GHANA

POLICY STATEMENT DELIVERED BY DR. EDWARD KOFI OMANE BOAMAH, MINISTER FOR COMMUNICATIONS AT THE HIGH-LEVEL SEGMENT OF WSIS+10, GENEVA, 10 JUNE 2014

Mr. Chairman,
Excellencies
Distinguished Colleagues
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I bring to you the warm and fraternal greetings from the Government and people of Ghana, and to convey to this august gathering their high expectations for the early realisation of an inclusive and sustainable Information Society that will make them attain their full potential and improve their quality of life.

Let me express our appreciation for the organisation of this Forum that we consider very timely, and providing a unique opportunity to re-dedicate our commitments to the WSIS document that our Heads of State and Government signed on to, in 2003.

Indeed, 10 years is a long time in technological terms, since 2003 and of course we have seen an explosion in mobile telephony, along with many other changes. It is also true that more than half of the world's people are still offline, with broadband access still relatively small, despite the very rapid growth of new technologies such as mobile broadband.

Ghana remains committed to the Geneva Plan of Action and the Principles for building an inclusive Information Society. Ghana regards the Tunis Agenda for the Information Society as a valuable reaffirmation of the global commitment for bridging the digital divide, on Internet governance and related issues. The challenge therefore confronting us is to ensure that everybody benefits from the opportunities ICTs can offer.

Mr. Chairman
As new Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) become critical enablers for sustained human development, the Government recognises the strategic role they play in promoting ICT for Development. To establish consensus on the ICT roadmap therefore, it built partnerships with all stakeholders, including the Private Sector and Industry; Regulators; Academia; Traditional Authorities; Women's Organisations; Political Parties; Civil Society; Legislators; Judiciary; NGOs; Development Partners; etc.

After a nation-wide consultation exercise and with the active participation of the stakeholders, a national ICT for Accelerated Development Policy was developed with 14 focus areas that address the specific targets of the WSIS Plan of Action. In May 2011, the Policy was also reviewed to include four new thematic areas, namely:
  i.   Broadband Policy
  ii. Cyber security Policy
  iii. Geo-Information Policy, and
  iv. ICTs, the Environment and Climate Change Policy.

Mr Chairman, Distinguished Colleagues,

State of ICT Infrastructure and Broadband development
Presently, Ghana is served by five submarine cables: SAT-3; MainOne; Glo-1; and WACS Cables supplying about 7.16 Terabits capacity. Last year, the Africa Coast to Europe (ACE) submarine cable system was inaugurated in Accra, bringing onboard additional 5.1 Terabits, to increase the overall submarine cable capacity to 12.3 Terabits.

There is also, a national terrestrial optic fibre network that is being built to cover all the Districts and Constituency areas of the country. In June 2012, Ghana successfully connected its terrestrial optic fibre with those of neighbouring sister countries of Burkina Faso and Togo. We have also established a point of presence on the western border, preparing to directly connect with La Cote d'Ivoire, in addition to the submarine link.

A 780-kilometre optic fibre ICT backbone infrastructure on the Eastern Corridor of the country being built to provide broadband infrastructure to over 120 towns and communities along the route. 410 km of optic fibre has so far been laid in the first six months, and upon completion, the project will be connected to the existing 3,000 kilometres optic fibre on the western and central spread of the country from the southern coast to the northernmost frontier of the country.

Complementing the optic fibre infrastructure, and also with support of the private sector Long Term Evolution (LTE) technology is being deployed. 120 sites are being constructed to enable the deployment of advanced ICT Applications in education, health, commerce, Open Government and other business opportunities.

Telephony
As a result of the enabling infrastructure environment, telephone subscription has been blossoming. At the end of 2003, telephone subscriptions stood at 947,320 for mobile and 6,884 payphones. Ten years on, and as at August 2013, 27,803,710 telephone subscriptions were recorded. By March 2014, the figure rose to 28,615,445 subscribers.

Internet
With the massive investments in broadband infrastructure, Internet usage is growing steadily with increased capacity for the deployment of 4th Generation Applications. In partnership with the internet community, Government is supporting the development of critical internet infrastructure by arranging for the supply of additional switches for Internet Exchange Points (IXPs).

