



**STATEMENT BY THE CHAIRMAN OF THE CTO**

**Mr. CUTHBERT M. LEKAUKAU**

**ON THE OCCASION ON THE CTO FORUM, COLOMBO, SRI LANKA**

**20 SEPTEMBER, 2004**

The Right Hon Mahinda Rajapakse, the Prime Minister of Sri Lanka,

Honourable Ministers present here both within Sri Lanka and visiting dignitaries who are delegates,

Your Excellencies, members of the diplomatic corps

Members of the CTO Council,

Distinguished delegates,

Ladies and gentlemen

I have the pleasure in welcoming all of you to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Forum which precedes the 44<sup>th</sup> Council meeting of the Commonwealth Telecommunication Organisation in short CTO. I thank the Right Honourable Prime Minister of Sri Lanka, for accepting to be with us on this important occasion, notwithstanding his busy schedule and indeed he wants to leave as soon as possible as he has another pressing appointment at 10 a.m.. I also wish to thank the Honourable ministers from our member countries who have journeyed from near and far for this occasion.

The presence here also of so many representatives of the Commonwealth diplomatic corps here in Sri Lanka, attests to the commitment that so many of our member states attach not just to the CTO but to the important role that improved cooperation amongst Commonwealth countries can play in the national development of our member states, and especially in their ICT sector. I am equally grateful for the commendable attendance of the Forum by members of the Council. Although attendance of the Annual Fora is a Constitutional responsibility, I recognise that our Fora have to be informative and well organised, if Council members are to attend in

sufficient numbers. For this reason, I also wish to thank our hosts, the people and the government of Sri Lanka through the Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (TRC) of Sri Lanka, and CTO Management for their work in organising this event.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The subjects to be addressed during this Forum and the range of speakers assembled for the next two days, attests to the growing importance of information and communication technologies in promoting the development of our nations and in improving the performance of the business sector. Most of us are witnesses to the rapid changes that have been achieved in so many countries thanks to the contribution of ICTs to their economies. For developing countries, there is therefore a continued urgency in developing and implementing policies, regulations and operational strategies that make the best use of ICTs in our national and corporate planning processes. It is my hope that the new ideas we may obtain from this Forum and the discussions that the various presentations will generate will inspire us all to approach the issue of making ICTs a facilitator and enabler in development with new vigour and greater determination.

Many of you will be staying on for the CTO Council meeting after the Forum. But for those who will not be with us, let me say a few words about the CTO. As you may know, it has been my pleasure to serve you as Chairman of Council over the past two years. During these years, I have been privileged to oversee a significant transition in the Constitution, structure, strategic priorities and operational orientations of the CTO. We now have a new CTO with a new CEO who has presented us with a new vision, a renewed management team and a number of new programmes aimed at catapulting the CTO to new heights. The CTO has revamped its management style and refocused its outlook. The range of subjects and Papers which the Council will discuss on Wednesday and Thursday provide ample evidence of where the CTO is heading.

Today, the CTO is not merely an association of telecommunications companies as it used to be. It is a veritable international organisation, owned by its member governments, but with ample room for the distinct but common challenges faced by policy makers, regulators, operators, other ICT stakeholders and other development partners to be identified and addressed. This Forum seeks to do exactly that, as is evident in the Programme for this Forum. The new CTO seeks to embrace the vast new field of ICTs—from telecoms to Internet, to information technology, to broadcasting. The CTO is also interested in these disciplines not from a theoretical perspective but in terms of the real impact of these agencies of communications on the real lives of real people. As such, the CTO is very much concerned about how ICTs can enable countries to reduce poverty and achieve the targets set in the Millennium Development Goals. The CTO seeks to be more relevant and more beneficial to the masses of our people whom we represent here.

We live in a challenging world. Over the past 100 years, the CTO and its predecessor organisations have made important contributions to the growth of our

nations and our ICT institutions. Over the next 100 years, it is my conviction that the CTO will assume ever greater importance in plans for our governments, the capacities of our regulatory institutions, the performance and profitability of our operating companies, and the satisfaction of ICT consumers. The path of the CTO in the near future may be more arduous than the path we have followed so far. This is the time therefore for all ICT stakeholders in the Commonwealth to give their fullest support to the CTO to enable it to serve us fully. The CTO can be only as strong as we make it.

This Forum is but one of the many events held by the CTO in the course of a year. These CTO fora enable many of us to exchange views on best practices and help each other avoid mistakes that others have made or that we have made. Our consultations can help us gain knowledge and wisdom and avoid expensive mistakes. Seen in this light, membership and partnership with the CTO calls for a rather modest investment of resources and time, compared with the invaluable lessons to be learnt and experiences to be gained. Over the next days, we will hear from each other, learn from each other, and leave here more knowledgeable than when we arrived in Colombo. We shall also learn some more about the new approaches, new initiatives and new strategies of the CTO, and how our Organisation can serve us all better. I urge all of you to take active part in the deliberations and make contributions that will redound to the excellence of the Forum.

As a country that is taking its first steps towards the wider application of ICT in the development process, Sri Lanka provides the ideal setting for the Forum and the Council meeting. As a country with a long and rich history, Sri Lanka's efforts in the ICT sphere poses the question we at CTO are trying to address. How can the new cutting-edge ICT products and services be woven into Sri Lanka's rich cultural traditions without each losing its identity and its value. The theme of this Forum- ICT: Business and Development is partly intended to seek an answer to this question.

In closing my address, permit me to thank the people and Government of Sri Lanka for deciding to host this august event here. We appreciate very much the warm hospitality that has been extended to us since we arrived and indeed it was warm and which we know will pervade the Forum and the Council meeting. I am certain that Sri Lanka's excellent hospitality will encourage several other countries to offer to host the next Forum and Council meeting next year around this time.

For those of you who will not be staying for the Council meeting, let me say that it has been my great honour to serve this institution as the Chairman for the last two years. Of course, I had also earlier served as the member of the Executive Committee and particularly as a Chairman of the Constitutional Review Committee which lead the best of the new Constitution. As I prepare to hand over this position to my successor and you will determine the successor at the end of the Council meeting, I wish to invite you all to give the same cooperation and support to my successor as I have enjoyed. The support that the CTO Chairman needs is not only from other Council members, but indeed from the wider ICT community of which all of you are a part.

Allow me to officially declare open this Forum and invite the CEO, Dr. Ekwow Spio-Garbrah, to address us.