



SPEECH

BY

THE PRESIDENT, HIS EXCELLENCY

CDE. E. D. MNANGAGWA

AT THE

**LAUNCH OF THE NATIONAL ICT POLICIES
AND COMMISSIONING OF THE FIBRE OPTIC
BACKBONE NETWORK**

SOMABHULA-MIDLANDS PROVINCE

7 MARCH 2024

Director of Ceremonies;

Vice President, Hon. Gen. (Rtd) Dr. C. G. D. N. Chiwenga;

Vice President, Hon. Col. (Rtd) Cde. K. C. D. Mohadi;

Minister of Defence and Chairman of ZANU PF, Hon. O. C. Z. Muchinguri-Kashiri;

Minister of State for Provincial Affairs and Devolution Midlands Province, Hon. O. Ncube;

Minister of ICT, Postal and Courier Services, Hon. Dr. T. A. Mavetera;

Minister of Transport and Infrastructure Development, Cde F. T. Mhona;

Other Honourable Ministers here present;

Members of the Politburo and Central Committee;

Chief Secretary to the President and Cabinet, Dr. M. Rushwaya;

Chairman of the Public Service Commission, Dr. V. Hungwe;

Senior Government Officials;

Madzimambo edu/iZinduna zethu;

The Founder and Managing Director of Bandwidth Cloud Services, Mr Yonas Maru;

The Chief Executive Officer of Dandemutande, Mr N. Ncube;

Ladies and Gentlemen.

It is my honour and privilege to be addressing you all at this historic launch of three policies. These are, the Reviewed National ICT Policy; the Smart Zimbabwe 2030 Master-Plan, and the National Broadband Plan.

The fact that we are launching these important policies and the Fibre Optic Backbone Network, here in Somabhula demonstrates that the Second Republic is walking the talk and committed to realising development that leaves no one and no place behind.

Before I proceed with my remarks for this event, I want to thank the people of Somabhula and the Midlands Province for coming out in your large numbers to witness this event.

I also want to thank the Province for resoundingly voting for our ZANU PF Party during the 2023 Harmonised General Elections. Well done. May the unity, good organisation and grassroots mobilisation strength of the Party continue as we go forward.

Ladies and Gentlemen, Comrades and Friends;

The policies we are launching today are in line with our National Development Strategy, where we aim to make sure that all our communities have access to affordable, fast and safe digital technologies. This has become important as societies and economies are now very dependent on ICTs.

The National ICT Policy outlines the guiding framework and development priorities for the ICT sub-sector. It will help promote digital know-how, innovation, the use of Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning, while also strengthening our country's cyber-security measures. At the end of the day, my Administration is creating a good

environment for the growth of a digital economy which empowers our communities, no matter where they live. So this Policy will make sure that learners and young entrepreneurs, whether here in Somabhula, or in Kanyemba or in Gokwe, or Binga all have the same opportunities as those in our big cities like Harare and Bulawayo.

Meanwhile, the Smart Zimbabwe 2030 Masterplan is set to see us achieve more creative societies, through the use of technology. The quality of life of all our people is expected to improve by the use of information and communication technologies.

Digital technologies must go beyond the use of ICT for social media and entertainment. We must use the infrastructure that my Government is putting in place to improve service delivery in healthcare, education and agriculture, among many other aspects.

At the Continental level, Zimbabwe was nominated to lead the Smart Agriculture Flagship Project under the Smart Africa Alliance. So far, our country is using ICT and geo- spatial technologies (our satellite is in space) to predict weather patterns, as well as for land planning and crop assessments, among basic information management within the agriculture sector. This demonstrates the power of ICT.

The National Broadband Plan highlights our determination to closing the digital gap and guarantee universal access to reliable and high-speed internet connectivity. Zimbabwe is, therefore, implementing more initiatives for knowledge sharing, social inclusion and economic growth through the expansion of broadband infrastructure and network coverage.

In addition, the policies we are launching today provide sufficient guidance to the ICT sector. All parties, including Civil Society Organisations, businesses and

the general public, are called upon to play by the rules. Ignorance is no defence.

ICTs must never be deployed or used to promote self-hate and denigrate our beloved country or for spreading falsehoods, malicious information or immoral content. No. My Government will not allow that. **Tisarase hunhu hwedu, se vanhu vatemala**, the descendants of the great Munhumutapa. We must use ICTs to protect and promote our identity, unity, love, harmony, peace, development as well as production and productivity.

