

SPEECH

BY

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DURING

***THE OPENING OF THE GLOBAL SYMPOSIUM OF
REGULATORS-2024***

SPEKE RESORT AND CONVENTION- MUNYONYO
KAMPALA.

2ND JULY, 2024.

Hon. Ministers;

Hon. Members of Parliament;

The Secretary General, International
Telecommunication Union;

The Director of the Telecommunication Development
Bureau (BDT);

Heads of International and Regional ICT Organizations;

CEOs of Regulatory Bodies;

Distinguished guests;

Ladies and gentlemen.

I want to thank International Telecommunication Union (ITU), for organising the Global Symposium for Regulators, in Kampala. In a special way, I welcome delegates from outside Uganda, to the Pearl of Africa. *Karibuni!* I commend ITU for bringing together telecommunication and ICT regulators, policymakers and industry stakeholders, to share experiences, exchange ideas and collaborate on the best regulatory practices and policies.

I am glad to learn that, among other things, you will be discussing matters relating to Artificial Intelligence, robotics, climate, space and digital financial services. These are very important topics with far-reaching implications for the development of the ICT sector, in Uganda; and indeed other countries.

As regulators of the ICT sector, your mandate is to promote the sector's contribution to the economic wellbeing of the people. The theme you have chosen,

‘Regulation for Impact’, is appropriate because it emphasizes the importance of implementing effective regulations that aim to achieve positive outcomes.

In line with this theme, I urge you to promote a regulatory environment, that prioritizes innovation, safety, privacy and the rights of digital technology users. You should maximize the benefits of ICTs, while minimizing the negative consequences of regulatory interventions. The Government of Uganda took a decision, in 1996, to reform the telecommunication sector with the objective of increasing penetration and raising the standard of telecommunication services in the country. The Uganda Communications Commission was created as an independent regulator to oversee the orderly development of the sector. It was a fundamental departure from the previous framework, where policy, regulation and operations were fused together. Uganda was one of the pioneering African countries to establish an independent regulatory body.

The communication sector has registered growth over the last twenty-five years, with the total number of fixed and mobile telephone customers rising from a mere 68,196 in 1998 to over 36.5 million today. Internet users have risen to 15.3 million while mobile money subscriptions are at 40.6 million. ICT is at the centre of our socio-economic transformation agenda. This is because digital technology has the potential to accelerate economic development through innovation, job creation and increased productivity.

Government aims at taking communication services to every household in Uganda. To achieve this, we have developed a Digital Transformation Roadmap, that will transform Uganda into an inclusive digital economy. It

will bridge the digital divide and integrate ICT in all aspects of everyday life. Once ICTs become accessible and affordable to all, the cost of doing business will be lower, more employment opportunities will be created and social services will get even closer to the people. The key factors responsible for the relatively low uptake of ICT services in developing countries include: low per capita incomes, unfriendly regulatory frameworks and limited internet infrastructure. These and other bottlenecks must be addressed so that our people can enjoy the full benefits of ICTs. We must leverage the benefits of ICTs to achieve the transformation of our economies.

Artificial Intelligence, a component of the 4th Industrial Revolution, is increasingly becoming part of our daily lives – in our homes and workplaces. With its ability to analyze vast amounts of data, identify patterns and provide accurate predictions, Artificial Intelligence has the potential to foster development across several sectors, including healthcare, agriculture, education, transportation, finance and manufacturing.

To ensure that Uganda is not a spectator in the 4th Industrial Revolution, the Government of Uganda established the National Task Force on the 4th Industrial Revolution to coordinate the integration of Artificial Intelligence into the country's development agenda.

Uganda has a fast-growing communication sector that is ripe for more investment. We have a conducive investment environment, a robust regulatory framework, a good return on investment and a young population that is ICT savvy. Moreover, Uganda is part of the big East African Community regional market that

brings together more than 300 million people in one single market.

However, I must caution that this rapid change in technology, although beneficial and inevitable, poses regulatory challenges. As we embrace ICTs, we must not forget its potential downside. Cybersecurity is an issue that deserves greater attention. In recent years, we have witnessed technology being used as a tool for political interference and economic sabotage. Unlike traditional warfare where you can secure the country by guarding your own borders against intrusion, cyber warfare calls for collaborative efforts, especially when emanating from outside your national jurisdiction. Technology must not be used to undermine the peace and sovereignty of nations but rather to support development.

Lastly, allow me to thank the ITU Secretary General, Ms. Doreen Bogdan-Martin and your team, for choosing Uganda to host this year's GSR-24 meeting. It is a privilege that we can't take for granted. As Government, we pledge to continue working together with global stakeholders such as ITU to make ICTs work for our people.

I now have the singular honour of declaring the Global Symposium for Regulators 2024 in Kampala, Uganda, officially open.

I wish you fruitful deliberations.