the telecommunications industry in the last few years;

c)   that globalization cannot achieve its promise without reasonable capacity for global competitiveness on the part of all players;

d)   the absence of industrial capacity in telecommunications in Africa such as in manufacturing and software development and Africa's great need to acquire such capacity, as a matter of priority, for its sustainable development;

e)   that such indigenous capacity is crucial if Africa is to develop global competitiveness in telecommunications at a conceivable time in the future,

considering further

a)   that the First World Telecommunication Development Conference held in Buenos Aires, Argentina in 1994, in its Plan of Action, called for special efforts to be made to facilitate the development of manufacturing capacity in developing countries through international industrial cooperation for the benefit of such developing countries;

b)   that several United Nations initiatives, such as the Second United Nations Transport and Communications Decade for Africa and the United Nations Special Initiative for Africa have called for special efforts to build an industrial base for Africa's telecommunications infrastructural needs;

c)   that the African Regional Telecommunication Development Conference held in Abidjan, Republic of Côte d'Ivoire in May 1996 (AF-RTDC-96) specifically called for a concerted effort to develop industrial telecommunications capacity in Africa and spells this out in detail in the African Green Paper adopted at that Conference;

d)   that the African Telecommunications Applications, Manufacturing, Research and Development Project (Telecom Africa) was formally presented to (and discussed at) the African Regional Telecommunication Development Conference (AF-RTDC-96) (Abidjan, May 1996) as a comprehensive initiative to bring about Africa's desired industrialization,

noting

a)   that many African governments, scientific, subregional and regional organizations (including the OAU and SATCC) have endorsed the project as being of critical significance to Africa's hopes of telecommunications industrialization in Africa;

b)   specifically, the endorsement of the Telecom Africa Project by the Council of Ministers of the Southern African Transport and Communications Commission (SATCC) of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) at its meeting of 3 July 1997 held in Mauritius and subsequently reaffirmed at its meeting in Maputo, Mozambique, in January 1998;

c)   SATCC's directive that the SADC region facilitate further development of the Telecom Africa Project through the provision of access to information required for feasibility and viability studies and through business-to-business contacts,

mindful

a)   of the progress made to date on the Telecom Africa Project;

b)   of the dialogue that has taken place between BDT and Telecom Africa subsequent to AF-RTDC-96;

c)   of the commitment of ITU, especially BDT, to actively promote and support serious efforts at telecommunications industrialization in Africa as embodied in the Telecom Africa Project;

d)   of the vast resources of ITU/BDT in expertise, information, partnerships and lessons learned;

e)   of the importance of an excellent feasibility and viability study to the success of major initiatives such as Telecom Africa;

f)   of the potential impact the success of Telecom Africa will have on Africa's telecommunications capacity and on Africa's industrialization in general,

resolves

a)   that ITU/BDT provide material and other support for the development of the Telecom Africa master plan;

b)   that ITU encourage support for the Telecom Africa Project by telecommunications and other related industrial and scientific organizations, through the promotion of global partnerships.

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