



Gallagher Estate, Private Bag X16, Midrand 1685, Johannesburg, Republic of South Africa
Tel: (+27) 11 545 5000 - Fax: (+27) 11 545 5136 - Web site: www.pan-african-parliament.org

**KEY NOTE ADDRESS BY H.E THE HON. DR. GERTRUDE MONGELLA,
THE PRESIDENT OF THE PAN-AFRICAN PARLIAMENT
AT THE OPENING OF THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON THE
DEVELOPMENT OF AN EQUITABLE INFORMATION SOCIETY: THE ROLE OF
AFRICAN PARLIAMENTS**

4th-5th March 2009

KIGALI, RWANDA

Presented on her behalf by
The Hon. Hon. Prosper Higirow, MP,
Vice Chair of the Committee on Trade, Customs and Immigration Matters
Pan-African Parliament.

INTRODUCTORY REMARK

It is a pleasure and privilege for me to stand here today in this continentally momentous international conference on behalf of the Pan African Parliament and its President, H.E Hon. DR. Gertrude Mongella.

Dr Mongella could not attend this conference in person due to very tight schedules in addressing other continental issues. She, however, sends her apology for her absence and reaffirmation of her strong support and commitment to the success of this international conference.

I am honoured to present her keynote address to you.

Your Excellency
Paul Kagame,
President of The Republic of Rwanda;

Your Excellency the President of the Senate of Rwanda;
Representatives of the National Parliaments and Governments;
Representatives of the International Community;

Excellencies;
Distinguished Delegates;
Ladies and Gentlemen;

More than ever before, Africa is confronted by numerous challenges, which hinders the people of Africa from enjoying quality of life and sustainable development.

It is Africa and the wellbeing of our people that is adversely affected by the current economic instability and uneven distribution of capital resources.

As the representatives of the people of Africa, we, the parliamentarians, better understand the frustration and long-standing call of the people at the grass root, for economic and political stability and development. Equally, we are beholden, to bring about, debate and explore potential and tangible solutions to address the needs of the people for flourishing and democratic Africa, free from conflicts, corruption, extreme poverty and illiteracy and injustice.

A strong political leadership, commitment and wider involvements are paramount to alleviate the continent's dated challenges and sufferings. We ought to be open, explorative, timely and decisive to benefit from every potential opportunity that could deliver people-centered and sustainable socio-economic development and growth to Africa.

Excellencies;
Distinguished Delegates;
Ladies and Gentlemen;

In today's vibrant and complex digital economy, where information and knowledge are the decisive factors for the survival and development of social entities, Africa is posed with great challenges and opportunities.

Among others, the lack of capital resources; basic and digital illiteracy; inadequate diffusion and under-utilization of ICT infrastructure and services; absence of supportive and harmonized legal framework; scarce and untapped expertise and knowledge are still the main challenges to Africa.

On the other hand, the political willingness and determination by African leaders for ICT initiative and wider and quality education; the continental integration agenda; the rapid and cost effective technological advancements; strong international commitment and partnership to Africa, are some of the opportunities.

It is now time for Africa to devise its own priorities and strategies geared towards transforming the continent into self-sufficient, strong and active player in the new global economy.

As stipulated by the Millennium Development Goals, World Summit on the Information Society, the programme of Africa Parliamentary Knowledge Network (APKN) and symbolic declarations signed by many African parliaments, including the Pan African Parliament, ICT has immense enabling potential for poverty reduction and socio-economic development in Africa. The Pan African Parliament strongly acknowledges the strategic importance of an equitable and all inclusive information society to improve public services, good governance, democracy, human rights and the wellbeing and competitiveness of our people in the global market.

I have no doubt, the development of an equitable information society based on the very interest of the people and coherent Africanized ICT strategies would significantly contribute to the timely achievement of the decades-old continental objectives for strong, prosperous and united Africa.

Excellencies;
Distinguished Delegates;
Ladies and Gentlemen;

African parliaments, and in particular the parliamentarians, have key role and responsibilities to instill, support and scrutinize the development of a sustainable information society in alignment to the best interest of the people, including the disadvantaged and marginalized members of the society.

Notwithstanding the multifaceted challenges to Africa, building an equitable information society should be one of the prioritized agenda of the continent and parliamentary debates.

In this context, the Pan African Parliament further acknowledges, the need for a strong political leadership and commitment; continuous dialogues; favorable and harmonized regulatory legal framework; continental ICT strategies, policies and standards; and sense of accountability and cooperation by all stakeholders, including the parliaments, local governments, private institutions and the academia.

In fact, the establishment of an all-inclusive and equitable information society in Africa is indeed challenging but achievable through the commitment and involvement of major African stakeholders and the continuous support of the international community.

I take this opportunity to urge you all to partner and support the leading African initiatives in capacity building, knowledge creation and exchange of information to make the establishment of an equitable information society, a reality. To this effect, the UN supported *Africa i-Parliaments Action Plan* and *the Africa Parliamentary Knowledge Network* are the key enablers and promises.

Excellencies;
Distinguished Delegates;
Ladies and Gentlemen;

We are witnessing the world is rapidly going digital with borderless global trade, real-time communication, significant dependency on ICT for business operations and instance access to global information. Due to this very global nature of the information society, an effective partnership and support from the international community is paramount.

Therefore, from the international community, I call for more people-centered, well coordinated, measurable and result-oriented partnership to Africa.

Finally, I would like to reassure you, the full support and commitment of the Pan African Parliament towards the establishment of an equitable and competent information society.

With those few remarks, I wish you fruitful deliberation and I am confident this international conference will lay a landmark for a better future to Africa and beyond.

Let us all work together to effectively bridge the digital and economic divide, and build a transformed, prosperous, equitable and united Africa, where its people will be utterly proud to say "I AM AN AFRICAN".

I thank you.