

Welcome Address by

Hon. Tebelelo Seretse, M.P.

Minister of Works, Transport & Communications

On the occasion of the official opening of the Botswana
Telecommunications Authority Offices

29 August 2002 Gaborone,
Botswana

Director of Ceremonies

Your Excellency the President Mr. F. G. Mogae and Mrs.

Mogae

Your Excellency the Secretary General of the International

Telecommunications Union, (ITU) Mr. Yoshio Utsumi

Honourable Speaker of the National Assembly

Honourable Cabinet Ministers

Your Excellencies Members of the Diplomatic Corps

BTA Board of Directors

Distinguished Guests

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my singular honour to welcome you to this occasion which marks the official opening the Botswana Telecommunications Authority (BTA) office. We are very pleased indeed to have you all share with us this important day.

Your Excellency may I acknowledge your presence and say how grateful we are in that you have found some time in your busy schedule, especially this week, to be with us this evening. May I also on behalf of the Government, the Ministry and the people of Botswana, extend a special welcome to our special guest of honour, the Secretary General of International Telecommunications Union (ITU) Mr. Yoshio Utsumi, who is paying an official visit to our country at our invitation. We are also grateful that he has agreed to officially open the BTA office during his visit. This is a double celebration in that we also celebrate the fifth anniversary of BTA's existence which

was set up in December 1996.

Mr. Secretary General we know that undoubtedly you have a demanding schedule particularly this year as we are only a few weeks away from the ITU Plenipotentiary Conference in Morocco. Thank you and once again, welcome to Botswana.

One of our old customs has a rule for controlling people who like making long speeches. The rule is, the speaker stands on one leg while addressing the audience and as soon as his second foot touches the ground, the speaker must stop. I am not going to speak standing on one leg but I will adhere to the spirit of that rule and be brief.

Let me go beyond the mere welcoming remarks and take a few more moments to put this occasion into its context by briefly mapping out the development of the telecommunications sector reform in Botswana.

The history of sector reform goes back to 1 April of 1980 when the Botswana Telecommunications Corporation (BTC) Act came into force. The Act created BTC out of the then Department of Posts and Telecommunications and established it as a parastatal with sole right to provide telecommunication services in Botswana. The government then entered into a management agreement with Cable and Wireless PLC to manage BTC until 1994.

By the early 1990s a number of mobile cellular equipment manufacturers started to visit us and encouraged us to purchase

mobile cellular networks. In the mid 1990s, Botswana started complaining about unsatisfactory service provided by BTC. The government then directed my Ministry to introduce sector reforms giving priority to the introduction of mobile services.

The Ministry awarded a consultancy contract to a consortium consisting of Swedtel and ISO Swedish Management Group to assist in the formulation of appropriate telecommunications policy and the enactment of appropriate and effective legislation. This was a joint project between our government and the Government of Sweden and we are indeed grateful to Sweden for this generous assistance. The consultants and officials of my Ministry traveled the length and breadth of this country to address Village Development Committees, District Councils, and consulted with business organisations and other stakeholders. The Ministry and the consultant's work culminated in a Telecommunications Policy of December 1995. The policy emphasised the need for Botswana to introduce competition in the sector. Subsequently the Telecommunications Act of 1996 was enacted in August 1996 providing the legislative foundation of the Botswana Telecommunications Authority. At the same time the Botswana Telecommunications Corporation (Amendment) Act of 1996 was passed eliminating BTC's legal monopoly over provision of all public telecommunication services.

The liberalisation of the telecommunication sector and establishment of the BTA has brought about positive and

commendable results. These are characterised by the rapid pace of telecommunications coverage and connections, accelerated economic and commercial growth of the industry with a turnover estimated at around P800 million from P200 million in 1996. However, the future still holds many challenges and hurdles. Botswana still has to ensure her place in the information and communications technologies (ICTs) sector. Key decisions are still required regarding Internet access, Voice over Internet Protocol and other issues. However, given BTA's achievements over the past five years, I have no doubt that, with time, these issues will be addressed and resolved.

We have been encouraged by the strides that we have made over the last five years and we now like to share our experience with the telecommunications fraternity within the higher echelons of the ITU structures. As a result, we have recently notified the Secretary General of our desire to stand for Council elections at the forthcoming ITU Plenipotentiary for the thirteen seats reserved for Region D (Africa). We feel that Botswana is also in a position to share with others the experience of a regional organisation like the Telecommunications Regulators' Association of Southern Africa (TRASA) as one of its founder members and host to its Secretariat.

I have no doubt in my mind that with the encouragement and assistance by the ITU, Botswana has laid a firm foundation for a vibrant and an effective regulatory environment that will enable

Botswana to reap the full benefits of the information and communications technologies (ICTs) revolution as we prepare for the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) to be held in Geneva in 2003 and in Tunis in 2005. It is at the WSIS that the international community will have an opportunity to develop a common vision and understanding of the information society issues.

We wish to acknowledge the tremendous effort that the ITU is making in facilitating international policy making process particularly with respect to information and communications technologies to make telecommunication services accessible to every citizen of the earth.

With these few remarks, I wish to thank you once again for honouring our invitation. May I now, consistent with Botswana tradition of exceptional hospitality invite you to feel at home and enjoy the evening.

I thank you

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