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EXECUTIVE COUNCIL
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EX.CL/261 (IX)

REPORT OF THE FIRST AU CONFERENCE OF MINISTERS IN CHARGE OF ICT

REPORT OF THE FIRST AU CONFERENCE OF MINISTERS
IN CHARGE OF ICT

INTRODUCTION

Recognizing the important role of CITs in promoting development, including achievement of the Millennium development goals, as highlighted in both the WSIS summit and the Accra meeting. Therefore, it is time to harmonize all the previous initiatives during the preparation course for WSIS and for the African Union to play the expected political role in the continent. Accordingly, the Commission report on the outcome of the WSIS Summit in Tunis and ARAPKE, submitted to the Executive Council Assembly in Khartoum on 16th January 2006, recommended the establishment of a Ministerial Conference for CIT.

Decision EX.CL/238(VIII) Executive Council authorizes the African Union Commission "to organize a conference of the African Ministers of CIT with the participation of the Regional Economic Communities and other partners - to develop an implementation framework of the WSIS decisions and the African Regional Action Plan on Knowledge Economy (ARAPKE) programme".
In accordance with this decision, the African Union Commission has called for this conference of Ministers responsible for CIT in Africa from 19th - 20th April 2006 – The First Ministerial Conference on CIT of the African Union.

REMARKS FROM THE MEETING

The opening ceremony was marked by statements by H.E. Tarek Kamel, Minister of Communications and Information Technologies of the Arab Republic of Egypt, H.E. Prof. Najia Essayed, African Union Commissioner for Human Resources, Science and Technology and H.E. Albert Kan-Dapaah in his capacity as the Chairperson of the African Ministerial Committee led Africa during WSIS.

In Their statements they referred to the required balance and realistic convergence of several factors and components. Reiterating the need for further enhancement of cooperation and integration so as to narrow the digital gap, in addition to the need for the establishment of mechanisms that will enable Africa to make maximum use of the ICT Technological Revolution.

Further they noted that the proposed Ministerial Conference would give political direction to the ICT endeavors and added significance, especially in mobilizing the Africa's opinion for the global discussion of the WSIS agenda.

The following Bureau was nominated on the basis of the consultations:

- Chairperson: Egypt
- 1st Vice-Chairperson: Gambia
- 2nd Vice-Chairperson: Kenya
- 3rd Vice-Chairperson: South Africa
- Rapporteur: Burundi

OBSERVATIONS

The meetings of the Experts discussed the following items and submit a recommendation to the Ministerial session for consideration:

1. Proposed structure for the CIT Ministerial Conference
2. Implementation of the African Regional Action Plan on Knowledge Economy (ARAPKE)
3. African ICT Week
4. PAN-African e-Network

The African Ministerial Conference on Communication and Information Technologies adopts the proposed structure as the basis for the functioning of the African Ministerial Conference on Communication and Information Technologies, its related Committees and the Cairo declaration. Further recommends the said documents to the Assembly of the African Union for consideration and endorsement.

Regarding date and venue of the next conference It was agreed that the date and venue of the next meeting of the CIT Ministerial Conference including the Bureau and steering Committee meetings would be agreed upon and communicated by the African Union Commission.

REPORT OF THE MINISTERS' MEETING

CONFERENCE OF MINISTERS RESPONSIBLE
FOR COMMUNICATION AND INFORMATION
TECHNOLOGIES (CITs)
OF THE AFRICAN UNION
FIRST ORDINARY SESSION
CAIRO - EGYPT
18-20 APRIL 2006

AU/MIN/CIT/Rapt/Rpt/ (I)

REPORT OF THE MINISTERS' MEETING

REPORT OF THE MINISTERS' MEETING

I.   INTRODUCTION

1.   The Conference of African Ministers responsible for Communications and Information Technologies (CIT) was held at Conrad Hotel in Cairo, Egypt on 20 April 2006.

II.   ATTENDANCE

2.   The attendance list is annexed.

III.   OPENING CEREMONY

Opening Statement by H.E. Dr. Tarek Kamel, Minister of Communication and Information Technology of the Arab Republic of Egypt

3.   The opening ceremony was marked by statements by H.E. Tarek Kamel, Minister of Communication and Information Technologies of the Arab Republic of Egypt and H.E. Prof. Essayed, African Union Commissioner for Human Resources, Science and Technology.

