

**KEYNOTE ADDRESS BY MINISTER FOR COMMUNICATIONS,
EDWARD KOFI OMANE BOAMAH(DR) AT THE WORLD
TELECOMMUNICATION AND INFORMATION SOCIETY DAY HELD AT
THE ACCRA INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE CENTRE ON TUESDAY 17TH
MAY 2016 AT 9:00 AM**

The Representative of the United Nations,

The Hon. Members of Parliament,

Board Members of NCA,

The Director-General of NCA,

Staff from the Ministry of Communications,

Our Revered Queen Mothers,

Management and Staff of the NCA,

The Chief Executive Officer, Ghana Chamber of Telecoms

The Ghana ICT Chamber,

**The Chief Executive Officers of Telecom Operators and Service
Providers,**

Members of the Press,

Students,

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good Morning,

Welcome to this gathering. We have gathered here once again to celebrate the World Telecommunication and Information Society Day (WTISD). This day

provides the platform to help increase awareness of the possibilities that the use of the Internet and other Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) can bring to societies and economies, as well as ways to bridge the digital divide.

I would like to take this opportunity to express my sincere thanks to the organisers-NCA, and in particular our distinguished speakers, media and participants present here today.

Since 1969, May 17 of each year has been set aside by the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) to recognise the impact of Telecommunication and ICTs in everyday lives of individuals and economies. Ghana, being a key member state of the ITU with its key stakeholders are commemorating this important day for the sector.

This day also affords us the opportunity to take stock of where we are as an industry and ways to improve and enhance our relationships, services and products for the collective good of society.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The ITU has taken a key interest in the role ICTs play in developing entrepreneurs, propelling growth and job creation, achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and therefore the theme chosen for this year's World Telecommunication and Information Society Day is most fitting:- **"ICT Entrepreneurship for Social Impact"**.

We continue to monitor the performance of the industry and collate concerns from consumers and companies so that these issues are dialogued in such fora

in a transparent and open manner to develop workable solutions for the benefit of all.

The outcomes may not always satisfy the narrow objectives of individual stakeholders; but in the end we always strive to work towards mutually beneficial conclusions where we give and take. We believe this is the reason why we continue to post impressive growth in the industry.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

By the close of 2015, statistics indicated that we had 35,283,957 telephone subscribers which represent a teledensity of 129.63%.

Mobile Data subscribers as of December 2015 stood at 18,031,188 which is 65.74%. This provides a big platform for innovative and creative mobile applications to enhance our daily lives. And we are experiencing a lot of that- mobile money, eservices with the advent of smart phones, e-health, e-education etc.

The completion of the Eastern Corridor Fibre Optic network is complementing the in-land fibre stock in the country to improve communications services. We are also constructing 120 LTE sites to enhance public service delivery.

To further improve universal access and bridge the digital divide, the Ministry has constructed 21 enhanced Community Information Centres across the ten regions of Ghana amongst them are: Battor, Kpetoe, Techiman Krobo, Twifo Atti-Morkwa, Bodi, Effiduase, Bekwai, Gambaga, Welembelle, and Lassia-Tuolu.

The Ministry has also refurbished the old PWD Warehouse into a first class Business Process Outsourcing Centre which will generate 10,000 direct and

indirect jobs in due course. The BPO Centre will be inaugurated by President Mahama in the coming weeks.

These strategic projects contribute and will continue to contribute to the use of ICT products and services offered by the Telecom Industry.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me commend the Private sector, all its affiliate bodies and Civil Society Organisations that operate in the industry for their massive investments and contributions to the growth of this sector which is driving several aspects of our national life.

We have common but differentiated responsibilities. We acknowledge you as worthy partners notwithstanding the fact that we may disagree at certain times. Such disagreements must be viewed within the context of the importance of frictional forces- which are major factors for systems and objects to move.

The Telecom industry is moving and it is indeed moving at a faster pace to respond to the increasing demands of our country and the world as a result of technological advancement including the convergence of telecoms and broadcasting.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Talking about broadcasting, as you are aware, Ghana is migrating from analogue television to digital terrestrial television broadcasting and this has freed spectrum needed for improved Telecom services. The freed spectrum is available and we encourage you to take advantage of it.

Already MTN has shown the way and has assured that in the next few months they will be deploying services within the 800MHz domain. We cannot wait to

experience this revolution. This revolution also aligns with President Mahama's vision to ensure significant local content in the industry and we are working to achieve this.

You would realise that the global theme for the celebration has been expanded to address some specific concerns of the Ghanaian industry. The discussions today will border on ways to develop our industry to create the enabling environment for nurturing entrepreneurs in Ghana.

As a result, our discussions today will be on **"Addressing Challenges of the Communications Industry to Promote Growth and Development – Focus on Domestic Roaming and OTT Services"**.

