

**ADDRESS BY Mrs. Ursula Owusu-Ekufu (MP), Minister for Communications and Digitalisation, at the 10th Anniversary Launch, Ghana Chamber of Telecommunications. 2<sup>ND</sup> DECEMBER, 2021**

Good morning. I'm delighted to deliver the keynote address for the launch of the 10th Anniversary celebration of the Ghana Chamber of Telecommunications and congratulate the Chamber for the progress they have made in the past decade. 10 years is an important milestone that deserves celebrating, however, it also calls for introspection and strategizing for the next decade.

The theme chosen by the Chamber, **10th Anniversary - Leveraging the gains of the past decade to accelerate Ghana's digital transformation**, is apt and aligns with the vision of H.E President Akufo- Addo to transform our economy through digital technology and achieve a self reliant Ghana Beyond Aid.

A bit of history will suffice here in view of recent developments. The vision of a chamber to articulate the views of the telecommunications industry was conceived in 2008, when the CST was introduced. I was spokesperson for the industry at the time and all CEOs decided it would be appropriate to have our own chamber akin to that of the Chamber of Mines etc. it finally saw the light of day in 2011. The Ghana Chamber of Telecommunications has grown to become the foremost industry association and a private initiative by the mobile network operators in Ghana, operating as an advocacy institution to help shape telecommunications policy, legislation and regulation, as well as pursue research towards the development of telecommunications sector.

This you have done with great success and demonstrated that the modern paradigm of collaborating to compete can be achieved.

As the voice of mobile network operators, tower companies, OEMS and infrastructure companies in Ghana, your work through direct engagement with government, the sector ministry and its agencies, other regulatory bodies, civil society, and consumers to shape the mobile ecosystem and maximize the socioeconomic benefits of mobile to Ghana has been commendable. The Chamber has become an ideas forum, exchanging ideas among your members, government and other stakeholders and working to leverage mobile technology for national development. This is laudable.

The growth in the sector has been admirable and this has been driven by all stakeholders working together.

Statistics from the National Communications Authority (NCA) indicates that, with an estimated population of 31,358,190, total data subscriptions in the country at the end of August 2021 was 23,291,729. The data penetration rate for the period stood at 74.59%. Additionally, at the end of August 2021, the total number of voice subscriptions was 41,486,196, a total penetration rate of 132.03%.

This sterling performance of the industry is collaborated by GSMA Mobile Connectivity Index Report 2020, which puts Ghana as the 3rd best country after Mauritius and South Africa with an index of 52.01. From 2014, where Ghana was ranked as an **Emerging** country with an index of 41.43, we have grown steadily and have now moved into the **Transitioner** stage with a growth of over 25% which is commendable.

The Ministry of Communications & Digitalization has achieved this due to its collaboration with the industry.

Some initiatives the Ministry has engaged the Chamber on include;

- Development of Ghana's Digital Economic Policy, Strategy and Action Plan
- Bridging the Gender Gap
- Child Online Protection
- National Cybersecurity Awareness Month
- Ebola Campaign
- ITU and ATU Conferences Organization
- Mobilization against Sim Boxing

When the COVID-19 pandemic took hold in early 2020, the Ministry worked with the NCA, NITA, the Chamber and its members to establish an industry group, the National Telecommunications Disaster Response Team, that worked on awareness creation, support to get government workers working remotely and ways in which the government could support the industry that ensured that the networks kept running and supported Ghana's COVID-19 containment efforts. I am informed that the group that was setup is still working. I urge you to ensure that we can contain further spread of the virus and the Omnicron variant. We cannot be complacent as we are not out of the woods yet. The Industry also contributed significantly to support the governments covid response efforts and i congratulate you all for this public spiritedness. From cash and vaccine donations and donations of cold chain equipment, your members have given significant assistance to support government efforts. Ayekoo

The increased adoption of technology in various sectors of our economy, albeit good, has also exposed us to risks such as financial fraud, data breach, and cybercrimes that must be addressed to protect our people and systems. Among other things, the Cybersecurity Act 2020, Act 1038 has been enacted and the CS Authority operationalised. The Chamber and other critical stakeholders were consulted in crafting the Bill which has been passed into law. This Act has established the Cybersecurity Authority to protect our critical information infrastructure, regulate cybersecurity activities, provide for interception of communication, and develop the cybersecurity of our country.

