

**EuroAfrica-ICT FP7 Awarenesss Workshop
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**Opening remarks by
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Prime Minister, Minister, Your Excellencies, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen

Let me immediately confide in you that I am neither a scientist, nor an engineer, nor a computer nor telecom specialist. I can not even be labelled a researcher. Accordingly, when I was asked to give a short opening address, I was hesitant and somewhat nervous to speak before so many distinguished ICT experts. But I believe I do know something about the importance of innovation. Before joining the EU and becoming a "Eurocrat", as we are often kindly known, I worked for ten years for the Hollywood film industry. If there are people who are truly innovative in this world and continually develop the technical wizardry that ensures their products attract customers throughout the world – it is the movie people! From this experience - I understand very well the great importance of ICT for growth and job creation and it is therefore a great pleasure to be today with so many pioneering ICT gurus!

EuroAfrica-ICT is not just another Conference where nice declarations are made about the key importance of ICT, science and innovation for development. I hope that we are all convinced about that. Frankly we had too many of these glorious sound bites in the past, without real impact on the ground. The objective we want to share with you during this event, is to take stock of current situation regarding Africa-EU cooperation and plan together the immediate next steps in the most concrete and realistic manner. I would like here to thank the EuroAfrica-ICT team and all the people who have contributed to the organisation of this event. I would like to congratulate all of them for having succeeded in bringing together key institutional leaders and representatives from both African and European scientific communities around this common concrete objective.

EuroAfrica-ICT is one of the support actions the European Commission has launched to promote Africa-EU cooperation on ICT research, in view of facilitating the participation of Sub-Saharan African organisations to the European Community Research Framework Programme. Such co-operation is essential to open the European Research Area to Africa, thus contributing to the struggle against both digital and scientific divides on the continent.

The task is very challenging, but we see today very encouraging signs for this co-operation to take-off.

Throughout last year, an intensive joint consultation process led to the definition and the adoption of the Joint EU-Africa Strategy and Action Plan, at the EU-Africa Summit in Lisbon last December. The outcome of this Summit represents a major breakthrough for EU-Africa cooperation in general, and for our sector in particular. At a time when Africa is changing

politically and economically, it was indeed necessary for our relationships to address common contemporary challenges for our continents.

European and African Heads of States and Governments therefore adopted an ambitious framework constituted of 8 Partnerships, moving from the traditional donor-recipient scheme to a genuine cooperation based on mutual interests. The EU-Africa Partnership on Science, Information Society and Space is one of these 8 pillars. It highlights for the first time at this level, the importance of science, ICT and space technologies in transforming economies in African countries and contributing to the Millennium Development Goals.

The objective of this Partnership is not to reinvent priorities, but to focus support and cooperation on already existing ones, adopted at pan-African level. These are ARAPKE, the African Regional Action Plan for the Knowledge Economy, for the ICT part, and the AMCOST Consolidated Plan of Action, for the S&T one.

If those priorities were already engaging African States, they now also engage all EU ones.

In the ICT field, the objective is to complement the EU-Africa Partnership on Infrastructure that was launched in October last year, through complementary capacity-building initiatives. This includes notably activities to support regulatory reforms and definition of e-policies, human resources development, content and e-applications provisioning as well as research and education networks. Such measures are indeed essential to cut-down access costs and maximise reach and usage of the underlying infrastructure.

Beyond this achievement in terms of political prioritisation, our cooperation has also significantly increased at operational level during last year.

Besides investing in trans-regional infrastructures projects, such as the East African Submarine Cable System (EASSy), we have been closely engaged with the African Union Commission to jointly identify 5 flagship pan-African projects to be launched in the very short term, for direct support to African Regional Action Plan for the Knowledge Economy. Activities will cover awareness-raising and training programmes, targeting the youth, policy-makers or IT professionals, support to the deployment of local internet exchange points, e-learning as well as research and education networks.

In the field of ICT research, actions like EuroAfrica-ICT have brought tangible results. Just out of the two first Calls for Proposals of the new European Framework Programme for Research and Development, more Sub-Saharan participations were retained, than during the 5 years of the preceding programme. Collaborative research projects as well as technology road mapping initiatives have been launched in various fields including mobile web technologies, wireless access, open source software, language technologies, grid computing, or natural disasters management systems.

Another key component of the new EU-Africa Partnership adopted in Lisbon, is the support to the development of African national and regional research and education networks, and their interconnection to the European GEANT2 network. This is indeed crucial to integrate the African scientific community at global level, benefiting from the latest advances in high speed networking, internet and grid technologies, sharing use of instrumentation, computing and data resources across a wide range of technology domains. Last January, a 1GigaByte physical link was established between GEANT2 and the Ubuntunet network, and we have committed with the African Union to further exploit this interconnection and expand it to other African countries.

On the occasion of the EC-African Union Commission college-to-college meeting that took place in Brussels on 1st October, the further extension of GEANT2 to Sub-saharan Africa (the AfricaConnect project) was announced. Another early deliverable was also announced, the AXIS project for supporting the deployment of a regional internet infrastructure in Africa through the establishment of national Internet Exchange Points.

We now have to build on these concrete achievements, and exploit existing dynamics through setting-up the most efficient partnerships between public, private and academic stakeholders. African public authorities have a prime responsibility in prioritising both ICT and S&T sectors in their agendas, as well as creating the right environment for private investments. Fast developments have occurred in countries that have started increasing liberalisation and competition in their ICT markets, inherently attracting FDI (Foreign Direct Investments) flows. It is also essential for governments and donors to invest and create incentives to tackle areas of “market failure”, notably in rural areas where 70% of the African population lives.

Significant progress has also been made in these domains, as illustrated by the recent mobile boom in Africa, with a mobile market growing twice as fast as the global average, and a leap from 16 million subscribers in 2000 to around 300 million today.

In Uganda, what a change this has meant to people's lives and to the ease of doing business. A total of \$850m has been invested by telecom companies in Uganda during the last 10 years. These companies also created 400,000 direct and indirect jobs and paid \$300m in taxes over the same period. The number of licensed service providers has increased from one fixed line operator and one mobile telephone service provider in 1997 to 21 public infrastructure providers and 34 public service providers by the end of August this year. Internet subscriptions have increased from 17,000 active accounts to about two million users over the same period. Impressive statistics. And we all know that a booming telecoms sector assists greatly in unleashing the talent and enterprise of all other economic players.

The European Commission is committed to supporting these positive developments both through an increased mobilisation of development funds to reinforce structuring capacities and local innovation, as well as fostering African participation in its research and development programmes. Just on the ICT part of this programme, which represents around 6% of the total EU public spending on R&D, the European Commission invests each year more than 1 billion €.

This programme is not only fully open to African participation, but African organisations are fully eligible to receive Community funding.

Strengthening ICT scientific partnerships through this Programme is a key objective of the event of today. This cannot be achieved on an opportunistic basis, but once again in the most realistic and relevant way, gathering the best European and African teams on mutual interests and priorities.

Based on these principles, I'm confident the results of your discussions during the next two days will be transformed into very tangible outcomes that will foster further innovation and thereby stimulate further economic activity and development.

Thank you for your attention.