Distinguished Guests, Comrades and Friends;

Guided by our mantra “Zimbabwe is open for business”, our Government continues to grant licenses to more service providers to deliver Backbone Network Facilities and Network Services. This is part of the Broadband Expansion Agenda.

The new companies entering this space are expected to increase Zimbabwe’s internet connectivity. There must be

affordable, usable products and services to our communities. **Hatidi ma data prices ekurovana pasi petsoka.** Data prices must be affordable.

I want to commend the Bandwidth and Cloud Services (BCS) Group Limited, for deciding to invest in Zimbabwe. This is an international company which is operating in a number of countries in Africa that partnered with one of our country's telecommunication organisations, Dandemutande, for the provision of a fibre backbone project which is being commissioned today. The outstanding part about this project is that it is riding on our existing infrastructure of the National Railways of Zimbabwe.

This has seen the revamping and upgrading of the National Railways of Zimbabwe signalling system from analogue to digital.

The fact that the project provides data links and Wi-Fi hotspots at NRZ railway sidings and stations, which will

in turn benefit communities along the railway network is most commendable.

As we consolidate the gains of Devolution and Decentralisation, the Ministry of Information Communication Technology, Postal and Courier Services is called upon to rollout similar critical infrastructure to other communities, such as those in Plumtree, Guruve, Nyamapanda and Chiendambuya, among others.

Ladies and Gentlemen;

The fast-changing technologies and ongoing Fourth Industrial Revolution is unveiling new digital breakthroughs and possibilities for improving all sectors of the economy. My Government will, therefore, continue to avail resources for the growth of the ICT and telecommunications sector. It is pleasing that so far, the mobile network penetration rate has since increased to 97.5 per cent, while the internet penetration rate is consistently growing, currently at 70.1 per cent.

Additionally, since the expansion of deployed fibre optic networks, there has been an unprecedented creation and growth of diverse ICT enabled services, in banking and finance, telecommunications, security, transport and tourism sectors, among others.

I urge communities to take advantage of these developments to create wealth by improving the viability and profitability of their enterprises and projects. Small and Medium Enterprises, Artists, Music and Cultural Industries, Women, the Youth and Farmers, among others, must exploit online platforms as well as ICT-driven productive and trading networks.

Comrades and Friends;

The developments in the ICT sector are positively impacting on the ongoing modernisation and economic transformation of our beloved motherland, Zimbabwe.

Data centres continue to be rolled out ushering in a new era of access to information by our communities through

the Village Information, Communication and Technology Centres towards digital transformation. To complement these efforts, our schools and VTCs will continue to receive more support on Internet connectivity and bandwidth, as well as the provision of computers and other ICT gadgets.

The establishment of the Computer Assembly Plant at the Msasa Factory in Harare also signifies remarkable progress in the local manufacture and assembling of ICT equipment. More must be done by our country's *techno-preneurs*, innovators and inventors to increase our ability to assemble and manufacture the hardware and software we need to develop the economy.

I, call for greater collaboration between stakeholders in the private sector, education and ICT space towards nurturing such innovations by our talented young people.

Meanwhile, there is need to ensure that our regulatory environment encourages ICT utilisation and industry

growth. Policy issues that affect users and the industry, such as online security and privacy, technology standards, education and digital literacy, among other aspects, must be prioritised.

The Ministry of Information Communication Technology, Postal and Courier Services, and all other regulatory bodies must continue to provide timeous, responsive advice and leadership to the sector in this regard. Let us all embrace the power and utility of technology to leap frog our modernisation and development towards a more prosperous nation.

Comrades;

May I take this opportunity to once again assure the nation that my Government has put in place all the necessary measures to ensure that none of our communities suffer from starvation due to the ongoing drought.

Climate change is real and going forward, Government is scaling up and accelerating the development and expansion of dams, irrigation and borehole infrastructure. We shall continue to be a nation that is able to feed itself.

In these challenging times of drought, let us draw lessons from our rich cultural heritage of unity, love and sharing whatever we may have. We must equally take care of our livestock, environment and conserve water resources.

In concluding, I congratulate Bandwidth and Cloud Services Group, Dandemutande, National Railways of Zimbabwe, and the Ministry of Information Communication Technology and Courier Services for the successful implementation of the high-capacity fibre optic cable connectivity project. **Makorokoto, Amhlophe.**

With these remarks, it is now my singular honour and privilege to declare the National ICT Policy, National

Broadband Plan and Smart Zimbabwe Master Plan officially launched as well as the Fibre Optic Broadband Backbone Network Facility commissioned.

God bless you.

God bless Zimbabwe.

I thank you.