



Good morning,

Honourable Ministers, members of the Bureau of the AU Specialized Technical Committee on Communication and ICT,

Your Excellency, Dr. Amany Abou Zeid, AU Commissioner for Infrastructure and Energy , Distinguished Colleagues, thank you for taking the time to attend this meeting, which transcends beyond being an important meeting, to be termed as a “unique” meeting. Its uniqueness stemming from the unprecedented times that is engulfing the entire globe, changing its norms, disrupting its realities and creating a new world order that the human race is compelled to comply with.

before I proceed I wish to invite you to take a moment of silence for all those who lost their lives to this pandemic and pray with our hearts to save our people from its miseries and scourge.

Thank you

Ladies and gentlemen ,

It gives me great pleasure to welcome your good-selves to the Extraordinary Bureau meeting of the African Union Specialized Technical Committee on Communication and ICT.

I wish to start by thanking Dr. Abou Zeid and her esteemed team for calling for this important meeting which comes during this challenging time the world is witnessing. It is unfortunate that we meet for the first time in this august setting amid a worldwide crisis which poses mounting challenges and requires extraordinary responses .

The speed and magnitude of the spread of the COVID19 pandemic made it imperative to shape national strategies and priorities to serve a common nationwide purpose, and to pursue collective actions based on agreed upon measures to build a robust digital society that serves as the backbone for development .

The current crisis demonstrated the vitality of a robust ICT infrastructure to enable citizens to access all essential services while observing social distancing .

It was quite impressive to see the ICT sector in many African countries demonstrating resilience in responding to the pandemic and contributing to the national measures taken to contain the spread of the virus and mitigate its dire economic and social impact .

Having mentioned this, I wish to applaud the efforts exerted by African countries to digitally transform their communities which started couple of years ago. I also wish to commend the work done by the AU Commission for Infrastructure and Energy to support member States realize this objective which resulted in the African Digital Transformation Strategy adopted during our last Specialized Technical Committee Ordinary session held in Sharm El Sheikh last October and endorsed by our Leaders during their 33rd Summit held in February 2020.

In Egypt, the ICT sector is proud to be among the first and fastest sectors to take necessary measures to contribute to the national efforts to curb the spread of the coronavirus .

The development in infrastructure combined with the digital transformation strategy the government has embarked on during the past few years was the backbone of the “stay at home policy” the Egyptian government is pursuing .

Leveraging the crisis to entrench the distance learning culture, MCIT provided free access to all educational sites to all students, in addition to free additional download quotas.

To support the health sector, MCIT has developed a tracing system to identify areas where the virus is most prevalent, in addition to models to simulate the pandemic outbreak patterns. In addition, MCIT increased the number of toll-free hotlines to provide information and post recovery consultancy facilities. Further, to express appreciation to the medical staff, free usage of mobile, voice, and data services is granted.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The supporting services of the ICT sector were not confined to health and education matters, yet it was extended to the community and senior citizens. Examples are numerous, to mention a few, a comprehensive plan was developed to facilitate the disbursement of financial benefits to irregular labour bearing the dire economic ramifications of COVID-19 through 4,000 post offices located all over the country seizing the opportunity to open bank accounts for these citizens, which constitutes a leapfrog on-route to financial inclusion .

Mobile operators played a positive role during the crisis, with several CSR contributions to provide food supplies for the less privileged and medical gear for the medical staff .

Honourable Ministers, the current crisis demonstrated the significant role the technologies of the 4th Industrial Revolution are performing. We have seen several cases where Artificial Intelligence technologies supported the role of researchers and healthcare professionals in the diagnosis and screening of patients with severe symptoms to decide on the appropriate responses and actions to be taken.

This been said, I wish to thank my fellow Ministers of the AU member States for establishing the African AI Working Group which was adopted during the 3rd STC Ordinary Session last October. This clearly shows the visionary outlook we share in Africa and our willingness to share our best practices for the benefit of our continent .

Towards this end, I would like to underscore the Egyptian Presidential Initiative “African Application Launchpad” that encourages training of African youth to develop applications that address common challenges. It is a time to stress upon the importance of developing e-health applications to lessen the negative effects of the pandemic and e-business applications to augment the use of technology in ensuring secured remote communications and complete work cycles .

Dear Brothers, the COVID-19 pandemic proved that no country can face it on its own in isolation of the rest. It underscores the enormous need to act collectively to face the dreadful economic and social repercussions. Hence, I wish to commend the initiatives adopted by the international development partners and the private sector to join the unflinching efforts of the governments to combat the pandemic .

It is undoubted that Africa is experiencing unprecedented challenges yet abundant opportunities are still available which we could collectively benefit from for the best of our countries.

To conclude, I am happy to invite you honourable Ministers to coordinate our efforts and share our best practices to mitigate the adverse ramifications of this global pandemic. I will be looking forward to productive deliberations and a fruitful outcome .

Stay Safe Africa.

Thank you