

PRESS STATEMENT

STATEMENT BY MR. FRANCIS W. WANGUSI, MBS, DIRECTOR GENERAL OF THE COMMUNICATIONS AUTHORITY OF KENYA (CA), DURING A PRESS CONFERENCE ON VANDALISM OF TELECOMMUNICATIONS INFRASTRUCTURE HELD AT THE CA CENTRE ON 22ND NOVEMBER 2017

The Authority notes with utmost concern the recent upsurge in incidents of destruction of ICT infrastructure in some parts of the country. These incidents have been occasioned by terrorist attacks specifically in Mandera, Garissa and parts of Lamu counties.

Vandalism of mobile telecommunications masts and other forms of infrastructure has also been noted in some parts of the country, particularly in Kisumu County in the aftermath of the just-concluded electioneering period.

This worrying and dangerous trend has caused network and service outages in the affected areas thus putting the lives of Kenyans at risk, given the significant role that telecommunications services play in provision of emergency response and other basic critical services. This malicious destruction of ICT infrastructure also threatens to erode the massive investments and other gains that have been made in the sector.

Lest we forget, barely 17 years ago only 15,000 Kenyans living in Nairobi and its environs had access to mobile telecommunications services. Thanks to a conducive regulatory environment and massive private investment, Kenya today boasts of 94.4% and 78% coverage of 2G and 3G mobile voice services, respectively. As we celebrate these milestones, we must remember that 164 sub-locations out of the 7,149 in the country have 0% mobile network coverage while 348 sub-locations having less than 30% mobile network coverage.

Clearly, a significant number of our people are yet to access basic ICT services. It is for this reason, that the Authority through the Universal Service Fund (USF), is putting in place the requisite interventions with a view to availing communications services to all in Kenya especially in areas where service gaps have been identified.

To vandalize the existing infrastructure, when industry players are investing billions of shillings to deploy ICT infrastructure to close existing communication gaps, is not only a demonstration of bad faith but also unacceptable. According to the ICT Access Gaps study carried out by the Authority in 2016, over 70 billion Kenya Shillings is required to close the existing ICT gaps in Kenya. The recently experienced vandalism of ICT infrastructure is therefore retrogressing all efforts to ensure all Kenyans access communications services and making the investment burden of facilitating universal access even more onerous.

The role that ICTs, specifically telecommunications services, play in our country's socio-economic progress cannot be gainsaid. Vandalism of telecom infrastructure by criminals and terrorists has negative ripple effects to the ICT industry, as well as other critical services including banking and finance, emergency services, health-services, national security and local businesses.

I wish to note here that the deliberate destruction of communications infrastructure under the false belief that it belongs to a particular operator is indeed misleading. Most of the Base Transmitter Stations (BTS) deployed in the country accommodate a multiplicity of players through infrastructure sharing and colocation arrangements. This only serves to compromise access to quality services by consumers for whom the very infrastructure has been set up.

The mobile network operators too bear the brunt of these sinister actions, as they are compelled to spend substantial resources to restore services in the affected areas. No investor would wish to operate in such an environment. It is equally with the recognition of the importance of ICT infrastructure that government has already initiated a bill seeking to designate telecommunications infrastructure as critical infrastructure. This will ensure that such infrastructure around the country is protected as an important national asset. The Critical Infrastructure Bill, which awaits passage by the National Assembly, offers remedy by prescribing stiff penalties for those bent on crippling such infrastructure.

Kenya can only remain competitive if we fully leverage on the numerous opportunities that ICTs and particularly telecommunications services present to us. Communications services are now a basic need and no civilized society can achieve any meaningful progress in this age, without this critical resource.

The Authority urges all Kenyans to restrain from wanton destruction of communications infrastructure and instead embrace and protect this key resource. Destroying ICT infrastructure is destroying our country. Let us make it our duty to safeguard these assets, which we heavily depend on.

Issued by

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Francis W. Wangusi', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Francis. W. Wangusi, MBS
Director General