

**COMMONWEALTH ICT MINISTERS FORUM 2016, 14 - 16 JUNE
2016, LONDON, UK**

**DRAFT WELCOME ADDRESS BY SHOLA TAYLOR, SECRETARY-
GENERAL OF THE COMMONWEALTH TELECOMMUNICATIONS
ORGANISATION**

CLOSED-DOOR MEETING, 14 JUNE 2016

The Secretary-General of the Commonwealth Secretariat,
The Honourable Minister of Communications of Nigeria and Outgoing
Chairman of the Commonwealth ICT Ministers Forum,
Honourable Ministers of ICTs,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

The staff of the CTO Secretariat and I are delighted to welcome you to the second Commonwealth ICT Ministers Forum. We are conscious of how precious your time is, and for this reason we are grateful to you for what will be a unique opportunity to listen to your concerns and guidance, to discuss with you some of the work done since the last meeting in 2014, and also to share with you our plans for the years ahead.

Let me start by noting that this meeting coincides with a time of celebrations. Indeed, the CTO is celebrating its 115th Anniversary this

year, which is being marked by a number of celebrations including the first annual Commonwealth ICT & Industry Awards to take place this evening and to which you are all cordially invited. I should also point out that you have arrived in London at a time of highly symbolic celebrations for the United Kingdom, as the Queen of England and Head of the Commonwealth celebrates her 90th birthday which is marked by a number of ceremonies throughout the country since the weekend. Of course, this means that the mood for us at this very point in time is generally celebratory, and your presence here only contributes to enhancing this.

Honourable Ministers,

In just over a month's time it will be a year since I accepted to take on this job as Secretary-General. With your permission, I would like to say a few words about why I did so and in doing so expand on the purpose of our presence here. And, of course, later this morning, I will have the opportunity to outline the role ICTs can play in development within the framework of our new Strategic Plan for 2016 - 2020.

It is no secret that many of us present here come from countries that are said to have missed the agricultural revolution; many of these countries are also said to have missed the industrial revolution. But, if it is also a revolution, the information revolution is certainly one of a different kind. Unlike agriculture and manufacturing that require significant capital and land and rely heavily and perhaps more than ever before on physical transportation and logistics, information-based

sectors such as IT, the service industry and the creative arts can work from anywhere and deliver their products or services anywhere else at anytime, in a matter of minutes or even seconds, thanks to data communications networks. Because of today's Internet and technology-rich environment, governments can reach out to citizens and vice-versa instantly for tasks that once took days, weeks or months; trade supply chains have never been as optimised as they are today, with single fast moving consumer goods tracked in real time from their assembly by manufacturers to their collection from stores by consumers. With artificial intelligence, machine-to-machine communications and the Internet of Things, information is increasingly generated from anything anywhere and instantly put to use, and its benefits are endless.

Unlike the agricultural and industrial revolutions, this revolution is one that every one of our citizens can be part of and benefit from. They can be present, learn, share or trade in the borderless cyberspace in ways that were simply not possible for them in the pure physical world.

Sadly, there are still far too many of our citizens who are left out of the opportunities information and communications technology brings; for too many of them, accessing the Internet is as prohibitive today as making a phone call 20 years ago. Something has to change.

That is why I took on the job. Having been in the field of ICTs for over 30 years now, I have witnessed the evolution and seen the cross-cutting transformation ICTs have brought to individuals by the hundreds if not more, to communities and to nations. And so I believe passionately in

the difference they can make to the lives of the many more who are still left out.

With the recent completion of our four-year Strategic Plan for 2016 - 2020, I can modestly say that at the CTO, we have a sense of the collective national and collective strengths of our member countries, as well as a sense of where challenges persist and what we need to do in order to help address them. And that is why this year's Forum is held under the theme "Enhancing the Commonwealth through Innovative ICTs", to ensure that those strengths are build upon.

Your Excellencies,

I have found in the CTO an organisation that is sufficiently agile to make that much-needed difference. You are the shareholders of this organisation and I humbly urge you to make the most of what it can contribute to your efforts to using ICTs to support your countries' national economic development plans.

We have pressing challenges and shared opportunities, which this meeting should help us address, namely:

- Lack of universal broadband access;
- Insufficiently predictable and effective regulatory environments;
- Growing and repeated threats of cybercrime;
- Growing ICT innovation but persisting limited applications in key areas such as health, agriculture and commerce; and

- The need for a more mutual understanding ahead of international treaty conferences and therefore a more coordinated Commonwealth approach.

With meetings such as this one, the CTO is well placed as an organisation to help all of us make progress in each one of these areas, and I am convinced that resolutions reached at this Forum, if implemented correctly, will make a patent difference to the impact ICTs are having in all our countries, and even beyond.

Once again, Your Excellencies, welcome to your Forum.

Thank you.