



# TELECOMMUNICATIONS AND POSTAL SERVICES REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

## Speech delivered by Telecommunications and Postal Services Minister, Dr Siyabonga Cwele at the African Network on Information Ethics (ANIE) 10th-year Anniversary

*on 21 February 2017 in Kievits Kroon, Pretoria.*

Conference Chair: Prof Theo Bothma;

Programme Directors;

Senior Government Officials;

Conference Management;

Professors and Academicians from across our beautiful African continent;

Foreign delegates;

Distinguished Guests;

Ladies and Gentlemen

It is a great pleasure and privilege to address you at this 10th year Anniversary of Africa Network on Information Ethics (ANIE), under the conference theme "celebrating a decade of promoting Information Ethics in Africa".

On behalf of my department, Government and the People of South Africa, I would like to welcome all the conference delegates and congratulate the organising team for the work well done. The team is drawn from the enduring partnership of the African Centre of Excellence for Information Ethics (ACEIE), the

Department of Telecommunications & Postal Services (DTPS) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO).

They have been promoting awareness and research in the field of information ethics, as we prepare for an inclusive Information Society and knowledge economy in line with the National Development Plan (NDP), The African Agenda 2063 and the World Summit on the Information Society programme. This collaboration between Government, academics and UNESCO is a perfect example of what the NDP calls smart partnership.

We need to pull all our resources together to ensure that we create a safe, inclusive and developmental online environment that will enable our citizens to embrace the internet and take advantages of the opportunities brought about by the advances in technology— without compromising our moral values of human solidarity and Ubuntu.

The quest for an inclusive information society in a normal democracy was articulated by our global icon, Tata Nelson Mandela, when he was giving his address at the opening ceremony of the Telecom 95 during the 7th World Telecommunications Forum in October 1995 in Geneva. He emphasised the importance of skilling young people for the information revolution, by stating that:

"Many of us here today have spent much of our lives without access to telecommunications or information services, and many of us will not live to see the flowering of the information age, but our children will. They are our greatest asset. And it is our responsibility to give them the skills and insight to build the information societies of the future."

He further emphasised that

"the young people of the world must be empowered to participate in the building of the information age. They must become the citizens of the global information society. And we must create the best conditions for their participation".

On 28 September 2016, the cabinet approved the National Integrated ICT Policy White Paper, in line with the sentiments echoed by comrade Mandela and the principles of equality, equal treatment and non-

discriminatory conduct enshrined in our Constitution. It is an important lever to assist us to use information technology to build "a seamless information infrastructure by 2030 that will underpin a dynamic and connected vibrant information society and a knowledge economy that is more inclusive, equitable and prosperous" as envisioned in the NDP.

Distinguished Guests,

The National Integrated ICT White Paper builds on the 2013 National Broadband Policy and South Africa Connect (SA Connect) that is anchored on four pillars of:

- digital readiness,
- digital development,
- digital future and
- digital opportunity

SA Connect adopts an integrated cross-cutting but citizen-centric approach to broadband deployment. These policies will soon be complimented by our National Digital Strategy and the Small, Medium and Micro-Enterprise Development Strategy for South Africa.

We are most excited by your selfless efforts, your positive attitude and planned activities towards achieving the objectives enshrined in these policies and further preparing our people towards safe access to information as we move towards an inclusive ICT sector. We as a department fully support all your research and activities, which includes but are not limited to:

- The NHI pilot project workshops on importance of information ethics and ICT skills,
- Research and Development output, and
- Digital infrastructure for economic development.

We further welcome and encourage the African Centre of Excellence for Information Ethics to continue publishing academic opinions on recent and relevant trends. To grow the body of literature in our sector and further benchmark our policy implementation with international standards. With that being said:

Let me acknowledge and congratulate Ms Naailah Parbhoo for successfully registering for her PhD and will work on Information "Retrieval and Information Ethics". With the same breath, I commend Ms Rachel Fischer for expressing her PhD topic on "Information Ethics, Big Data and Multilingualism". As a government, we continue to encourage and celebrate academic excellence. Your research and the existing body of literature will inform public policy.

One of the focus points of our Memorandum of Agreement with the African Centre of Excellence for Information Ethics is to produce research which aims at highlighting the critical role of ICT in improving the material conditions of our people. I implore you to delineate some of the current trends which may assist government to fast track ICT penetration and usage to our people, especially the remote areas of our country.

In his State of the Nation Address (SONA), His Excellence President Zuma called for the decisive implementation of Radical Economic Transformation. He described it by stating:

"We mean a fundamental change in the structure, systems, institutions and patterns of ownership, management and control of the economy in favour of all South Africans, especially the poor, the majority of whom are African and female, as defined by the governing party which makes policy for the democratic government".

Compatriots,

We are all in agreement that information ethics is our next ICT challenge. One of the most challenging ethical issues is the inequity of access to ICT between countries, and between urban and rural communities within countries. As Africans, we should be worried about the worsening female gender access to ICT in the last few years as reported by the UN Broadband Commission. Information Ethics in a democracy is often embedded in dilemmas and social contradictions while ideally ICT knowledge and skills should be for accessibility, development, ethics, literacy, multi-linguism, cyberspace and preservation. In practice, there are instances where ICTs are used in ways which undermine the core value of human rights and dignity.

The 2007 Tshwane Declaration adopted by the African Information Ethics Conference understood "information Ethics to be the field of critical reflection on moral values and practices about the production, storage, distribution and access to knowledge as well as to all kinds of processes, systems, media and Information and Communication Technologies."

