



**POLICY STATEMENT ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF  
TELECOMMUNICATIONS SECTOR IN BOTSWANA  
AT  
THE INTERNATIONAL TELECOMMUNICATION UNION  
(ITU) PLENIPOTENTIARY CONFERENCE**

**MARRAKECH, MOROCCO**

**1 OCTOBER 2002**

**BY**

**HON. L. B. SEBETELA, MP**

**MINISTER OF COMMUNICATIONS, SCIENCE AND  
TECHNOLOGY**

Mr Chairman

Honourable Ministers

Secretary General of the ITU, Mr. Utsumi and

Other Elected Officials of the ITU

Distinguished Delegates

Ladies and Gentlemen

Mr Chairman, my delegation would like to congratulate you on your election to chair this august Conference. May I wish you success in dealing with the challenges that lie ahead of you as the Chairman and my delegation will definitely support you in this demanding task.

Mr Chairman, let me hasten to inform you that while the rest of my delegation arrived in time for the opening of the conference, one of my Deputy Heads of Delegation and I have only just arrived. I shall also have to leave early to return to Botswana on 2 October 2002. This is because my ministry has just been established and started operations on 15 September 2002. I therefore have to be home to see to the general business of setting up the necessary structures for the new ministry of Communication, Science and Technology.

I would also like to thank the government of the Kingdom of Morocco for the generous hospitality that has been extended to us in this historic and beautiful city of Marrakech since our arrival. A good word also goes to the International Telecommunication Union for the excellent preparations for this conference.

Mr Chairman, as a first step in the liberalisation of the telecommunications sector process, my Government adopted a new telecommunications policy in 1995 after countrywide consultations. The objective of this policy initiative was to lay down a framework for the liberalisation of the telecommunications industry through the creation of an investor friendly environment that would foster injection of private capital and ensure a process of fair and healthy competition. The initiative led to the establishment of an independent regulator, Botswana Telecommunications Authority (BTA), in December 1996, which is independent in respect of decisions on regulatory matters. The monopoly by the incumbent fixed line operator was also abolished.

Mr. Chairman, Distinguished delegates, I would now like to share with you our humble achievements. We licensed two GSM

cellular mobile operators in 1998 involving joint ventures between citizen companies and foreign investors such as France Telecom, Portugal Telecom and one of the ECOMET group of companies; eleven Internet Service Providers; seven International Data Gateway operators; seven private network licences and two private radio broadcasting stations. The telecommunications customer base has taken a quantum leap with the number of fixed lines more than doubling from **59 673** in 1996 to **144 633** at the end of August 2002 resulting in fixed line teledensity of 8.5% on a 100% digitalised telecommunications network. Similarly, the number of mobile subscribers shot from **0** in 1998 to **380 290** at the end of August 2002 resulting in a mobile teledensity of 22.4%.

The fixed line operator, Botswana Telecommunications Corporation is currently undergoing a transformation and restructuring process at present and it has been identified as one of the candidates for privatisation by the Public Enterprises Evaluation and Privatisation Agency (PEEPA) under the Privatisation Policy for Botswana that was adopted by Parliament in 2000. PEEPA is now developing procedures for the orderly privatisation of all public enterprises in order to chart a uniform course for such privatisation.

Having set the stage ready for a competitive telecommunications market, we are now grappling with challenges of guiding the industry and facilitating the market to operate in a manner that will best serve both the consumers and the providers of the services. In our quest to meet the objective of bridging the digital divide we are currently undertaking a study which aims at coming up with a policy strategy on how best Universal Service and Access could be achieved given the prevailing conditions in our telecommunications industry. We have also started the process of acquiring an automated spectrum management and monitoring system from early next year to enable us to plan and administer the spectrum efficiently. A market study of the telecommunications sector is currently underway which will, *inter alia*, aid in determining the feasibility or otherwise of licensing a second fixed line operator.

Allow me, Mr Chairman, to express my Government's support for the ITU reforms, especially those aimed at ensuring that the body remains relevant and responsive to the evolving needs of the telecommunications sector globally.

Mr. Chairman, Botswana has been participating actively in the affairs of the ITU and other telecommunications organisations such as the Commonwealth Telecommunications Organisation (CTO) Council and the Telecommunications Regulators Association of Southern African since introducing telecommunications sector reforms in 1996. We were for example honoured to be elected the founding chairperson of the ITU World Development Symposium held in Geneva in December 1999 which resulted in the Global Regulators Forum which is now an annual event and the Chairperson of the first Forum on Telecommunications Regulation in Africa organised by the ITU in Gaborone in 2000 in order to chart a way forward of how the continent could continue consulting on regulatory issues. We were also elected one of the Vice Chairpersons of the Telecommunications Development Advisory Group (T-DAG) advising ITU on regulatory issues for the last four years since the 1998 Plenipotentiary Conference.

Botswana is convinced that it has become a telecommunications thoroughbred and should, therefore, share its experiences in the higher echelons of the industry's family of nations, ITU. We are, as a result, a candidate for one of the

thirteen Council seats reserved for Region D (Africa) of the ITU. In this regard we wish to solicit support from the respective delegations in this august conference.

Mr Chairman, may I wish the Plenipotentiary Conference a success.

I thank you Mr Chairman.

**P U L A**