

**STATEMENT BY HIS EXCELLENCY JAKAYA
MRISHO KIKWETE, PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED
REPUBLIC OF TANZANIA, AT THE MICROSOFT
GOVERNMENT LEADERS' FORUM – AFRICA,
CAPE TOWN, REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA
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Your Excellencies

Heads of State and Government;

His Excellency Bill Clinton,

Mr. Bill Gates, Chairman of Microsoft Corporation;

Distinguished Participants;

Ladies and Gentlemen.

Let me start by saying what a privilege it is to join you here this morning. It is a great honour for me to have the opportunity to address this important Forum. I thank Microsoft for organizing the event for the second time in Africa, and I am also thankful to Chairman, Bill Gates for inviting me to participate here. I also wish to thank our hosts, the Government of the Republic of South Africa, for the warmth of their hospitality and the excellent arrangements they have made for this meeting.

This meeting is about Africa's competitiveness in the global market. In a globalised world of today, survival is predicated upon ability to compete in the global marketplace. It is a function of being able to produce goods and services which can compete in terms of quality, affordability and availability.

It is in essence a matter of production capacity and efficiency. These in turn are very much influenced and enhanced by technology particularly information and communications technology (ICT). Development and use of ICT is very central to modern day production

and development processes. ICT therefore is central not only to the production process but also to other aspects of human life and activity such as governance, tourism, education etc. where when used it engenders greater efficiency and better services.

In this context, it is indisputable that the pace of Africa's development will necessarily rely upon the extent and depth of the ICT Revolution. ICT offers a cross-cutting and multisectoral resource that can be beneficial in many different ways. In particular, ICT increases productivity and efficiency in all sectors and facilitates the creation of new industries and services, thereby augmenting growth and job opportunities. When the development of Europe and other countries was being supported by the Industrial Revolution, Africa was left out. Even now in the era of ICT revolution, Africa seems to be lagging far behind others. Africa is the world's last frontier in human and ICT development.

Africa needs, and deserves the assistance of the developed world. It is heartwarming indeed, to note that there is this kind of initiative by Chairman Bill Gates which will enable us to better identify priorities to bring Africa rapidly onto the Global Information Highway. We thank you Chairman Bill Gates for your foresight and for timely action.

Given the historical handicaps and the current infancy of Africa's ICT sector, African Governments and leaders realize that we must be pro-active and adapt international best practices for the continent to be able to raise its ICT standing. We need to fast-track ICT development in the continent. All of us in Africa recognize the importance of ICT for accelerated socio-economic growth, as policies are being formulated for creating conducive environments for ICT development.

There are a number of things that need to be done to bring Africa into the ICT fold. One, we need to look at the infrastructure facilities which will make ICT available in Africa. They present a serious constraint to ICT development in the Continent. Most countries in Africa and many areas within nations are not properly connected and are currently dependent on expensive satellite technologies that are not affordable to governments, businesses and the majority of our people. We have to reduce dependence on the satellite if we have to make fast progress. It is in this regard for example, that our nations in Eastern

Africa, are ready to invest in the submarine cable (The Eastern Africa Submarine Cable System - EASSy) to link our countries. In my country, Tanzania, we are making huge investment in a nationwide terrestrial optical fibre cable network to connect the whole country up to the districts. Later, of course, we intend to take it to the villages. Such heavy investments will necessarily involve creating innovative partnerships among our public and private sectors, and between us and our international development partners and friends. It is a matter of great comfort and inspiration to observe that Microsoft has chosen to take a lead in lending valuable support to Africa through cross-sectoral networking.

The other thing that needs to be addressed is the question of human resources development. Africa's competitiveness is essentially dependent on the skills of its people. Our Continent's future therefore, is dependent upon our ability to develop our people's skills to cope with the rapidly evolving needs of the ever changing global and national environment. In that changing environment, ICT is a major factor.

This means therefore that ICT development must be an integral part of the education systems of our nations. It should be anchored properly in the curricula of our schools from the level of pre-school, through primary, secondary, to tertiary education and vocational training. This is a big challenge indeed to our Governments, especially in the least developed ones, like mine, Tanzania. But, because of its immeasurable contribution towards promoting fast growth it is a cost we must bear. On the same vein, this is enough reason for the developed world, governments institutions and for friends, to look seriously into supporting the LDCs in ICT development.

Our nations and governments in Africa should also appreciate the role the private sector in our respective nations can play in ICT development. We need to promote and develop this partnership. I believe, in partnership with the private sector, our countries can make faster progress in ICT as has been the case with other important areas.

In the African continent where teachers are very scarce compared to our needs, ICT could be used, and has been used in some cases to extend the capability of teachers. ICT can also be used to empower

students to access higher quality learning experience via educational software. In many instances, this effectively makes for the inadequacy and absence of libraries, laboratories and other learning materials.

It is a pleasure to note that Microsoft has made substantial investments in this particular field within Africa, as well as elsewhere in the world. While applauding Chairman Bill Gates for this, may I make a humble request to you, that you continue to extend this useful service a little more and a little longer, to cover more countries and people.

