

Statement By Mr. Akossi Akossi, Secretary General, African Telecommunications Union (ATU), on the Occasion of 33rd ATU Telecommunications/ICT Day Celebrations At Laico Regency Hotel, Nairobi, On 7th December 2010.

The Minister for Information and Communication Hon. Samuel Poghiso,
Director General of CCK, Mr Charles Njoroge,
Our sponsors for today's event,
Associate Members of ATU,
Players and operators in the telecom and ICT sector,
Distinguished guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen.

It is my great pleasure and honour to welcome you all to the 2010 ATU Telecom/ICT Day celebrations. This year, our celebrations are dedicated to Peace and Security, with the appropriate theme *“ICT Services for the Promotion of Peace and Security in Africa”*.

This day is being observed in all our Member States in Africa by promoting the use of electronic means for all correspondences within our private and public institutions and expressing our commitment to the digital revolution in Africa.

It is expected that Member States and other stakeholders shall file in a report to ATU on the nature of activities carried out to commemorate the day. The message I am sharing with you today was circulated earlier to all the Member States to assist in the preparations for the day. We call upon all stakeholders, that is: Regulators, Operators and the Industry in the Region, to act appropriately in creating awareness through displays and exhibitions as well as special messages through mobile phones, print and electronic media on issues addressing the theme.

The African Union (AU) in the Tripoli Declaration SP/ASSEMBLY/PS/DECL/ (1) declared the year 2010 the year of Peace and Security. Through this Declaration, African governments were urged to identify concrete steps that could be taken to promote peace, security and stability in the continent. ATU as the specialized agency of the African Union in the field of communications was requested to take an active role in furthering the objectives of the year of Peace and Security.

Consequently, ATU has taken steps to use African Telecommunications/ICT Day which is annually celebrated every 7th December to promote this declaration by organizing a half day Symposium at Laico Regency Hotel, Nairobi. This will be marked with messages on Peace and Security by operators and players in ICT industry to celebrate gains recorded in information and telecommunications arena. The private sector is equally being requested to play the critical role of furthering the objectives of lasting peace and sustainable development of ICT in Africa.

For example, in the week leading to the ATU Telecom/ICT Day celebrations, telecommunication companies were requested to disseminate key messages of Peace and Security via SMS to the millions of mobile phone subscribers. Media houses were also requested to do the same. In doing so they will have made the “Year of Peace and Security 2010” slogan part of their communication programmes in all African countries where they are active, hence making notable contribution towards the elimination of conflicts on the continent.

For those of you who probably do not know much about ATU, the Union was founded in 1977 as a specialized agency of the Organisation of African Unity (now African Union) in the field of telecommunications. ATU took its present name in 1999. This led to the transformation of the agency into a partnership between public and private stakeholders in the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) sector.

The Mission of the Union is to promote the rapid development of info-communications in Africa in order to achieve universal access and full inter-country connectivity. The Union envisions an Africa that is empowered as a full and active participant in the global information and knowledge society. ATU currently has 44 Member States and 18 Associate Members. Our Associate Members being the telecom operators, broadcasters, internet service providers, ICT manufacturers, and ICT training institutions, among others. Membership is still open to potential Member States and associate members.

May I also take this opportunity to announce the recent entry of a new Associate Member; Qualcomm Ltd, who has been quite instrumental and supportive of ATU activities as evidenced by their presence here today. Welcome and thank you for your support.

Guest of Honour, Ladies and Gentlemen,

We are called to develop innovative ways of making use of the ICT and other means of disseminating, exchanging and using information conducive to peace and development. For example, in post-conflict situation, a network of community radio can be used to open the door to new opportunities for collaboration and support to peace efforts.

In fact we can also make use of ICT in the preparation and organization of election polling particularly upstream in the development of voter registration and preparation of registration cards in line with technical and political requirements expected in order to make them more credible or undisputable. Downstream, at the counting of the votes obtained by the candidates, ICT can be used by the representatives of the candidates in the polls to submit the results by SMS directly to their base via the mobile phone.

Freedom of expression and the dissemination of truthful information are rights and it means ICT can be used to shape public opinion for the maintenance of public order, denounce abuses and atrocities. Participatory and interactive systems help and promote the keeping of a safe and healthy environment for all. ICT social networks like Twitter and Facebook have allowed dissemination and sharing of free information outside official communication channels owned or controlled by public authority, which affects, in some cases, accessibility and integrity of information.

Africa is not left behind as a producer of technology resource allowing for sharing true information that can be used to check impunity and atrocities against humanity. Indeed, the software Ushahidi, created in Kenya in 2008 made it possible for citizens and authorities to follow in real time crisis from the point of view of those who experience them. With this tool, people can use a mobile phone, SMS or e-mail, to describe the tragedies they are going through or that are being experienced around them. Such an ICT tool is now replicated in Ghana, South Africa, DRC and throughout Africa, wherever the need to communicate on a latent or actual crisis arises. This ICT program is used today by the news channel Al Jazeera to report on conflicts in the Middle East.

However, the ICT sector in Africa continues to face a number of challenges including:

1. Bridging the digital divide.
2. To promote the right of all to have equal access to ICT value added services and to experience the advantages of using technological services.
3. To develop, maintain and stimulate people's curiosity, interest and enjoyment in technologies.
4. To promote the acquisition of appropriate technological skills, concepts, principles, methods and vocabulary.
5. Boosting security and trust in the sectors rely on the use of information networks.
6. To encourage people to develop informed opinions about their technological services and to be able to support them through reasonable arguments.

7. Leveraging ICT as a tool for creating an informed-African society.
8. Promoting greater ICT awareness among African governments, community and stakeholders.
9. To use technologies in a variety of subject areas and contexts.
10. To attract more and new investments to the African technological market, especially the ICT market.

The African Union (AU) is also conscious about the obstacles that prevent the African society from developing and bridging the gap between us and developed countries. Indeed, the limited access to telecommunications infrastructure, affordability and electricity (in particular in rural areas) are the major problems that hinder faster economic development on the continent. Other barriers include high cost of telecommunications, existence of social barriers and difficulties based on gender, languages, lack of local contents, cultural considerations, and lack of clear and engaged policies in favour of the ICT prompt us to call on our governments to be more pro-active on ICT issues.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is the wish of ATU that every African should benefit from the many possibilities offered by ICT. By inviting African governments, the private sector as well as the civil society, ATU and the AU wish to urge all to work together to improve access to infrastructure and ICT by creating an information knowledge society. Through the ATU Telecommunications/ICT Day, we wish to reinforce capacities, increase confidence and safety in the use of ICT, to support, make known and create respect for the African cultures and cultural diversity.

Having realized that peace and security are a prerequisite for ensuring sustainable development, African heads of state and the AU declared 2010 the Year of Peace and Security in Africa at the Tripoli Declaration on the Elimination of Conflict and the Promotion of Sustainable Peace in Africa of 31st August 2009. We expect all players in Telecommunications and ICT to contribute towards peace and security in Africa.

In our respective countries and organizations, let us all preach the message of the day. Let us utilize the wonderful tools provided by ICT to promote Peace, Security and Prosperity in Africa.

Thank you.

Akossi Akossi
Secretary General
African Telecommunications Union