

**KEYNOTE ADDRESS BY HONOURABLE MINISTER FOR COMMUNICATIONS,  
HONOURABLE EDWARD OMANE BOAMAH AT THE WORLD TELECOMMUNICATION  
AND INFORMATION SOCIETY DAY HELD AT THE ACCRA INTERNATIONAL  
CONFERENCE CENTRE ON THE 17<sup>TH</sup> OF MAY 2016**

Representatives of the United Nations,

Board, Management and Staff of the NCA,

Distinguished Guests from Operators and Service Providers,

Members of the Press,

Students,

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good Morning,

It is my pleasure and privilege to welcome all of you to this unique gathering, bringing together stakeholders and key representatives from the telecommunications sector.

Since November 1969, May 17 of each year has been set aside by the International Telecommunications Union (ITU) to recognise the impact of Telecommunications and ICT in the everyday lives of the individuals.

The purpose of World Telecommunication and Information Society Day (WTISD) is to help increase awareness of the possibilities that the use of the Internet, other Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) can bring to societies and economies, as well as of ways to bridge the digital divide. As a result, member countries of the International Telecommunications Union (ITU) commemorate the day annually by organising events.

The theme for this year's World Telecommunications and Information Society Day is "ICT Entrepreneurship for Social Impact", as the ITU has taken an interest in the role ICTs play in developing entrepreneurs.

However as you may see from our banner, while it may seem that we may have strayed from the theme; we should be assured that our discussions today border on ways to develop our industry as well as to create the enabling environment to nurture entrepreneurs in Ghana. As a result our discussions today, will be on “Addressing Challenges of the Communications Industry to promote Growth and Development – Focus on Domestic Roaming and OTT Services”.

ICT plays a large role in our day-to-day lives and addresses challenges facing Ghanaians in general. Sectors such as finance, health, education, agriculture and the Government are quickly embracing technology for dissemination of information, enhancement of service delivery and to reach their customers more effectively and efficiently. This is where it becomes clear that an enabling ICT environment is needed to develop entrepreneurs within these sectors.

The growth of mobile money for instance in the country has motivated change in the business model of most financial institutions in the country and has ultimately led to jobs in most areas across the country. However, it is clear and evident that there are pockets of areas in Ghana which are underserved in terms of telecommunications and may benefit from interventions such as Domestic Roaming.

The Government acknowledges that ICTs can serve as the engine for developing entrepreneurs and transform the country into a competitive business hub, extending to all areas in Ghana. An implementation of such a transformation will stimulate, promote and encourage innovation and furthermore provide the required quality of service while developing a reliable communications infrastructure.

One major aim of the Government is to consider the case for domestic roaming. This service will enable mobile users to switch from one network to the other in the event of network failure. Furthermore, this will ultimately be of an advantage to the police and other security officers in the event of crisis and mass information.

Currently the increase in internet penetration across the country means more people are using mobile services. Unfortunately, this penetration means that consumers are using more than one service provider for the same services but for different reasons, where one consumer may want to use another provider to enjoy one promotion or the other, another consumer will want an alternative service provider simply because they may be going to areas which are not covered by

their service providers. In any case, we are sure that the service providers may enjoy some benefits from this practice, however, is the consumer fully satisfied?

This has led to the development and availability of applications which bypass our traditional modes of communication. However, this has been interpreted as a loss of revenue to the operators.

Consequently, the theme for this year's Digital Family Forum is crucial in our bid to increase awareness of the opportunities that the use of ICT have on all aspects of our lives, with a special focus on the increasing number of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in the country, a number of people who are based in areas which do not have constant and reliable service. In many developing countries, SMEs are contributing significantly to the economy and are therefore directly connected to creating the better Ghana we all crave for. The same opportunities that SMEs in the urban areas have should also be available to the SMEs in rural areas. We want the Shea Butter farmer, the Community Health nurse, the startup looking for financing, the woman buying drugs and wanting to check the authenticity of the drug, the student who wants to order a book from Tonaton and many others to be connected as well.

Through the Government's initiative of providing a platform for information technologies to thrive, SMEs across the country should take advantage and use ICTs, especially over-the-top (OTT) services to promote their businesses. Take for example the growing Ghanaian online markets, whose mobile apps are contributing towards an increased level of customer satisfaction and opening up opportunities for various providers to offer their services and products to a greater number of potential customers, and in some cases, providing additional socio-economic benefits including employment.

Government seeks to continuously partner with other stakeholders in all sectors, to provide the appropriate environment to promote the adoption of ICT tools within our country as they can increase the competitiveness of SMEs and enable the creation of more flexible links with trading partners because of faster and more reliable communication channels.

In this light, I urge an open and honest discussion of facts and issues from all stakeholders gathered here today, so that as an industry, we determine what is best for us as Ghanaians.

The other focus of today's discussions is on OTT Services, of which there was a lot of media discussion last week. The reality of today's telecommunication Industry is that consumers are in control. Consumers love innovative, and more often than not, low-cost alternatives and will always seek them out. Our mandate should be to seek a balanced approach such that all stakeholders in this arena have their needs fulfilled. It is also imperative for us learn from other countries and understand why they have or have not encouraged this trend of affairs.

But in all this, I state emphatically that the Government is not and has not in any considered a ban on OTT services. We believe that as an emerging trend, the regulator, together with operators and consumers should find a middle ground which befits our peculiar situation. Again, I urge you the media to support the agencies by conveying messages which have been released and to avoid colouring them for the purposes of boosting readership and listenership.

During this period leading up to elections, it is my wish that all holders of communication licences and authorisation will use their channels effectively to support Ghana's continued democracy journey.

I would like to take this opportunity to express my sincere thanks to the organisers and in particular our honourable speakers, media and participants who have taken time out of their schedules to be here today.

I urge everyone to fully participate and make this forum a success.

Thank you.