

**KEYNOTE ADDRESS BY MS. MARJORIE PYOOS,
GROUP EXECUTIVE: SOCIO-ECONOMIC PARTNERSHIPS,
DEPARTMENT OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY,
AT THE OCCASION OF EURO-AFRICA ICT AWARENESS
WORKSHOP,**

**PREMIER HOTEL, PRETORIA- SOUTH AFRICA
17 JUNE 2008**

Ms. Eva Bursvik – Trade Advisor to Delegation of European
Commission South Africa;

Representatives of European Union Dr. Edmund Katiti, Policy and
Regulatory Advisor – NEPAD e-Africa Commission

Meraka Institute Centre Manager, Ms. Kagiso Chikane

Consortium Partners of the Euro-Africa ICT Initiative

Colleagues from various governments departments

Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen

Workshop participants, panellists and presenters,

Distinguished guests,

Ladies and gentlemen...

It is indeed an honour to support your efforts at strengthening European and Sub-Saharan African research collaboration through this ICT workshop. On behalf of the South African Department of Science and Technology, I extend a warm welcome to all our foreign visitors and partners. I would also like to thank the African Advanced Institute for ICT, also known as the Meraka Institute, for playing the role it has in organising this workshop.

In discussions I've had recently with the European Commission, in particular Mr Frans de Bruine, Director: ICT addressing Societal Challenges DG, I have been impressed that European society stands to benefit as much from such collaboration as we on the African continent, if research activity in the area of 'independent living' technologies proves fruitful. For example, Europe with an aging population, seeks technologies that allow for fewer 'live' diagnostic services from specialists in the health sector. Africa with

huge backlogs and severe skills constraints also needs technologies that can ease the case load on medical practitioners and other service providers.

This is the essence of what came out of the European Union – African Union Summit in Lisbon, the recognition that partnerships built around the real needs of the societies on these two continents will contribute to the sustainable achievement of economic and social objectives. It is exemplary that the European Commission has acted upon the findings that participation by African researchers in the Framework Programmes has been disappointingly low. The support that is provided for increased dialogue through such workshops as we have today is greatly appreciated. The South African Department of Science and Technology welcomes the agreement to revise the FP7 ICT Work Programme for 2009-2010 so that increased participation of Sub-Saharan African organisations is positively assessed during the evaluation process of the proposals, and; that specific cooperative actions based on European and African mutual interests are included in the revised FP7 Programme for the ICT Theme.

In keeping with the purpose of this workshop, I will proceed to share with you information on recent policy and strategy developments in South Africa.

We have made good progress on a matter that had been troubling our President, Thabo Mbeki, for quite some time. Whilst we had the advantage of a President with a strong vision on the role that ICT must play for the growth of the economy and broader social progress, ICT activities were fragmented across a number of government departments. This year, 2008 started with a Cabinet approved Programme of Action that drew together these departments and their resources with clearly defined outcomes that must be delivered over a set period. In South Africa, government coordinates work across departments in what we call Government Clusters. A new government Cluster, called the Forum of South African Directors General (FOSAD) Information Society and

Development Cluster, has been created to deal with the coordination and integration of all government ICT initiatives and the advancement of “*a people-centred, development-oriented and inclusive information society*”. The ISAD Plan recognizes the importance of ICT R&D and innovation. The ISAD cluster has adopted eight thematic areas of work. These include e-Health, e-Education, ICT/R&D and Innovation, ICTs for SMME Development, Local Content Development, e-Documentation, e-Government and ICT Infrastructure.

South Africa has adopted a list of critical issues that must be dealt with as a matter of priority. Government is called upon to deal with these issues in a ‘business unusual’ context and the list is called the Apex Priorities. The FOSAD ISAD Cluster is committed to fast-tracking the roll-out of ICT infrastructure for rural connectivity and the partners across the Cluster include the Department of Communications and its agency SENTECH, the Department of Education with 255 Dinaledi maths and science schools targeted, Department of Science and Technology and the Meraka Institute, and the Department of Public Service and Administration.

The DST’s specific role in this activity is the scaling up of existing R&D and innovation work in “low-cost broadband technologies” in support of the connectivity initiative. Through the Meraka Institute of the CSIR, DST is actively involved in the deployment of a solution suitable for the African context using “**Wireless Mesh Network**” technologies, to provide affordable last mile broadband connectivity. We believe this project is well aligned with the African Regional Action Plan on the Knowledge Economy (ARAPKE), World Summit on Information Society (WSIS) action plan; as well as the NEPAD e-Africa Commission’s ICT Component. The common objectives include the reduction of costs of telecommunications and provision of economies of scale, affordable broadband infrastructure and promotion of greater use of ICTs throughout the economy and in support of SMME development, health and education service provision.