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

ICT plays a large role in our day-to-day lives and addresses challenges facing Ghanaians in general. As earlier stated, sectors such as finance, health, education, agriculture etc. are quickly embracing technology for dissemination of information, enhancement of service delivery and to reach beneficiaries more effectively and efficiently.

The growth of mobile money for instance in the country has motivated change in the business model of most financial institutions in the country and has ultimately led to jobs in most areas across the country. The innovative products that you offer the consuming public makes it imperative to create the enabling ICT environment to nurture and grow entrepreneurs with creative ideas within these sectors.

Government is working with the private sector to develop budding entrepreneurs in the ICT sector for Ghana's transformation. We are also

working to develop competitive business hubs, with the view to extending them to all areas in Ghana. This vision calls for uninterrupted connectivity and network in all areas of the country.

However, you would agree with me that there are telecom coverage gaps as you drive from one region to another and one district to another especially areas that are unserved and underserved in Ghana.

Just imagine that you are on an important telephone call transacting a business while in a vehicle to a function and along the way the call drops, not because you do not have enough airtime but because there is no coverage from the network you are subscribing to.

Can you appreciate the frustration? Also imagine that you witness an ongoing attack on a travelling bus and you wanted to alert the security authorities to be able to accost these armed gangs but you realise there is no network coverage so you could not place the call.

These are just but a few of some of the critical incidences that can frustrate consumers and businesses. How can these be addressed?

Ladies and Gentlemen,

One major aim of President Mahama's Government beyond the efforts being made by the Ghana Investment Fund for Electronic Communication (GIFEC) is to consider the case for Domestic Roaming.

Traditional GSM Roaming is *"the ability for a cellular customer to automatically make and receive voice calls, send and receive data, or access other services, including home data services, when travelling*

outside the geographical coverage area of the home network, by means of using a visited network”.

“Domestic” or “National” roaming is when the geographical area where the customer roams is within the same country as the customer’s mobile operator.

An implementation of such a transformation will stimulate, promote and encourage innovation and furthermore provide the required quality of service while developing a reliable communications infrastructure.

This service will enable mobile users to switch from one network to the other in the event of network failure. Furthermore, this will ultimately be of an advantage to the police and other security officers in the event of crisis and mass information.

Currently the increase in internet penetration across the country means more people are using mobile services. Unfortunately, this penetration means that consumers are using more than one service provider for the same services but for different reasons.

Where one consumer may want to use another provider to enjoy one promotion or the other, another consumer will want an alternative service provider simply because they may be going to areas which are not covered by their service providers.

Is the consumer satisfied with this? We believe the dialogue here, today, will significantly influence the adoption and implementation of this policy.

Another reason why the theme for this year’s Digital Family Forum is relevant has to do with the opportunities that the use of ICTs have on all aspects of our

lives, with a special focus on the increasing number of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in the country. These people who are based in areas which do not have constant and reliable service deserve better.

We want the Sheanut farmer, the Community Health nurse, the Business Startup Owner looking for financing, the woman buying drugs and wanting to check the authenticity of the drug, the student who wants to order a book from an online service provider and many others to be connected as well.

Government seeks to continuously partner with stakeholders in all sectors, to provide the appropriate environment to promote the adoption of ICT tools within our country as they can increase the competitiveness of SMEs and enable the creation of more flexible links with trading partners because of faster and more reliable communication channels.

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

I wish to encourage you all to be open and honest as you share ideas to make the discussions beneficial. It is all about finding solutions to issues of concern so that Ghana becomes a winner. There should be no calcified positions.

The other focus of today's discussions is on OTT Services, of which there was a lot of media discussion last week. The reality of today's telecommunication Industry is that consumers are in control. Consumers love innovation, flexibility, efficiency, comfort, and more often than not, low-cost alternatives and will always seek them out to enhance their livelihoods.

Our mandate should be to seek a balanced approach such that all stakeholders in this industry have their needs fulfilled. It is also imperative for us to learn

from other countries and understand why they have or have not encouraged this trend of affairs.

But in all this, ***I wish to state emphatically that Government is not and has not in any way considered a ban on OTT services. We believe that as an emerging trend, the regulator, together with operators and consumers should find a middle ground which befits our peculiar situation.***

To this end we wish to reiterate that we recognise the media as development partners and as such, we need your support in communicating accurate and verified messages to the public.

ELECTIONS

Ladies and Gentlemen,

During this period leading up to elections let us all pursue a peaceful environment where our aspirations and businesses would grow and also use our telecommunication channels/cyberspace effectively and safely to support Ghana's continued democratic journey.

I urge everyone to fully participate and make this forum a success.

Thank you.

God Bless Us All.