4.   In his statement, H.E. Tarek Kamel welcomed all the participants and wished them a pleasant stay in Egypt. He said that Africa had completed the process towards its preparations for and participation in the World Summit on Information Society and was about to launch another process of embarking on the development of the Information Society.

5.   He further stated that building the Information Society required a balance and realistic convergence of several factors and components. To this end, national and regional actions should take into account the need for Africa to exert efforts in several areas to attain the international development objectives, notably the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

6.   The Minister expressed his gratitude to African States and to the various stakeholders who played an important role in the accomplishment of the different stages and activities related to ICTs in Africa, particularly the preparation of the WSIS. One of the objectives to be pursued, he said, was the establishment of a viable framework of close co-operation and interaction between all the stakeholders.

7.   Mr. Tarek said that there was need for countries to intensify their capacity to use ICTs for their development, adding that the present Conference should initiate a structured framework for dialogue and coordination of African policies that promote cooperation and integration of the continent. To this end, he proposed areas on which African Ministers should focus their attention.

8.   Concluding, the Minister said in keeping with the commitments made to speed up the development of ICTs, Egypt had put in place a leadership training program for the development of ICTs.

Statement by Prof. Nagia Essayed, AU Commissioner for Human Resource, Science and Technology

9.   In her statement, Prof. Essayed started by expressing her sincere thanks and gratitude on behalf of the Chairperson of the African Union Commission, to the leadership, government and the people of the Arab Republic of Egypt for the kind gesture of hosting this first African Ministerial Conference on ICT. She also thanked the delegates for their large turn-up at this important Meeting. Reiterating the need for further enhancement of cooperation and integration so as to narrow the digital gap, she urged for the establishment of mechanisms that will enable Africa to make maximum use of the ICT Technological Revolution. She hoped that this Conference would create organizational structures that would lead to the creation of adequate implementation, follow-up and evaluation mechanisms for the African ICT initiatives. She urged delegates to make this Conference a starting point in the information society and produce positive results that would fulfill the aspirations or our African people and put them on the right course to development and progress for the Continent.

Statement by Hon. Albert Kan-Dapaah, MP – Minister of Communication and Information Technology of the Republic of Ghana

10.   In his statement, the Minister conveyed his appreciation to H. E the President and the people of Egypt for the wonderful reception accorded to all the delegates. He reiterated that the establishment of the Ministerial Committee on ICT was long overdue. Indeed the structure had existed in the past in the form of the African Telecommunication Union (ATU) and was referred to as the Ministerial oversight committee. He noted that the proposed Ministerial Conference would give political direction to the ICT endeavors and added significance, especially in mobilizing the Africa's opinion for the global discussion of the WSIS agenda. He requested the delegates to continue to give recognition to ARAPKE, which has been adopted by Member States as a framework encompassing the action lines of the WSIS.

III.   ELECTION OF THE BUREAU

11.   The following Bureau was nominated on the basis of the consultations:

- Chairperson: Egypt
- 1st Vice-Chairperson: Gambia
- 2nd Vice-Chairperson: Kenya
- 3rd Vice-Chairperson: South Africa
- Rapporteur: Burundi

IV.   ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA

12.   The Agenda was adopted as proposed

V.   <u>ORGANIZATION OF WORK</u>

13.   The Organization of Work was adopted as proposed.

VI.   Agenda Item No.6   Presentation and Consideration of the Report of Experts– Doc. -AU/EXP/ICT/RPT (I)

14.   The Report was presented by the Chairperson of the Experts Session, Ms. Ghada Howaidy, Director of International Relations in the Egyptian Ministry of Communications and Information Technology.

OBSERVATIONS

15.   During the discussions on the report of the Experts and the proposed structure, the following observations were made:

- The meeting should be referred to as a Ministerial Conference on Telecommunication, Information and Communication Technology;

- There is need to clarify the funding aspects of the proposed structure, in view of the fact that the African Union Commission may not have the capacity and resources to accommodate this structure;

- Noting the rapid dynamism in ICT, it was suggested that the proposed frequency of meetings of the proposed Ministerial Conference (2 years) was not realistic. A proposal was put forward that the Ministerial Conference should meet annually;

- Telecommunications was not adequately catered for in the proposed structure and Ministerial Conference should be rephrased to include Telecommunication;

- Convergence in Technology is an issue that has to be addressed and promoted at all government levels;

- There is need to have a focal point to deal with all technological issues within our government structures.

AU CLARIFICATIONS

16.   In responding to some of the issues raised during the discussion, the AU clarified as follows:

- the proposed Ministerial African Conference of ICT will be a program of AU with the necessary budgetary provisions in accordance with other AU programmes;

- there are many development partners who will be willing to fund such an initiative.

