

**10th Anniversary of the Botswana
Telecommunications Authority (BTA)**

**Speech by Hon. Pelonomi Venson-Moitoi
Minister of Communications Science and Technology
14 December 2006
Gaborone International Convention Centre (GICC).**

Your Excellency the President

Your Honour the Vice President

Your Lordship the Chief Justice

Honourable Speaker of the National Assembly

Honourable Ministers here Present

**Your Excellencies, Members of the Diplomatic Corps &
Foreign Missions**

ITU Secretary General Elect, Mr. Hamadoun Touré

Members of Parliament

Members of House of Chiefs

**Members of BTA Board, National Broadcasting Board
and other Boards**

Visiting Heads of Regulatory Authorities

BTA Chief Executive

Distinguished Guests

Ladies & Gentlemen

It is an honour and a privilege for me to be here today officiating at this landmark occasion of the 10th Anniversary of the Botswana Telecommunications Authority (BTA) and indeed of the liberalisation of the telecommunications sector in Botswana.

This occasion brings us to the crossroads in the development of the telecommunications sector. On the one hand Mr. C. M. Lekaukau who established the BTA and set in motion the first phase of liberalisation will lay down his tools by end of this month. Mr. Lekaukau's name has become synonymous with telecommunications regulatory landscape in Botswana. He has contributed immensely to where we are today and his departure is a challenge to the industry.

I should say that Mr. Lekaukau also put Botswana on the world map as far as the telecommunications industry is concerned. It is through this international connection that we are fortunate to have Mr Hamadoun Toure, ITU Secretary General –elect, here with us today. Sir, we welcome you to Botswana and we are delighted to have you here.

Distinguished guests, there are heightened expectations from both consumers and service providers as the industry enters the second phase of liberalisation. Precipitated by technology advancements, especially digitalisation, the second phase of liberalisation promises to change the way telecommunications is being run today and ultimately bring better value for money to the consumer.

Looking back I am glad that over the past ten years a lot has happened to enable Botswana to stake her claim on the global information and communications technologies (ICTs) stage. Achievements include the establishment of the BTA and the introduction of competition. This resulted in the introduction of mobile telephony that has changed our way of leaving and doing business; the advent of Internet Services; and even the arrival of commercial radio broadcasting are some of the known results. The cumulative benefits of all these initiatives, you will all agree, have been enormous.

Looking into the future, the Ministry of Communications Science and Technology has submitted a draft Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Policy to Parliament for approval, which will pave the way for our industry. Maitlamo, as the ICT policy is known, intends to provide

easy access to valuable information on health, jobs and education; to move Government information and services on-line; to stimulate increased levels of e-commerce ; to connect all schools and libraries to the Internet ; and to increase ICT related education for students – both children and adults, just to mention but a few.

In line with the ideals of this policy and in our quest to improve Botswana's competitiveness and efficiency we have a decision invest in the East African Sub-marine System (EASSy). This system will provide adequate fibre – optic broadband connectivity and capacity. It is expected that the draft ICT policy in combination with EASSy initiative will set the scene for making Botswana an ICT hub.

Ladies and Gentlemen, technological advancements have made it inappropriate to talk of basic voice telephony services only without reference to a variety of value-added data services available in today's digital networks. It was in view of these advancements that we made a decision to further liberalise the telecommunications market in a bid to enhance competition in the sector. We believe that further liberalisation will allow and encourage private sector participation in a range of competitive value-added services especially in data, internet and mobile communications.

Pursuant to this decision, the BTA is finalising a licensing framework designed for a more liberalised and converged telecommunications market which entails service neutral licences. We are convinced that it is in the interest of all business partners to have in place an unambiguous licensing framework that establishes clear and verifiable obligations that are supported by robust enforcement mechanisms, which could facilitate sustainable competition.

Botswana like all other developing countries faces a great challenge in rolling out communications services to remote communities. Over the years, Government has been addressing this challenge by subsidising the Botswana Telecommunications Corporation (BTC) to rollout services to these otherwise uneconomic locations. The rural telecommunications programme that has been driven through BTC is now being reviewed with a view to finding the most effective and efficient way of reaching out to rural communities.

As part of this new approach, Government has decided to establish a Universal Service Fund whose modus operandi is still being crafted by my Ministry and the BTA. In principle, operators who would be willing to venture into rural areas would be subsidised using this Fund through reverse auctions mechanisms. The BTA has, in the

meantime, contributed 10 million Pula as seed funding for the Universal Service Fund.

The Government of Botswana is considering measures and policies aimed at strengthening the role of the private sector in our economy. In this regard privatisation of the BTC is on course. In addition to the usual objectives for privatisation, the specific objectives for the privatization of the BTC entail:

- subjecting BTC to greater competition by levelling the playing field for other operators to compete fairly;**
- enhancing the contribution of telecommunications industry as an enabler to doing business cost effectively and to improve of Botswana's competitiveness;**
- reducing Government's financial commitments and operational involvement in telecommunications sector; and**
- facilitating development and deepening of capital market.**

With the above objectives in mind, the intention is to attract the best deal in the transaction by attracting a strategic equity partner who truly understands telecommunications business and with proven track record in telecommunications business that could help

could help BTC achieve greater heights in terms of service delivery and technological advancements.

Distinguished Guests, in conclusion, I am grateful for the work BTA has done to the telecommunications sector thus far. I hope that this celebration will encourage the Authority to tackle the next stage of liberalisation and its accompanying regulatory challenges with even more vigour.

Happy 10th Anniversary BTA!!

I thank you for your attention.