



**STATEMENT BY HON. DR PEYA MUSHELENGA, MP
MINISTER OF INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY (ICT)
ON THE OCCASSION OF
THE LAUNCH OF THE ATU-AFRICA INNOVATION CHALLENGE 2021, IN
PARTNERSHIP WITH ITU)**

**Virtual meeting
15 June 2021**

The ATU Secretary General, Mr. John OMO,

The ITU Representative, Deputy Director, Telecommunications Development Bureau, Mr. Stephen BEREAX;

Title Sponsor, Mr. Stephen CHEN, Vice President, Huawei Southern, Africa Region;

Gold Sponsor: Dr. Bienvenu AGBOKPONTO SOGLO, Government and Policy Director for Africa.

Ladies and gentlemen,

It gives me great pleasure to be here today, address you and join you in marking this milestone. This is no ordinary day, but a significant day in which we should appreciate the symbolism of this event, particularly for what it envisions for our continent. Vision has always been a principal part of initiating and greasing forward momentum. This is true for every society that welcomes the value of organisation. I believe that when such societies are counted, Africa's position does remain intact.

In our pursuit of the future we desire for ourselves, sometimes we are provided with all the tools necessary for the journey, and other times we have to start from the very beginning. The collaboration between ATU, ITU, Huawei, Intel and other partners, which has given rise to the ATU Africa Innovation Challenge 2021, is a tool delivered in our hands. For that reason, I will be surprised if we as a continent fail to see this opportunity through the same lenses.

Many African countries are abundantly endowed with natural resources such as minerals, oil resources and good soil for agriculture, among others. It remains an easily dissociable mystery why despite all these massive endowments, underdevelopment continues to define many of our nations. This is not a unique situation to the areas I have made reference to. It is possible that tomorrow, when we review our actions of today, we could look back at this Challenge as a missed opportunity for our young innovators. That is a tragedy that we should avoid at all costs. Innovation is a must. Iranian academics, Hamid Tohidi and Mohammad Mehdi Jabbari ¹state that,

¹ Tohidi H. and Jabbari M.M., 2012, The important (*sic*) of innovation and its crucial role in growth, survival and success of organizations, in *Procedia Technology*, 1, 535-538.

Innovation is the success key for organisations. Every company should have innovation process from creation to playing, when a product enters growth step, the company must play a change in product for supplying to market, because, another companies have reached the technology for producing.

Eliminating poverty, suffering and absence of social security in Africa has to start from somewhere. In my considered opinion that it must not be a slow start, but a radical one. Doing nothing new is easy, especially because templates can always be followed to the letter. Innovation however, has always been an upstart, a stimulant that activates our individual and collective thinking. Today, we play host to many problems that are hurtful to both our social and economic fabric. Our infrastructure, educational systems, health facilities, industries, and many other sectors are in hospital, in need of urgent attention. It cannot be a function of operational normalcy to resuscitate these sectors, and neither can it be the responsibility of the ageing population whose ideas have already undergone experiment. Our young people must come out of the woods, fold their sleeves and head straight to work. That is our best chance at forward momentum.

The challenge, from where I stand, has always been the lack of resources for youths to facilitate their emergence from their brackets; brackets that too, hide the African brain. This is a cry that has traveled down generations, and which we are prepared to stop in our time. Gladly, we have the hands of ATU and ITU to hold onto even as we look towards putting together a formidable alliance with like-minded stakeholders for our journey forward. It is my conviction that since generating sustained economic growth in Africa remains one of the most pressing challenges to development, we must start to see that ICT is an important factor in Africa's socio-economic growth. Just as we re-engineer ourselves in other sectors, we must find ways to ensure that ICT innovations are designed to respond to the challenges we face as a society. Of course in doing so, it should never be lost to us that digital innovation is cross sectoral and has the potential to develop quickly and feed innovation into less developed sectors.

If we must remain competitive on the international stage, our willingness and ability to innovate is critical. Innovation is a complex process incorporating investment, education, networking, community building, cultural change, economic factors and chance. In between all these factors

are individuals, either going too far off the track alone, or too far to nowhere on their own. If they find themselves and find each other, then we can all possibly find what we are looking for.

Reflecting on innovation as a subject that I understand ATU and ITU Member States to be so particular about, I appreciate three contributions it always somehow somewhere finds a way to elevate. That is; improved public services through innovative ICT solutions, room for governments, civil society, and the private sector to work together, and now, its potential to provoke businesses to develop ICT solutions and compete on a global scale by creating jobs, wealth, and economic growth. Therefore, as the ATU Africa Innovation Challenge 2021 is set in motion, I urge us to be as supportive as possible, to the process and outcomes that it comes with. Many times, we lack the opportunity to own and be proud of something as Africa's own, majorly because as a result of nationalism, we are often reminded of our loyalty to our own individual nations. This Challenge however, is something to be proud of, and it must be upon us to ensure its continuity down many generations after ourselves.

Ladies and gentlemen

As I conclude, I am happy to share with you my excitement at the multinational, and cross-continent interest in this Challenge. It is delightful to see the International Telecommunication Union here, and of course, the same goes for Huawei and Intel. Truly, there can never be better affirmation of the concept of this Challenge, other than the level of partnership it has attracted. Our coming together is emblematic, giving us an idea of how we can set out to accomplish what needs to be done today.

Let us own and popularise the ATU Africa Innovation Challenge 2021. Let us make it an unstoppable force.

I thank you.