From the policy perspective, the department (DST) has taken some great strides in recent times that will ensure the strengthening of our National System of Innovation. Last year, we were truly honoured by the Cabinet decision to approve the DST-led Ten Year Innovation Plan, otherwise aptly entitled “*Innovation Towards a Knowledge-Based Economy*”. The main purpose of the Ten Year Innovation Plan is to help drive South Africa’s transformation toward a knowledge-based economy. To achieve this, we have set the country, four grand challenges i.e.

- “Farmer” to “*Pharma*” to strengthen the bio-economy;
- Space science and technology;
- Energy security – looking at safe, cleaner and affordable energy;
- Global-change science – looking broader than climate change to include earth system science;
- Human and social dynamics – contributing to a global understanding of the shifting social dynamics, and the role of science and technology in growth and development.

One of the major, immediate initiatives that the Ten Year Innovation Plan proposes is the establishment of the Technology Innovation Agency – TIA. The value proposition for TIA is to help close the gap between the formal knowledge base and the real economy. As a result, TIA will seek to address the main barrier to commercialization of technological innovations by consolidating the fragmented funding instruments as we have them today.

Chair, ladies and gentlemen, I wish to emphasise that these new policy developments are not in anyway departing from our founding NSI pillars such as the White Paper on Science and Technology of 1996 and the National Research and Development Strategy of 2002, but rather are efforts to complement and re-orientate our strategic impetus as we build the knowledge economy.

For this reason, Information and Communication Technology (ICT), - contemplated as one of the key technology missions in our 2002 National R&D Strategy alongside biotechnology, manufacturing technology and technology for poverty eradication – is still a strategic priority in the Ten Year Innovation Plan. We recognise a strong interface between the Ten Year Innovation Plan and our national ICT R&D and innovation strategy. This positions us to develop a strong base of research expertise and technology goods and services in geomatics and spatial technologies, mobile and wireless technologies, information security, human language technologies, cyber-infrastructure, open source software development, high performance computing. We believe that South Africa and Africa must engage strongly in the science of climate change in order to manage the sustainable use of natural resources, to model scenarios on vulnerability of eco-systems and to respond timeously and effectively with natural disasters. To do so requires both ICT infrastructure, affordable access to earth-observation data and scientific expertise.

Chairperson, ladies and gentlemen;

In our quest to build a stronger scientific and technological base - and as a way of harnessing global competitiveness, our policies have a strong emphasis on “**Partnerships**” – at national, regional and international levels.

To ensure that our researchers and scientists interact seamlessly with their peers globally, we are implementing a high speed South African Research Network (SANReN) as part of our growing cyber-infrastructure initiative, alongside the Centre for High Performance Computing (CHPC). SANReN’s vision is not only to provide a high-bandwidth network to our higher education institutions and other research centres, but to also link up with other institutions in our neighbouring countries in the SADC region and the rest of Africa – thus providing a gateway to international networks in other parts of the world such as Europe, Asia and the Americas. We have

benefited greatly from the support of the European Commission in our efforts to establish SANReN.

These Cyber-infrastructure programmes will now allow our researchers and scientists to collaborate with their peers and partners globally on science, technology and engineering in mega projects such as astronomy (MeerKAT and SKA), bio-medical science, climate change, molecular biology, bioinformatics, and advanced manufacturing, amongst others. One example that illustrates this is that SANReN will have the capacity to connect the Hartebeeshoek Radio Astronomy Observatory (HartRAO) to other participants of the Very Long Baseline Interferometer (VLBI) elsewhere in the world at 10Gb/s or more, to the processing centre in the Netherlands via GeANT.

It is for this reason that we have high regard for the EuroAfrica ICT initiative. We recognise the critical role that the European Commission (EC) Framework Programme (FP) is playing in forging strategic partnerships for ICT R&D and innovation, initially between EU and Sub-Saharan Africa, but now including the Caribbean region.

We are also aware of the significant success that the Meraka Institute has achieved in the Framework Programme 6 (FP6) and in providing leadership and sharing the experiences of the EU Framework Programme with the rest of Africa. In line with the objectives of this workshop, I urge you, the Meraka Institute and your champion in this area, Mr Johan Eksteen, the EU partners and all African and Caribbean partners and role players, to re-double your efforts in developing and formulating real partnerships as we gear ourselves for an even stronger and broader participation in FP7 and beyond.

With that chair, I wish you a fruitful and successful workshop.

Thank you!