

AFRICAN UNION
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**REPORT OF THE CONFERENCE FOR THE MINISTERS
RESPONSIBLE FOR COMMUNICATION AND INFORMATION
TECHNOLOGIES**

**First Ordinary Session
Cairo-Egypt
20 APRIL 2006**

I. INTRODUCTION

The holding of the African CIT Ministerial Conference is a culmination of a series of activities, both at the international and regional levels.

The two WSIS summits defined a global agenda and an Action plan for building an information society.

At the regional level we had the Accra preparatory meeting for the second phase of the Tunis WSIS summit. The Accra meeting clearly defined the position of the African continent on creating an information society.

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, it is now the time for the African continent to start the implementation of the agreed decisions and action plan in order to realize the set goals and further, recognizing the importance of a coordinated and multi-prolonged strategy at the national and regional levels.

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.**

II. REMARKS FROM THE OPENNING SESSION

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 statement, H.E. Tarek Kamel stated 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. He further referred to the required balance and realistic convergence of several factors and components.

In her statement, Prof. Essayed expressed her sincere thanks and gratitude on behalf of the Chairperson of the African Union Commission for the kind gesture of hosting the 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.

H. E. Minister of Ghana 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

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

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

IV. MINISTERS OBSERVATIONS ON THE PRESENTED REPORT:

The Report of the Experts meeting presented to the ministers along with the proposed structure and the Ministers comes with the following observations.

OBSERVATIONS

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

- 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. Although, the Ministerial African Conference of CIT will be a program of AU with the necessary budgetary provisions in accordance with other AU programmes;
- Noting the rapid dynamism in CIT, 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. Although, the conference can be convened in Extra-Ordinary session when required

- 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 National focal point to deal with all technological issues within our government structures.

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.

V. CAIRO DECLARATION

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 the attached declaration to the Assembly of the African Union for consideration and endorsement.

VI. DATE AND VENUE OF THE NEXT CONFERENCE

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 would be agreed upon and communicated by the African Union Commission.

VII. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. 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.

2. The Communication and Information Technology Ministerial Conference will be meeting annually.
3. 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.
4. 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.
5. Member States were urged to support the Digital Solidarity Fund (DSF) and take advantage of this fund in implementing the ARAPKE projects.

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 HERE BY:

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