South Africa and many other developing countries are making efforts and progress in increasing uptake and usage of ICT's for development. Our nation and continent are determined to achieve their renewal and development, defeating the twin scourges of poverty and underdevelopment. In this regard, we have fully recognised the critical importance of modern ICTs as a powerful ally for socio-economic development, as reflected both in our national initiatives and the priority programmes.

We have been working hard to implement the outcomes of the World Summit on the Information Society and appeal to all stakeholders similarly to commit themselves to take action and translate the shared vision of an inclusive development-oriented information society into practical reality.

Fellow Africans,

Since the hosting of the first African Conference on Information Ethics held in February 2007, various academic institutions, government departments and private sector stakeholders have contributed to the expansion of the work and objectives set by the conference. These objectives not only included the growth of awareness about Information Ethics in Africa but also aimed to formally research the topic and teach the new knowledge in formal courses at universities. The Africa Network for Information Ethics (ANIE) and the Africa Centre of Excellence for Information Ethics (ACEIE) were structured to support the UNESCO activities in furthering the outcomes of WSIS on the African continent.

The WSIS in Tunis and Geneva pronounced on the actions that needed to be undertaken by countries to make this a reality. Amongst those actions, was that countries needed to ensure that "Information Society is subject to universally held values and promotes the common good and to prevent abusive uses of ICTs".

South Africa subsequently developed an Information Society and Development Plan which provided a brief guideline on how to implement the WSIS recommendations in a coordinated and inclusive manner.

In December 2015, South Africa had a privilege of leading G77 plus China, comprising of about 140 countries during the United Nations WISIS Plus 10 Review Summit in New York. In this meeting, we came out with a new enhanced programme of action.

Distinguished guests,

In 2012, having considered the efforts that were done by the academics through the African Network on Information Ethics, my Department took a bold decision to partner with the University of Pretoria towards the establishment of the African Centre of Excellence for Information Ethics. We gave them a broad mandate to coordinate research to inform policy decisions on the Information Ethics Programme for Africa. This includes focusing on:

- the promotion of academic studies in the field of Information Ethics;
- ensuring that the opportunities offered by the developing Information Society are effectively utilised for socio-economic advancement and a better life for all and
- developing tools for the practical application of ethical reasoning;

Working with the Centre, we have developed frameworks that improve people's knowledge about what is ethical and unethical in the Information Society. We would like to use this information to promote ethics within the education sector.

All these initiatives are exposing the students to the Internet world, where boundaries are only virtual. It is our responsibility to educate them about the conscious decision to create one's boundaries in consuming, creating and disseminating information, without limiting them from being active participants in this Information and Knowledge Society.

The Department is currently working closely with other departments, to promote Ethics for ICTs sector. We are also developing the Digital Opportunities programme that has set out seven strategic pillars of:

- Capacity Development,

- Digital Entrepreneurship,
- Digital Awareness and e-Inclusion,
- e-Government,
- ICT Applications,
- Local Content Development and
- Research and Development.

The Information Ethics Programme is also linked to the Digital Awareness and e-Inclusion Pillar will require collaboration between all stakeholders. We depend on you as academics and researchers to advise the government on the best possible way of implementing our policies while drawing on our moral compass, fundamental values of Ubuntu and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

This has become more urgent as we try to maximise benefits and minimise the impact of the current Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) that sweeping across all nations of the world. The African Countries missed the first three revolutions, and we may not afford to miss this one if we are to be globally competitive and enjoy the benefits of development. The 4IR brings new dimensions beyond equity in access and general safety in the use of ICTs. The boundless landscape of artificial intelligence brings a new frontier for ethics in relations to emerging technologies such as:

**UNEMPLOYMENT** Vs low-risk jobs and availability of quality time on labour activities

**INEQUALITY** due to few owners extracting economic surplus vs. promoting innovative companies including SMMEs.

**HUMANITY** vs. interacting with less humane machines vs. technology addiction or 'robotisation of human beings'.

**ARTIFICIAL STUPIDITY.** Intelligence comes with learning. People may manipulate these systems or may be fooled in an unimaginable manner.

**RACIST ROBOTS** profiling people e.g. to predict criminals.

**SECURITY** human soldiers and cyber security.

**EVIL GENIES.** What if AI itself turns against us? e.g. elimination of cancer by killing everyone.

**SINGULARITY** or how do we stay in control of a complex intelligence system? We are on top of the food chain because of our ingenuity and intelligence. Will the AI one day have the same advantage over us? We may not rely on pulling the plug because these advanced machines may anticipate this and defend themselves. Singularity refers to a time when human beings are no longer the most intelligent being on earth.

**ROBOTS RIGHTS** How do we define the humane treatment of all as they begin to perceive, feel and act due to our neuroscientific advances? How do mitigate their suffering or possible risking adverse outcome such as mass murder.

Despite all these risks, we should always remember that this technological progress is likely to ensure a better life for everyone. Artificial Intelligence poses a vast potential for human development particularly if we implement it in a responsible manner. It is all in our hands.

I wish to reiterate the commitment of the government to strengthen our relationship with the African Centre of Excellence for Information Ethics, and our insatiable desire to transform the ICT sector during this year of Oliver Reginald Tambo. Cde O.R, Tambo is the giant of the liberation of South Africa and destruction of the apartheid system, which was described by the United Nations a Crime Against Humanity. Tambo was a keen maths and science teacher.

As a department, we will use our policies and regulatory framework to support ACEIE in the process of transformative and progressive agenda in ushering and preparing our people for the Fourth Revolution.

**I wish you every success in your deliberations—and to our foreign delegates, a pleasant stay in South Africa.**

I THANK YOU