- the proposed structure allows for as many Extraordinary sessions as may be required;

- On the role of NEPAD as stated in the Experts' Report, the AU clarified that NEPAD is a programme of the AU. However AU and NEPAD are working together to create synergies between the different programmes.

17.   At the end of the deliberations, the meeting agreed to adopt "**Ministerial Conference on Communication and Information Technologies**", as the name for the Conference and subsequent structures. This will ensure that telecommunication issues are included in the structure. Further, the Conference should be convened every year.

VII.   Item Agenda No. 7:   Consideration and Adoption of the Draft Cairo Declaration – Doc. AU/EXP/ICT/2 (I)

18.   The Draft Declaration was presented by the Director of HRST of the African Union Commission. Discussions on the Draft Declaration were deferred to the afternoon session. However, delegates were requested to submit their amendments to the African Union Commission.

VIII.   Agenda Item No. 8   Date and Venue of the Next Conference

19.   Having no proposals to host the next meeting, it was agreed that the date and venue of the next meeting of the Communication and Information Technology Ministerial Conference including the Bureau and steering Committee meetings will be agreed upon and communicated by the African Union Commission.

RECOMMENDATIONS

20.   The Information and Communication Technologies Ministerial Conference adopt the name "**The Communication and Information Technology Ministerial Conference"**, and adopt the structure proposed by the African Union Commission.

21.   The Communication and Information Technology Ministerial Conference will be **meeting annually.**

22.   The Arab Republic of Egypt proposed to establish **an e-forum for African Ministers responsible for Communication and Information Technologies**. Whilst agreeing that the Ministerial Conference should be held once every year, Egypt also proposed that the meetings include sessions dedicated to discussing **thematic issues.**

23.   The meeting agreed that when electing new members of the proposed structure, one of the members of the outgoing Ministerial Bureau as well as the Outgoing Bureau of the Steering Committee be included in the new bureau as ex-officio members.

24.   Member States were urged to support the Digital Solidarity Fund (DSF) and take advantage of this fund in implementing the ARAPKE projects.

CLOSING REMARKS

25.   On behalf of the Delegates and Honorable Ministers present, the Honorable Minister of Communications of the Republic of South Africa, Dr I Matsepe-Casaburri, expressed thanks and appreciation to His Excellency the President of Arab Republic of Egypt and also Prime Minister Nazif for their visionary leadership in the ICT sector. She further congratulated Egypt for demonstrating the preservation of cultural, natural and historical heritage through the use of Information and Communications Technologies.

26.   She acknowledged and appreciated the contributions of the African Union Commission, and other institutions such as ECA and ATU for their patience and hard work in holding Africa together in the ICT sector. In this era of convergence, she said, the challenge would be how to reconstruct some of these specialized technical agencies into new structures, when so required.

27.   The Chairperson of the CIT Ministerial Conference, H.E. Tarek Kamel, Minister of Communications and Information Technologies of the Arab Republic of Egypt thanked the Delegates and honorable Ministers for their effort and positive discussions that have resulted into the CAIRO Declaration.

28.   He hoped that the Cairo declaration will be approved by the AU Assembly in Gambia during then next Summit.

DECLARATION OF THE FIRST AFRICAN UNION MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE ON COMMUNICATION AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGIES

Adopted 20th April 2006
Cairo, Arab Republic of Egypt

DECLARATION OF THE FIRST AFRICAN UNION MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE ON COMMUNICATION AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGIES

Adopted 20th April 2006
Cairo, Arab Republic of Egypt

WE, the Ministers responsible for information and communication technologies in African countries, meeting at our inaugural conference within the framework of the African Union from 18-20 April 2006 in Cairo, Arab Republic of Egypt;

Recalling Article 3 of the Constitutive Act of the African Union (AU), which promotes African common positions on issues of interest to the continent and its people as well as sustainable development at all levels;

Further recalling the decisions by Heads of States and Governments of the AU at the Durban Summit 2002 on the adoption of the NEPAD as an AU programme including the NEPAD ICT programme;

Noting the Decision by the Executive Council EX.CL/DEC238 (VIII), as endorsed by the Assembly of the Union, on the report on the outcome of the WSIS Tunis phase including the (ARAPKE) Plan of Action

Acknowledging that other new African initiatives may appear including those resulting from the implementation of WSIS Tunis Agenda;

