

**Opening Speech of Hon. Deepak Balgobin
Minister of Information Technology,
Communication and Innovation
*Republic of Mauritius***

Africa Internet Summit 2022 (AIS '22)

Theme: Shaping Africa's Digital Future

30th May 2022 at 17:00 MUT, Le Meridien, Mauritius

- **ork Operators Group Convenor,**
- **Eddy Kayihura, Chief Executive Officer, African Network Information Centre (AFRINIC),**
- **Members of AFRINIC,**
- **Captains of the Internet Industry,**
- **Members of the Press,**
- **Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Good afternoon to you.

First of all, allow me to thank AFRINIC for hosting this annual event in such a pleasant ambiance. I am indeed honoured to be among your midst this afternoon to address you on the opening of this 5-day Summit. The Africa Internet Summit is, *par excellence*, the multi-stakeholder educational and business ICT event in Africa where key players in the Internet industry can interact with the global Internet community.

I am told that this event has registered more than 700 participants, both online and onsite, from more than 50 countries worldwide. I am convinced that there will be interesting discussions and that this Summit will be the perfect opportunity to discuss how we can learn and work together and make our joint ambitions a reality.

To me, this is the kind of platform that is going to generate solutions for a united Africa.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

At the base of a sound Internet ecosystem lies a robust and resilient connectivity. Regions that are already struggling with basic Internet access will be left further behind in the global economy of the future if they are not taken on board. By deploying the necessary connectivity technology across the African continent, only then will Internet services be within the reach of the people of Africa with the goal of leaving no one behind.

This is a quite long journey and implies connection to submarine cables, inland fibre optics and 3G/4G/5G networks over thousands of kilometres as well as setting up of Internet eXchange Points (IXPs). Obviously, this endeavour will encounter numerous challenges ahead. In order to accelerate the process, we need collaboration among Governments, private operators and the Global Internet Community.

For this reason, forums like the Africa Internet Summit are instrumental in securing the necessary proposals for a roadmap to achieve the targeted objective of a connected Africa within an acceptable timeframe.

In Mauritius, major strides have been covered in terms of connectivity. Talking of international connectivity, the country is connected to three submarine cables, namely SAFE, LION/LION2 and METISS. A fourth cable, T3, will be operational by mid of next year. Our households are well connected with FTTH (Fibre to the Home) provision which has reached 100% since 2017. As for mobile connectivity, the whole island is fully covered with 3G and 4G services. On the other hand, an initial 5G service has been launched in June last year and provides coverage for the upper regions of the island.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The success of the digitalisation programme for Africa goes far beyond the roll out of connectivity across the continent. The affordability of connectivity and other facilities like computers, tablets and smart phones is key for encouraging the take up of digital services by African people. COVID-19 has shown us the importance of digitalisation for the delivery of services, be it in times of emergency or not.

Again, a motivated partnership is needed among African Governments, private operators and the Global Internet Community in order to truly bring digitalisation within the reach of one and all.

The distribution of communication facilities is one thing, but making services affordable over those networks is quite another. One concept which is widely adapted for the latter purpose is the Universal Service Fund which receives social contributions from telecom operators. The Fund is utilised for resolving telecom issues related to the digital divide.

For instance, it may be used for the deployment of connectivity and services to remote underserved and economically not viable areas. Moreover, provision of free Internet to families below the poverty line may also be drawn from the Fund.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The global economy has evolved dramatically over the last decade, which is largely attributed to the contribution of the digital economy. It is not merely the employment of ICTs in economic activities, but it also includes

digitised information and knowledge as well as skills in the field of ICT as drivers of productivity.

According to the World Bank, the digital economy is equivalent to 15.5% of global GDP, and is growing two and a half times faster than global GDP itself over the past 15 years.

At this pace, the contribution of the digital economy to global GDP is expected to exceed 20% by far in 2030. No doubt, the digitalisation of processes and services has warranted enhanced productivity and efficiency. This being said, we cannot afford to stay behind in the global economy.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

For the digital ecosystem to function to its full potential, Internet users require the assurance that their interests are protected. We must be aware that as progress is being made in the field of ICT, cyber threats are equally emerging at the same pace.

Today, we are witnessing the dangers of ransomware attacks which has the potential of bringing down critical information infrastructures like banking systems, Government networks, power grid systems and telecommunication infrastructure. On an equal footing, phishing is another evil on the rise.

If we want to empower our population to operate in the digital environment, we need to include adequate protection mechanisms for them to be confident when transacting online. Governments need to introduce the necessary policies and legislations to counter or mitigate the contemporary threats that Internet users are faced with.

And last year, in November, Mauritius has introduced the Cybersecurity and Cybercrime Act to protect citizens and businesses transacting online. This new law is well adapted to the current situation prevailing in cyberspace making our digital ecosystem more resilient and secure for use by Internet users.

Dear Friends,

For an inclusive progress to be achieved in the global economy, I would say that no country is to be excluded in today's new ways of doing business and communicating with each other.

International cooperation plays an important role in addressing challenges related to Internet Governance, skills mismatch, capacity building, digital literacy, cyber threats, technical barriers to trade, regulatory frameworks, and many more.

A multi-stakeholder forum like this one is the right platform where we can share our expertise to address common issues, and foster a sustainable digitalisation programme and inclusion for all.

On this note, I thank you for your attention and have the honour to declare the Summit open.