When I spoke at the Chamber Mobile Technology For Development (MT4D21) conference in April this year, I congratulated the Chamber for complementing the efforts of government which is establishing a Central Equipment Identity Management System by setting up the Fraud Control Dashboard to help eradicate fraud. I am told that so far, the FCD that was launched by H.E Vice President has blocked over 23,000 devices and blacklisted about the same number of IDs used by fraudsters. This is what we can achieve working together.

When I inaugurated the Board of the NCA, I reiterated the fact that the digital transformation agenda of government resides on ICT, Telecommunications, and the ability to manage the communication sector well. I asked for a robust but light regulatory touch and charged the Board to regulate the industry in a forward-looking and transparent manner that promotes fair and equitable competition to benefit all. I also urged them to ensure the Authority is strategically placed to facilitate the achievement of its goals. The NCA can only accomplish this by working with Mobile Network Operators and other regulated entities. Let me also indicate that I charged the Board to ensure that their governing legislation is implemented to the letter, without fear or favour.

I have received the work that the Chamber has done with the NCA and other regulators to revise the Telecommunication Tower Guidelines. We are considering it and we would approve it with the necessary amendments soon.

The National Engineering Coordinating Team, an entity that is chaired by the Chamber to ensure that we can bring some sanity into the management of the road reservation, has also been established. This team is to ensure that the rampant destruction of optic fibre cables is minimized if not eradicated once and for all. Let me sound a note of caution to road contractors, other utilities and stakeholders that work in the road corridor that telecommunication infrastructure has been designated as Critical Information Infrastructure, it is a crime to destroy telecommunication Infrastructure and this includes optic fibre cables. I have not been too happy with the work of the coordinating committee so I hope that this

CII designation gives an impetus to your work. We will enforce the law to the letter and any road contractor or person who destroys fibre optic cables will face the full rigours of the law and bear the cost of restoring this infrastructure to its original state.

I would also urge all communities to work with government and the network operators to protect cell sites from theft and vandalism. We all have a collective responsibility to protect telecommunications infrastructure. You stand to lose all connectivity if a few anti social elements destroy or steal components from cell sites serving you. Expose them.

I urge that the spirit of cooperation that has characterised the engagement with our two entities over the past decade would be enhanced into the next. The SIM Registration exercise is ongoing and I urge the members of the chamber to continue cooperating with the MOCD and the NCA to ensure that by March 2022 all SIM cards are registered using the Ghana Card.

The President of the republic has charged all industry players to document the history of the development of telecommunications, broadcasting and postal services by establishing a Communications Museum to provide a link between our past, our present and future so far as communications is concerned. We have an excellent story to tell that will not only document progress in these sectors but will also serve to educate our people, young and old, and boost our tourism infrastructure as well. I'm excited at the potential of this project and urge the Chamber to rally its members to see this project come to fruition. It will also bring the currently defunct Science and Technology Museum where it will be housed to life.

There is a lot we can do together and the era where officials of the chamber engaged in unnecessary public spats and disputes with the sector ministry are hopefully behind us, I want to see vibrant Industry and Ministry's Engagements where we deliberate on various policy initiatives and regulations. The members of the Chamber can provide leadership for home grown technology solutions and initiatives to deal with our local challenges and offer same as export especially taking advantage of AfTCA. They can and should support the tech start up industry by using and paying for tech innovations developed in response to local challenges. Like Mpesa, if given a chance, our innovators can provide local solutions which have global applications. Invest in and promote their dreams.

As I conclude, let me reiterate that technology is an indispensable catalyst in our socio-economic development and this government is committed to ensuring that all the needed investment in our digital ecosystem is prioritised. I reiterate government's commitment to ensuring our digital ecosystem is functioning and

has the right infrastructure and regulatory environment to thrive in a way that also safeguards the interest of all Ghanaians.

I assure you of the full cooperation of my Ministry and Agencies so that, together, we can leverage on the gains of the past decade to accelerate our nations digital transformation for the next decade and beyond.

Let me congratulate you once again for this milestone and wish you all the best in the coming years.

Thank you, and may God Bless our Homeland, Ghana and make us great and strong.