The Ghana Internet Service Providers Association confirmed in May 2013 that currently, 45% of Ghana's Internet traffic is handled locally through the existing Internet Exchange Point. With the arrival of additional switches, the percentage will improve and more opportunities will emerge, especially to promote content development.

Indeed, the cost of bandwidth in Ghana has witnessed substantial reduction over the years. In the year 2007 the cost of 2 Megabits bandwidth was about $10,000 per month. In 2008, this figure fell to $7,500, then in 2009 it reduced to $4,500, then to

$4,000 in 2010, $2,000 in 2011 and for last year, the cost of 2 Megabits bandwidth fell to $1,500 per month. Right now, this is reducing to $1,200 and below.

Universal Access to ICT services

The Ministry of Communications through one of its Agencies, the Ghana Investment Fund for Electronic Communications (GIFEC) has been undertaking universal access projects and programmes to support the delivery of basic ICT services to the underserved and un-served areas of the country.

Some of the projects include;
- Establishment of 120 Community Information Centres and the deployment of 4,000 rural payphones,
- Provision of cyber labs to all Teacher Training Colleges; National Vocational Training Institutes; Technical Institutes; Youth Leadership Centres; Agricultural Colleges; and 360 Senior High Schools.
- Internet Connectivity to all Regional Libraries, provision of mobile library vans connected to broadband.
- Provision of cyber labs to all to Nursing Training Colleges
- ICT for Livelihood programmes for fishermen, Prison inmates, People with Disability.

Major Government Programmes
e-Government Infrastructure and services

Government has ensured that all Regional Administrative Offices and District Assembly Offices are connected with broadband for the effective implementation of the e-Government programme. All the Regional Offices are provided with Tele-Presence equipment for multi-media interaction with the Office of the President.

Supporting the programme, is the establishment of a National Primary Data Centre along with Secondary Data Centres and Recovery sites.

All 23 Ministries, along with about 75 other agencies have been connected to the Network and Data Centre.

E-Health

All Public Health Institutions are provided with basic communications services from the e-Government infrastructure platform. Pilot e-health Applications are being deployed for three (3) sites; Korle-bu Teaching Hospital, Wa Regional Hospital and Zebilla District Hospital. Medical Call Centres are being established to provide advice to the citizenry

E-Education

A Tertiary Education Access Network to promote e-Education is connecting 200 Senior High Schools that have been singled out for special treatment on account of economic deprivation.

Ghana Online Services Project (e-Services Portal)

The improved connectivity and availability of broadband has enabled the Government to deploy Portal Infrastructure to provide a platform Content Management, Document Management, e-Forms, Services Integration and

Information and Application Security for various Government Agencies to ensure transparent and accountable governance.

E-Justice
Complementing the efforts of the Judicial Service in developing an e-Justice System to improve on the effectiveness and efficiency of justice delivery in Ghana, Videoconferencing Telepressence equipment have been supplied to augment the fight against corruption.

Integrating ICT, video and mobile technology is improving the productivity and efficiency of court case dispositions.

E-Immigration
In collaboration with the Ghana Immigration Service a network has been instituted to manage Ghana's entry system for visitor numbers in a cost-effective way through the use of cutting edge technology, as well as deliver a level of service consistent with the expectation of today's travellers.

E-Parliament
Ghana's Legislative Assembly is implementing the 'e-Parliamentary System', making a high-tech shift in the way business is conducted. Under the e-Parliament System, Members of Parliament are able to file their queries online, leading to speedy and paperless flow of information.

Mr. Chairman, Excellencies, Colleague Delegates
Post WSIS+10
While we acknowledge the progress in the deployment of ICT for development, we must admit that 'we are not yet there'. The level of accessibility in figures does not tell the entire story. The issue of multi-lingualism and cultural content is still a spectre we cannot run away from.

We should begin to reflect on the next generation and technology applications.

The issues of the Internet, especially on security and governance remain unsettled. The set of common principles and values identified by the NETmundial held in Sao Paulo in April 2014 serve to address gaps in the implementation of the Tunis Agenda for the Information Society.

I cannot end with acknowledging the immense support we have received from our international partnerships to develop and prosecute our national ICT agenda along the lines of WSIS and in this regard, I wish to mention the contributions of the ITU, and UN Economic Commission for Africa.

The success of the policies and laws developed have made possible the attraction of investments that have brought Ghana this far.

I thank you for the audience.