STATEMENT ON BEHALF OF THE GROUP OF 77 AND CHINA BY THE SOUTH AFRICAN MINISTER OF TELECOMMUNICATIONS AND POSTAL SERVICES, H.E. MINISTER SIYABONGA CWELE, AT THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY HIGH-LEVEL MEETING ON THE OVERALL REVIEW OF THE IMPLEMENTATIONS OF THE OUTCOMES OF THE WORLD SUMMIT ON THE INFORMATION SOCIETY (New York, 15 December 2015)

Mr President,

I am honoured and privileged to address this high-level meeting of the General Assembly on behalf of the 134 members of the Group of 77 and China.

I would like to start by congratulating and expressing our appreciation to Ambassador Janis Mazeiks of the Republic of Latvia and Ambassador Lana Nusseibeh of the United Arab Emirates for the sterling leadership they displayed in guiding the review process to its successful conclusion.

The Group of 77 and China fully supports the fundamental principles of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS), which are to create an information society that is underpinned by social, cultural, economic and technical development; and whose objectives are to build partnerships, and bridge the gap between developed and developing countries.

The Group's engagement in the WSIS process is informed by the desire to fulfill its global vision for an inclusive, people-centred, development-oriented global information society; and to enhance its capacity as a tool for economic and social development.

Mr President,

The WSIS agenda is as relevant today as it was at its inception and can be a catalyst for the successful implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the realization of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

It has been ten years since the adoption of the Tunis Agenda, and we recognise the successes in the development of national e-strategies and creation of an enabling environment; adoption of e-applications and mainstreaming ICTs; creating a media environment that promotes information sharing; and regional cooperation.

The advent of broadband has transformed education and health, and has proven to be a useful tool for the delivery of government services. There is increasing recognition of the enhanced multiplier effect that derives from investment in broadband. This is important for developing countries because access to adequate, reliable, affordable and secure ICT infrastructure and devices is still a challenge, particularly for rural areas.

Mr President,

Challenges faced in achieving the information society are further impacted by illiteracy, high levels of unemployment and poverty. Equality of opportunities, especially relating to gender, and digital inclusion tools to cater for people with disabilities are some of the critical factors which have not been addressed adequately.

There is a need for us to address internet challenges, such as privacy, data protection, cybercrime, network security, equal access and participation by all countries and ensuring adaptability of usage in local contexts.

We further recognise that there are many cross-cutting international public policy issues that require attention and are not adequately addressed. In this context, it is important to build a united, equal, open, transparent, fair and balanced platform which recognises all governments on equal voice.

The Tunis agenda called for mechanisms to consider the views of all stakeholders, recognising the contribution of public, private, civil society, intergovernmental and international organizations in their respective roles in the building of an information society. It is those principles which should enshrine the outcomes of our collective decision from this meeting.

Mr President,

We believe as the Group of 77 and China that the information society is underpinned by an understanding that the current society is significantly different from previous social formations; and that information and knowledge are central to the development and emergence of a new form of social organisation in society.

As ICT stewards, we believe that access to information and communications technologies remains essential for all; and hence we should commit to e-skilling, building capacity and ensure that all citizens in the world are connected.

Whilst having a digital society yields benefits, it is important to ensure that our citizens, especially the youth, are educated about the threat of cyber-opportunism. It should be a collective responsibility to invest in youth programmes, create capacity platforms, not only to train in terms of e-skills, but in the developing of e-applications to mitigate security threats such as cybercrime which remains a high priority for us. As we all know, ICTs are critical catalysts for integrated development and accelerated shared growth and the importance of ensuring a secure and robust environment must not be overlooked.

Mr President,

The gender digital divide is a concern. Women, in any society, serve as a pillar, yet, they remain the most vulnerable as the cyber space continues to be used for the exploitation of women and girls. Through private-public partnerships we must tackle cyber discrimination and violence. We need to change societal norms and practises in order to tackle offline and online violence directed at women and children. The development of norms, protocols and standards to safeguard and ensure the proper use of cyber space could contribute to changing societal norms. In addition, we must develop programmes which will empower women and girls and promote their active participation in the digital economy.

The existing imbalance in the development and distribution of software and IT equipment remains a barrier for uptake, rapid deployment of ICT infrastructure and usage by citizens. It is therefore necessary to identify strategic electronic and manufacturing programmes and partnerships, more especially for the developing countries, to ensure joint efforts to free the world markets of the existing monopolies.

We support and encourage the development of Intellectual Property (IP) on open source principles to facilitate universal and unrestricted access, and that the manufacturing of software and hardware

devices should remain a collective priority in order to ensure social and economic development.

We as the Group 77 and China also consider it necessary to promote measures and facilitate favourable conditions for ensuring the progressive development of ICTs. As governments, we should commit to create favourable and harmonised legal and regulatory environments, to promote private sector investment for localisation and this must be scaled up to regional levels for maximum economies of scale.

Mr President,

The Tunis Agenda pushed for financing mechanisms to support the digital agenda. To harness and sustain investment in ICTs requires a political will, incentive schemes, as well as commitments by partners to support local programmes, including those whose return on investment may not be immediate. Fast-tracking ICT infrastructure roll-out should not be at the disadvantage of communities and citizens who face economic hardships. The Addis Ababa Action Agenda recognizes the important contribution that direct investment can make to sustainable development, particularly when projects are aligned to national and regional sustainable development strategies.

With regards to confidence and security in the use of ICTs, the G77 and China is of the view that there is a void created by the lack of international instruments and measures dealing with this. It is no longer prudent to think that bilateral, technical cooperation agreements alone will eradicate crimes committed online. In this regard, there is a need for effective and robust measures at the international level to combat these challenges.

We reaffirm that the same rights that people have offline must also be protected online. We emphasis that the process towards WSIS vision should be considered not only as a function of economic development and the spread of ICTs, but also as a function of progress with respect to realization of human rights and fundamental freedoms.

The need for the for transparency and democratization of the international order, rings true for internet governance as it displays an unbalanced control of what are in essence global resources and infrastructure. It is by now self-evident that the internet and the infrastructure it is based upon is critical for the economic, social and security dimensions of all countries. Different countries rely on the internet for their manufacturing, domestic and foreign trade; while citizens rely on the internet to receive government services, including using it to express their political choices and participate in the countries' political processes.

To a greater extent all countries are exposed to threats to their banking and financial systems, electricity, water and other critical utilities as a result of what happens to the internet and its security. Further, the defense and security forces of countries are also dependent on safe operation of the internet that is free of disruptions and non-interception by others.

In conclusion, Mr President,

I would like to borrow the words of democratic South Africa's founding father, Nelson Mandela, when he addressed the ITU Telecom World on 5th October 2009 and said: "Communication technologies have transformed the way people live and the manner in which countries develop. They have the potential to enable us to solve many of the critical problems confronting us. If this potential is to be realised, then we must find ways of turning these technologies into a resource for all people despite the challenges they face within their communities."

We need to ensure that all people, despite their geographic location and socio-economic

constraints, have equitable and affordable access, rights, protection and freedom to use of ICTs for economic and social benefit.

I thank you.