Motivated by the solemn pledge by the Executive Council decision (EX.CL/DEC.258 (VIII)) during its 8th ordinary session in Khartoum 16th-24th January 2006, which was subsequently endorsed by the Assembly of the Union, requesting the African Union Commission to convene a meeting for the African Ministers of Communication and Information Technology;

Taking into account that the realization of the African Union goals as well as those of supportive initiatives, such as the Millennium Development Goals, the Plan of Implementation of the World Summit on Sustainable Development are receiving considerable attention of African leaders and Africa's development partners;

Considering that building the Information and Knowledge Society is a lever for the economic and social development, as has been recognized by the World Summit on Information Society;

Recognizing the past initiatives of African Ministers of Communication and Information Technologies to address issues relating to the development of ICTs at the continental level;

Convinced that information and communication technological innovations are driving forces for economic growth and sustainable development;

Acknowledging that the ability of our countries to create, diffuse and utilize ICTs is a major determinant of our capacity to take advantage of international trade and effectively compete in the global economy as well as improve the quality of life of our people;

Realizing that the gap between poor and rich countries in terms of economic income as well as in terms of info-poverty is largely accounted for by differences in the acquisition, proliferation and utilization of ICTs;

Determined further to effectively and successfully address the challenges of implementation and follow-up of international and continental decisions in the field of ICTs;

Guided by the deliberations and outcome of this Ministerial Conference held from 18-20 April 2006 in Cairo, Arab Republic of Egypt;

WE HEREBY:

1. **REAFFIRM** the need for ICTs to be championed as priority instruments of economic and social development at the highest level of our governments;

2. **EMPHASIZE** the need for ICT policies, strategies and plans that lead to sustainable development and the eradication of poverty;

3. **UNDERTAKE** the implementation of African Regional Action Plan on Knowledge Economy (ARAPKE) as authorized by the Heads of State and Government;

4. **INVITE** Member States to contribute financially to the Digital Solidarity Fund (DSF) and to fully use it for the reduction of the digital divide in our countries;

5. **COMMIT** to find ways and means of strengthening, individually and collectively, ICTs innovation systems of our countries to attain sustainable development and integration into the global economy;

6. **SUPPORT** the promotion and development of enabling environment at the national and regional levels within the Continent, including legal and regulatory frameworks necessary for the promotion of ICTs as well as investments in this sector;

7. **UNDERTAKE** to improve bilateral and multilateral cooperation in the development and application of ICTs;

8. **RESOLVE** to build regional consensus and strategies to address concerns emerging with advances in new technologies of ICTs;

9. **REAFFIRM** our commitment to promote within our countries ICTs and their applications, particularly in e-Learning, e-Health, e-Commerce and e-Government;

10. **PROUDLY ACKNOWLEDGE** the abundance of indigenous knowledge, the rich and diverse culture, technologies accumulated over millennia in our continent, and to promote, protect and develop them as crucial components of ICTs and innovation systems;

11. **REAFFIRM** our commitment to pursue all measures possible to increase public expenditure on ICT development;

12. **ENCOURAGE** the establishment of networks of centers of excellence in ICTs within the framework of the African union;

13. **SUPPORT** the development and adoption of common sets of indicators to benchmark the implementation of the Information and Knowledge Society at national and regional levels;

14. **ENCOURAGE** the establishment of national and regional programmes to promote public awareness and understanding of ICTs and their role in development;

15. **ESTABLISH AND DEVELOP** public systems of legal information, using the potentials of ICTs, with a view to enhance access to and dissemination of such information to all stakeholders concerning their rights and obligations;

16. **ENSURE** coordination of ICT matters between the different sectors of Government, and promote dialogue and partnership between stakeholders in the ICT community;

17. **FORMULATE** policies and allocate resources to promote the use and protection of Languages and local content in Cyberspace; and

18. **RECOMMEND** the institutionalization of the Conference of Ministers in charge of Communication and Information Technologies as the policymaking and overall governance body for ICT within the framework of the African Union.

THE AFRICAN MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE ON COMMUNICATION AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGIES ADOPTS the Outline of proposed structure as the basis for the functioning of the African Ministerial Conference on Communication and Information Technologies and its related Committees.
FURTHER RECOMMENDS this declaration to the Assembly of the African Union for consideration and endorsement.

Done at Cairo, Arab Republic of Egypt,
this 20th day of April 2006

2006

Report of the first AU conference of ministers in charge of ICT

African Union

African Union