

**SPEECH BY HON. PROF. GEORGE SAITOTI, EGH, M.P. THE MINISTER FOR EDUCATION, DURING THE OPENING OF 2<sup>ND</sup> eLEARNING CONFERENCE HELD IN SAFARI PARK HOTEL, Nairobi, Kenya ON MAY 28, 2007.**

Director of Ceremonies  
Honourable Ministers here present  
Members of the Diplomatic Community  
Government Representatives and Non-Governmental  
Organizations Represented  
Representatives of International Development Agencies  
Distinguished Delegates  
Ladies and Gentlemen

It is my pleasure to welcome you to this unique Conference in the education calendar of this country. This is an important event in that it has brought together stakeholders from far and wide, with a view to exploring possibilities of employing ICT for enhancement of education and training in Africa. For us in Kenya the conference is timely as we strive to achieve the Millennium Development Goals of coming out of ignorance and embracing global trends in education.

Since the World Education Forum in Dakar in the year 2000, Kenya has made considerable progress towards attainment of EFA by 2015 in tandem with national and international commitments. As stipulated in the Sessional Paper No.1 of 2005, entitled “ **A policy Framework for Education, Training and Research**”, the government of Kenya, through the Ministry of Education intends to increase the transition rate from primary to secondary schools from 47% to 70% by 2008. Further, it envisages expansion of capacities for universities by an average of 5000 students annually. Generally, the policy spells out the government’s commitment for enhancement of access, quality and equity in provision of education at all levels.

In order to realize the objectives laid down in the policy document, the government has made commitment to integrate ICTs in the delivery of education, to strengthen Open and Distance Education (ODE) and to promote effective and efficient administration at all levels of education.

This Conference is therefore very important in that it will give us an opportunity to reflect on the issues that will enable us to succeed and those that are likely to become an impediment to our progress in implementing EFA. Our shared experiences will enable us to adopt what works best. As we are all aware, rapid growth and development of ICT is transforming the way in which we live and work. In education, the effective use of these technologies offers new ways in which the quality, effectiveness and in particular, the flexibility of higher education can be improved. Information and Communication Technologies when integrated into education have the capacities to improve the delivery of education through Distance Learning; open the way to universal digital libraries; offer ways in which Universities can compete on a global basis and offer improvements in academic administration.

In the year 2003, the International Telecommunications Union (ITU) held its first ever World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) in Geneva. The summit’s vision as stated in the WSIS Declaration of Principles, was to build a people-centered, inclusive and development-oriented information society, where everyone can create, access, utilize and share information and knowledge, enable individuals, communities and people to achieve their full potential in promoting their sustainable development and improve the quality of life. The overall objective of the action lines was to bridge the digital divide and hasten the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals through ICTs. Among other specific targets to be achieved, the WSIS Action Plan intended to improve connectivity and access to ICTs by connecting universities, colleges, secondary and primary schools by 2015.

Ladies and Gentlemen, with this WSIS agenda in mind, we can all agree that the theme for this year, “**Building Infrastructures and capacities to reach out to the whole of Africa,**” is the right direction for Africa towards achieving these goals. For us in Kenya it is in the spirit and furtherance of our government’s commitment of ensuring that all Kenyans have access to ICT services, irrespective of gender, distance, socio-economic status, and ability or disability. For this to be actualized there is need to take note of the importance of theoretical and practical understanding of the technologies. Information and Communication Technology is currently considered key in creation of new economic and social networks. Proper management and promotion of ICT will determine the extent to which any country can reap maximum returns from investment.

As a matter of fact, the challenge of eradicating poverty in Africa can be addressed through education which has turned out to be the key to the advancement of the global economies. Education is central to development, social

progress and human freedom. Thus, to eradicate poverty and promote sustainable development, it is necessary to transform the structures of African economies. This is the commitment undertaken by African leaders in proposing the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD). Indeed, NEPAD has prioritized ICT as a tool of ensuring that young Africans participate in the global information society and knowledge economy.

Ladies and Gentlemen, we are all aware that at the moment, Africa still faces many challenges in implementing ICT. This in effect is an obstacle to effective delivery of education programmes through ICT. For example, lack of skills among school managers and teachers; lack of ICT policy framework in many countries, inadequate skills for the development of localized digital content and the high cost of software are just but a few of the challenges faced by most African countries. Added to this is the poor state of infrastructure particularly access to electricity, communication lines and, connectivity to the internet. These challenges have contributed greatly to the digital divide between urban and rural areas, the rich vs the poor, the educated and the illiterate, men and women. There is, therefore, the need to look for a way forward towards addressing these multiplicity of divides as they constitute a major impediment to the emergence of an equitable and viable information society.

In Kenya, we do recognize that the spread and availability of ICT services across the country is far from satisfactory. Currently, 56 per cent of the fixed telecommunication network is concentrated in Nairobi, with the remaining 44 per cent distributed across the other regions of the country. To address the disproportionate distribution of ICT services, the government through Communications Commission of Kenya (CCK), developed a universal access strategy for Kenya. The government is working towards implementation of this strategy with the aim of creating an equitable information society. It is anticipated that with this strategy in place, the obstacles of putting in place appropriate mechanisms for e-Learning across all sectors of education delivery will be easily addressed. Nevertheless, we also recognize that time is not on our side if we have to provide quality education to our young people who are faced with the reality of the demands of the global market, where they will have to fit. Efforts towards various initiatives for the achievement of promotion and integration of ICTs in education are in place. For example:

- The Ministry of Education in partnership with the Ministry of Energy and the Government of Finland has embarked on rural electrification of all public schools in the country.
- The Ministry is working with the Communications Commission of Kenya to provide connectivity to schools. CCK has even gone further and equipped and connected sixteen schools to the internet as a sign of commitment towards better education for our young people;
- The NEPAD e-Schools initiative has received immense support from all stakeholders in this country for its success. I am happy to report that the DEMO phase is now complete, the schools are all connected to the internet and integration of ICT in teaching and learning is taking place. We have now embarked on strategies for the roll out to additional 142 schools across the country.

Ladies and Gentlemen, even with these myriad problems, we in Africa must understand that there is no turning back in embracing ICT and in particular, ICT in education as a fundamental tool for ridding Africa of ignorance, poverty and disease. We must embrace all it will take to make us move ahead with the rest of the world – this e-Learning Conference being one of the vehicles towards this actualization. Africa must narrow these divides by making efforts to:

- Develop National policies and multi-lateral ICT Strategies.
- Support and adoption of the New Partnership for African Development's (NEPAD) recommendations with an aim of implementing the NEPAD e-schools initiative.
- Exploitation of alternative technologies to avoid over reliance on costly software and hardware.
- Promotion of Private and Public partnership in investments in ICT within education and training with the purpose of providing computers to primary, secondary and teacher training institutions and universities.

Success in this area will be realized if and when African governments make a commitment towards facilitating universal access to ICT infrastructure. This will among others include: provision of rural electrification programmes, review of telecommunication policies to support e-learning and building both institutional and human capacity to harness the use of ICT in education training.

On behalf of the Government of the Republic of Kenya I once again welcome you to Kenya and wish you successful deliberations. We

believe and are confident that this conference will leave a land mark and a road map for us as we strive to ensure that our country fully participates in global trends in education for effective transformation in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century and beyond.

Let us all strive for Africa's development and posterity.

Thank you.