

DRAFT SPEAKING NOTES: KEYNOTE ADDRESS BY THE MINISTER OF COMMUNICATIONS, DR IVY MATSEPE-CASABURRI, AT THE LAUNCH OF THE MERAKA INSTITUTE ON 17 MAY 2005

Deputy Minister, MECs, ambassadors and high commissioners, COO of CSIR, distinguished guests, I have great pleasure in speaking to you today at the launch of the African Advanced Institute for ICT (AAIICT). This Institute was driven by the vision of President Thabo Mbeki. It is therefore apt that we revisit his words from his State of Nation Address in February 2005 when he stated that:

“Our programme for the coming here year is premised on the broad objectives to increase investment in the economy, lower the cost of doing business, improve economic inclusion and provide the skills required by the economy.”

This Institute represents one of the steps taken by South African government to address the important social and economic imperatives. The establishment of the Institute represents an intervention aimed not only at addressing the needs of the First economy, but importantly also addressing the very real and pressing needs of the Second economy.

The on-going process of technological and market convergence, the world-wide opening of the telecommunications sector, in particular, to full competition and the rapid growth of the Internet and on-line services, is leading to the creation of new market structures and new role for market players.

These dynamics have created new challenges for the training and development and multi-skilling of new and existing participants in a highly volatile market environment. South Africa, in particular, has a shortage of newly skilled people and this country also has an opportunity to contribute skills development to the rest of the continent of Africa where needs, in many instances, are greater.

Hence, the name of the institute as AAIICT.

Today also marks another important global event, the celebration of World Telecommunications Day. It is therefore appropriate that today we launch an institution aimed at addressing issues related to increasing access to communications technology.

Background:

An inter-ministerial committee comprising of the Ministers of Communications, Science and Technology, Education, Labour, Trade and Industry and Public Service and Administration was tasked with ensuring the realisation of the vision of President Mbeki to establish this important institute. This vision included ensuring that the Institute will facilitate national economic and social development through human resource development and needs based research and innovation in Information and Communications Technologies (ICTs).

This venture again demonstrates the new way government is working in an integrated and co-operative manner. I would like thank my colleagues for their support and contribution towards the establishment of this institution.

The Institute is envisaged as a substantial intervention that will contribute to a vibrant local industry and reinforcing the view of South Africa as an innovator and leader in ICT. Most importantly, the Institute will form collaborative relationships with government, industry, academia and civil society in achieving its objectives.

The Name

I am proud to formally announce that this institute will be known as the Meraka Institute. The name is a Sesotho word which has different interpretations, but in this instance relates to a common space that is shared by a community for creative and productive activity. It can also refer to a common grazing area – in other words a place where wealth, represented in this instance by our cattle. In today's economy, knowledge is wealth. We are confident that the Meraka Institute will live up to its name in creating more out of sharing together.

The components of the Meraka Institute

The Meraka Institute is initially built on existing institutional capacity and organisational infrastructure and draws on the CSIR's organisational and management functions supplemented by a distinct governance structure for ensuring implementation of its strategy. It also encompasses what was called the Institute for Space and Software Applications (ISSA).

The Meraka Institute will achieve its mission through three complementary and interlinked programmes:

- Human capital development – in cooperation with Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) supporting students in employment to attain further qualifications and professional experience
- Application innovation – engaging in applied research and development to realise societal benefits from ICT R&D, especially indigenous ICT R&D.
- Technology Research - doing advanced research in selected technology domains relevant to the local context in cooperation with HEIs through mechanisms such as the establishment of critical-mass research units at HEIs

In striving to achieve a leadership position in identified domains, relevant experts will be sourced locally and abroad, including involvement of South Africans living overseas. Special attention will be focused on getting African and developing country experts. In achieving these objectives, the Meraka Institute will be pursuing a high-throughput employment model aimed at creating the required stream of world class African human capital resources that the sector, country and the continent requires.

Importance of MI:

The importance of the Meraka Institute in developing the ICT sector and economic well-being of South Africans cannot be overstated. At this important time in our history, having celebrated 10 years of democracy, institutions like the Meraka Institute represent the next important phase in the development of

our democracy. The next ten years of democracy has to ensure that we consolidate the gains of democracy and enable all South Africans to reap the benefits thereof. In order to achieve this there is a real need to develop our human resource capacity to play a meaningful role in the development of all South Africans and Africans in general.

Role in the rest of the Continent

The Meraka Institute will support regional initiatives under the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), collaborating with ICT organisations through staff and student exchanges and establishment of co-operative and collaborative programmes. In addition, the Institute will ensure that its domains of intervention will be focused on socio-economic development needs of the Continent. In the exhibition area you will be able to see some of the initiatives that reflect this African focus.

The Institute will also leverage international science and technology collaboration and establish global links to international programmes, especially those in the South, in order to contribute to and take advantage of international efforts in redressing the digital divide.

I would like to thank the industry, government, those working in the centre, institutions. I say thank you very much for making this a successful launch.

Conclusion

I wish to challenge the management of the Institute to ensure that it plays an active role in the development of South Africans at all levels, in both the First as well as the Second economies and take our continent to greater heights.

THANK YOU