It is now time for all of us to move beyond experimental pilot projects in e-Education and to implement broadbased integrated strategies such as those envisaged by NEPAD, among others. Unless we do so, the Digital Divide among the peoples of this continent will be aggravated as ICT skills, access and benefits will remain the preserve of small minorities.

It is therefore imperative for us to use ICT to enhance the quality of our educational pipelines, as well as to expand its accessibility to our people. This will assist them to adopt and adapt these tools in the context of their work places.

Let me raise another important fact. This relates to availability of PCs to the people so that they can make use of the ICT. They are not readily available and too expensive to many to buy when available. African countries are unlikely to be able – on their own – to reduce the cost of PCs and other ICT equipment so that they become as affordable as cell-phones have now become. They have no leverage but the industry can do something. There are examples of what the industry can do. Merely eight years ago, a cell-phone in my country would cost close to US\$2,000 and the equipment was nearly the size and weight of a brick. The technology was new then, and the subscriber base was barely measurable. Now that handsets are easily available for less than US\$100, the user base has increased tremendously to close to 4,000,000 subscribers. Over 10% of Tanzanian population are subscribers.

I am sure that similar measures towards the affordability of access to ICT equipment would yield comparable results in terms of the user base. However, because computers are able to offer substantially

more uses and productivity enhancements than cellular phones, I firmly believe that our economic statistics will reflect an even more pronounced and favourable impact. With the view to improve on affordability in Tanzania, my predecessor His Excellency Benjamin W. Mkapa lifted duties and taxes on computer equipment and other ICT equipment. Still, in an economy where a sizeable population lives on less than one dollar-a-day, it is quite unrealistic to expect many people to invest on equipment worth two years of their income – and yet spend more money on maintenance. We need to do something on this important matter.

I am aware that Microsoft and partners are working on improving the affordability of ICT for the end-user. I applaud the work done thus far; it is my hope and that of many of us in Africa that we will soon enjoy its fruit.

The other challenge for us in Africa is the use of ICT in government, businesses, in tourism, in medicine, and in everyday life. Where ICT has been used in government, delivery is fast and efficiency is increased. There is more transparency and corruption is curbed. In tourism, marketing is easy and realization of financial proceeds is instant. We need to get there. Africa needs to be assisted to develop e-Government and e-tourism as much as we need to be assisted to develop e-commerce.

Development of a critical mass of African entrepreneurs, who are actively involved in the process of Africa's integration into the global ICT highway, is essential for anchoring ICT in our economies and societies. Further, ICT helps businesses to grow, small businesses to become medium, local become global and able to compete effectively in delivering affordable and quality goods and services on a timely basis.

E-commerce is the way to do businesses in the globalised world. It handles billions of dollars of business per annum, yet only a mere small fraction of this revenue comes from Africa. Africa is left on the periphery of this important vehicle of trade. The development of innovation hubs and incubators for ICT entrepreneurs, if accelerated could speed up the process of enabling African entrepreneurs to become active participants in this.

Africa's emerging entrepreneurs need to be empowered and enabled, both technically and financially, to play a meaningful role in ICT development in the continent. The growth of entrepreneurs is currently slow, hampered by prohibitive costs of establishing businesses, low accessibility to medium and long term loans, and high costs of production. Some of these obstacles can be addressed internally, by the entrepreneurs themselves and many by governments.

Governments have a crucial role to play in creating and supporting a conducive environment in which these entrepreneurs can grow and thrive. They are charged with the responsibility of ensuring that political, fiscal and monetary policies, as well as legal and regulatory frameworks, are receptive and responsive to ICT development. Many governments in Africa have already created incentives and deliberate interventions to promote ICT entrepreneurs in their respective countries.

Given that the ICT development process contains both public and private dimensions, it is noteworthy that Africa has woken up to the fact that Private-Public Partnerships are essential. Where Private-Public Partnerships are actively utilized, the rate of digitization is certainly accelerated.

Excellencies and Distinguished Participants,

Before I conclude, allow me at this point to reiterate and underscore the centrality of ICT development in Africa. It's the way for us to take. I also reiterate the need for support to ICT development in Africa. Africa needs to be assisted to be part of the global system by overcoming the constraints relating to infrastructure, skills, PCs availability and development of local entrepreneurship. While these areas are important, African Governments also need to ensure that they develop conducive environments for ICT investments to grow harmoniously. In this context, partnerships between private sectors and Governments will ultimately determine the success of our endeavours in this age of Globalisation.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen;

I wish to express my sincere appreciation to Microsoft for demonstrating how the peering between ICT entrepreneurs of

developed and developing countries can be fostered in order to bridge the digital divide.

And finally, may I take this opportunity to once again thank Chairman Bill Gates for bringing together in this venue a valuable network of African Government Leaders and other important players and great personalities of world reknown like His Excellency Bill Clinton, former President of the United States, to share ideas with one another on this dynamic field. We look forward to useful exchanges.

Thank you for your attention.

