

**Address by Amb. Bruce Madete, Ag. Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Information and Communications, during the official opening of the East African Communications Organizations (EACO) Assemblies on 24<sup>th</sup> June 2013 at the Kenyatta International Conference Centre (KICC), Nairobi, Kenya**

**Mr. Francis W. WANGUSI**

**Director General, Communications Commission of Kenya (CCK)**

**Amb. Joseph BANGURAMBONA, Director General of ACRT and Chairman of the East African Communications Organisations (EACO)**

**Major Francois-Regis GATARAYIHA, Director General of the Rural Utilities Regulatory Authority (RURA)**

**Prof. John NKOMA, Director General, Tanzania Communications Regulatory Authority (TCRA)**

**Eng. Geoffrey MUTAMBAZI, Executive Director, Uganda Communications Commission (UCC)**

**CEOs and Representatives of EACO Member Organizations**

**Delegates to the EACO Congress and Assemblies**

**Distinguished guests**

**Ladies and gentlemen**

I am profoundly delighted to be here this morning to preside over the official opening of the East African Communications Organizations (EACO) Assemblies. I would like, on behalf of the people and Government of Kenya, to extend our warm welcome to all visiting EACO delegates to Kenya for this important regional meeting. I encourage you all to feel at home here in Nairobi. We are all East Africans, thanks to regional integration initiatives like EACO.

This meeting of communications organizations within the East African region clearly demonstrates that the East African integration project is slowly but surely becoming a reality. The fact that EACO meets annually to caucus on issues pertinent to the development of ICTs in the region is quite commendable. It is also heartening that postal, telecommunications, and broadcasting players and ICT regulatory bodies within the region have already established a secretariat to, among others facilitate harmonization of ICT policies and regulatory frameworks, and to follow up on implementation of resolutions made during these annual meetings. Initiatives of this nature will go a long way in positioning East Africa as a single investment market, and catalyzing the realization of our region's ultimate goal of political and monetary integration. I, therefore, wish to commend the EACO member organizations for their focus and persistence.

Distinguished delegates, ICTs are now recognized as one of the most transformative inventions of our time. The capacity of these technologies to shrink distance and to inject efficiency in economic production, governance and in the provision of social services such as health and education is now widely acknowledged and also harnessed. Indeed, ICTs are already serving as enablers of socio-economic development in our region, and thus contributing positively towards improving the livelihoods of our citizens. The communications industry, for instance, is already

generating the highest number of new jobs in the region, and providing new sources of revenue to governments.

In light of the afore-cited benefits, governments in the region now appreciate the importance of developing policies and laws that are conducive to the continued growth of the ICT sector. In this regard, governments are now working closely with industry players and other stakeholders with a view to ensuring that ICT policies, laws and regulatory frameworks are aligned with market demands and trends. In addition, as a result of liberalization, governments in the region have left the role of infrastructure development largely in the hands of the private sector. As a matter of fact, governments now focus only make interventions to redress inequalities brought about by market failure or to fast-track the attainment of certain ICT policy objectives. Some of these policy objectives include boosting roll out of strategic infrastructure to spur economic growth in line with national development blueprints and facilitating access to ICTs to the vast majority of our citizens. I am happy that the five East African governments are participating in EACO meetings and other relevant national and regional forums where issues pertinent to the continued growth of the sector are deliberated on.

Allow me, distinguished delegates, to single out an issue that Kenya picked up from EACO meetings and other forums, and whose implementation has dramatically changed the communications landscape within the East African region. You will all recall that before 2009, the East African region was the only region of the world that was not connected to the international fibre optic network. As a result, our region had the dubious distinction of being described as the 'missing link' in the global fibre optic connectivity. Lack of international broadband connectivity then meant inordinately high prices for international satellite bandwidth, which in turn compromised the economic competitiveness of the East African region.

To address this challenge and exploit Kenya's potential in Business Process Outsourcing, the Government of Kenya made a deliberate decision to facilitate the construction of The East African Marine cable -the first fibre optic cable to connect the East African coast to the rest world. This bold decision motivated the private sector to enter into this market. As a result, the region is now connected to four international fibre optic cables, and the number is poised to increase as investors have continued to display tremendous interest in the international broadband market. Within our respective countries, availability of low-cost international broadband connectivity has subsequently spurred intense activity in the development of national broadband infrastructure and led to the reduction of both wholesale and retail bandwidth prices. As I speak, a number of our countries are at various stages of developing their National Broadband Strategies with a view to ensuring that our region leverages on broadband to spur economic development, and facilitate provision of e-government and other critical e-services. I will not dwell on broadband at length as I am aware that the subject of broadband is the theme for this year's East African Communications Organizations (EACO) workshop.

As you converge here in Nairobi this week to deliberate on various issues touching on the ICT industry in the region, I wish to challenge the EACO membership to seek to provide concrete solutions to the myriad challenges that we encounter in the region. This will go a long way in ensuring that this Forum does not become a mere talking shop. One of the key issues of concern is the high mobile roaming charges.

It is quite worrying that mobile roaming charges between Kenya and Burundi for instance are much higher than between Kenya and United Kingdom or between Kenya and India. These high roaming charges negate the very essence of integration, and act as a disincentive to communication and trade within the region. We cannot attain our ultimate goal of becoming a single market if this situation is allowed to persist.

I also wish to challenge regulators in the region to develop interconnection frameworks for ICT and postal networks in order to ensure that the region enjoys seamless connectivity.

To leverage on the opportunities presented by broadband, we need to fast-track the development of National Addressing Systems in the region. These systems shall prepare the post to harness the emerging business opportunities that the uptake of e-commerce presents. This will go a long way in ensuring that the post remains relevant in the increasingly digitalized world. Kenya is already implementing an Addressing System for Nairobi on a pilot basis, and we look forward to ultimately replicate the system in other parts of the country. I am sure you will all hear much about this project in the course of the week.

Distinguished EACO delegates, Ladies and gentlemen,

The East African Communications Organisations (EACO) Congress and related meetings presents our region with a good opportunity to share experiences and best practice in ICT regulation and sector development. This is important in ensuring that we learn from the successes of our peers and avoid repeating costly mistakes. One area where we clearly need to learn from one another is on the transition to digital TV broadcasting. At the moment, our countries are at various stages of the transition, and we need to expedite the migration proceeds in order to free spectrum for use in deployment of mobile broadband services. Tanzania has trailed the blaze in the transition to digital TV broadcasting, and it is my hope that other countries in the region will learn something from them during this event.

As we development our national broadband strategies, there is also a lot to be gained by sharing notes as East African Community member states. This will go a long way in ensuring that the strategies are harmonized and synchronized.

As I conclude, I wish you all fruitful deliberations. I also hope that you will find time to sample the social scene in Nairobi and the warm hospitality of our people. Nairobi and indeed our country have a lot to offer ranging from our parks teeming with wildlife, our sandy beaches, rich cultural heritage to our world class hotels. The host of this event will be available and happy to render any advice that you may require in this respect.

With those remarks, it is now my pleasure to declare the East African Communications Organization (EACO) Assembly meetings officially open.

I thank you for your attention.