

**Statement By**

**H.E. Dr. Tarek Kamel  
Minister of Communications and Information  
Technology**

**To the First Meeting of the**

**Conference of African Ministers in charge of  
Telecommunication and Information Technology**

**Cairo, 20 April 2006**

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*Honorable Ministers,*  
*Distinguished Guests and Delegates,*

It is a great pleasure to be here with you addressing the First Meeting of the Conference of African Ministers in charge of Telecommunication and Information Technology, and I would like to seize this opportunity to welcome you and to wish you a pleasant stay in Egypt.

Today, here in Cairo, we are concluding a phase of a process that we, Africans, have been engaged in for many years. A process of catching up with the developments of communications and information technology we have been witnessing over the last three decades all around the world. And today, at the same time, we are initiating another process of many characteristics and prospects to which our engagement is more out of experience, self confidence, capability and commitment towards the future of our people in Africa.

Our determination in the new process is to create, disseminate, preserve and constantly develop the Knowledge Society to achieve sustainable development. Building the Information Society requires a balanced and realistic convergence of many factors and components. Actions on the local, national and regional levels should take into consideration that Africa needs to accelerate its efforts to achieve the internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals.

By convening the Conference of Ministers in charge of Communication and Information Technology in Africa we strongly confirm our commitment to the implementation and development of the comprehensive and common African Action Plan adopted in Accra earlier in 2005.

In this regard allow me to extend our gratitude and appreciation to the African States who played key leading roles of coordination among and on behalf of the Continent for the past phases. I commemorate South Africa, who led the Ministerial Oversight Committee established in 1999 and played a very important role of coordination particularly during the first phase of the World Summit on the Information Society.

I also commemorate Ghana, who hosted in Accra in early 2005 the African Regional Preparatory Meeting of the second phase of the Summit and coordinated our work with the help of Nigeria and Senegal. And I congratulate Senegal, and His Excellency President Abdulla Wad, for the Digital Solidarity Fund Initiative that was globally acknowledged as a necessary instrument showing the commitment of the world towards bridging the digital divide.

***Honorable Ministers,  
Distinguished Guests,***

I believe that one of the important objectives we should be pursuing is to set-up a viable framework for close interaction and cooperation within the African Continent in ICT, that allows the participation of all stakeholders, with a view to foster development and the effective implementation of initiatives and programs.

In this context, I would like to refer to the African Union and its socio-economic program NEPAD as one of the successful practices of the African vision for development as well as the efforts conducted by the Economic Commission in Africa which spared no effort in coordinating African views and positions towards different issues including those debated within the WSIS.

***Distinguished Delegates***

Bridging the digital divide effectively requires a dedicated strategy on the Continental level. The goal is to produce a highly skilled workforce that enables our economies to be competitive in the global market.

While Africa enjoys talent, opportunities, resources, skills and motivation, African countries still require improvements in their capacity to maximize the use of ICT for development. We also need to enhance our capacity to keep pace with the technological challenges our industry introduces, such as media convergence for example and new generations of telecommunications.

*Ladies and Gentlemen,*

One of the main findings declared by the UN Commission on Science and Technology for Development (CSTD) in its 8<sup>th</sup> meeting held in May 2005 is that none of the Millennium Development Goals will be achieved without appropriate and extensive use of science and technology and without a focused innovation policy. It also concluded that socio-economic benefits of modern science and technology have not reached across all countries and people, and this is not due to lack of innovations but the lack of commitment and adequate national efforts and capacity to harness its potential.

Also it is well known that the effective harnessing of existing and emerging technologies will both reduce the cost, and increase the likelihood, of achieving the MDGs. Applications in information and communication technology hold enormous promise for Africa in this regard.

Thus, our conference, by introducing a structured platform for dialogue, promises effective coordination of African policies in support of continental cooperation and integration as one of the main objectives in the coming years.

I propose that we focus on the following areas:

- Design and implement an African operational agenda for long-term support to African ICT initiatives for development and ensure that ICT innovation strategies are incorporated in national development strategies.
- Ensure effective coordination among ICT regulatory authorities within Africa in order to deal with the changing global environment in ICTs.

- Offer guidance for the follow-up and implementation of WSIS within the Continent and draw upon any regional policies undertaken or need to be launched in this respect.
- Incorporate in a functional way ICTs as a crucial tool to sustainable poverty reduction as they make a country's economy more efficient and globally competitive, improve health and education services and create new sources of income and employment for poor people.
- Promote the participation of the African private sector in ICT for development, paying particular attention to its role in the creation of the favorable enabling environment and promote Public Private Partnerships.
- Involve representatives from industry, academia and civil society in carrying out a comprehensive technology foresight exercise with the purpose of identifying technologies that are likely to help addressing pressing socio-economic issues and needs.
- Explore ways and means for establishing a continental financial and technical facility, in collaboration with other relevant entities, to ensure sustainable funding for ICT innovation programs, and that adequate funding is allocated for the infrastructure of ICTs.
- Initiate a mechanism of engaging and partnering Africa, through ICTs, with other international partners in away that would enhance the African human capacities.

***Dear Sisters and Brothers,***

Allow me to elaborate a little on an idea that I wish to offer and share with you in this regard. As you are aware, one of the main obstacles to development in Africa has been the low level of human resource and human capacity compared with other continents. There is an urgent need for Africa to achieve world-class levels of excellence in terms of ICT implementation through intensively investing in human resources in order to compete internationally.

In line with Egypt's commitment to boost the development of the ICT sector in Africa, Egypt is proposing an African regional ICT leadership program aiming at enhancing leadership skills of promising ICT professionals in African countries. Participants will be introduced through the program to leadership skills and the available opportunities and mechanisms in the Continent for regional cooperation. The vision is for this program to be conducted in at least three different African countries. We believe that raising awareness and promoting regional cooperation gives the Continent a competitive edge. This is in addition to the technical training scholarships Egypt is offering at the National Telecommunications Institute and the Information Technology Institute.

I have to comment here that we are hoping to have more gender balance in these training programs. Our own ICT training programs in Egypt that have trained more than 120 thousand users and almost 25 thousand professionals include almost 50% women. I hope we see the same representation in the regional programs.

### *Distinguished Delegates*

We believe that the conference structure and method of work has to support African countries in increasing access to, and making the best use of, ICT in support of governance, by supporting the development and implementation of national e-strategies and e-governance initiatives aimed at increased efficiency, effectiveness, transparency and accountability.

Also one of the most important tasks is to highlight and develop the African ownership in ICTs through; for instance; demonstrating and representing African leadership on the issue of ICTs and education. I believe that we have been relatively successful over the last few years in demonstrating to the world that as Africans we, too, have innovative examples of the use of ICTs for learning. We should continue producing a number of made-in-Africa research reports on the experience of the Continent. In this respect it is very important, to all of us, to ensure that FDI projects including infrastructure have a maximum local research and development component and participation, in order to facilitate technology transfer and assimilation in African countries for the future sustainability of these projects.

*Ladies and Gentlemen,*

I wish on your behalf to thank the African Union and particularly the Commissioner for Human Resources, Science and Technology, for organizing this event, and to thank all the organizations and individuals who spared no effort to bring us together here today in this distinguished gathering. I would also like to thank Egypt's Information Technology Industry Development Agency for sponsoring this important event.

At the end, I am sure that our agenda will be an important step to achieve the common African Information Society we all aspire , which aims to build an African wide information infrastructure and to make ICT services available to all citizens.

Thank you.