

**SPEECH BY MR. FRANCIS WANGUSI, EACO CHAIRMAN,  
DURING THE 23<sup>rd</sup> EACO CONGRESS, ON 5<sup>TH</sup> JULY 2019**

**Our Guest of Honour, Hon. Eng Isaack Kamwele, Minister, Ministry of Works, Transport and Communicationans, of the United Republic of Tanzania**

**-Mr Kolawole Aduloju, the PAPU Assistant Secretary General**

**-Ms. Gladys Mutyavaviri, UPU Regional Project Coordinator for Southern and East Africa**

**-Chairman and Board Members of TCRA**

**-Eng. James Kilaba-Director General - TCRA**

**-EACO EXCOM Members present**

**Dr Ally Simba, EACO Executive Secretary,**

**-Local Authorities of MWANZA**

**-CEO of Various Organizations,**

**-EACO Development Partners**

**-Members of EACO,**

**-Distinguished Guests**

**-All Protocols observed**

It gives me great pleasure to warmly welcome you all to the 23<sup>rd</sup> EACO Congress meeting. I take this early opportunity to express my profound gratitude to the Government and the people of the United Republic of Tanzania for hosting the 23<sup>rd</sup> session of the EACO Congress and related meetings at this beautiful lakeside city of Mwanza.

On behalf of EACO members, I also wish to thank the Tanzania Communications Regulatory Authority (TCRA) for the excellent facilities and warm hospitality extended to us since our arrival.

At this juncture, I would like to acknowledge the various dignitaries who have graced this important event, including Mr. William BARAZA, Director, AFRALTI, Mr. Mark Dutz, Lead Economist, World Bank and representative from Inter University Council of East Africa.

I also wish to recognize the eminent presence of Directors General of the national regulatory authorities from the East African region and their representatives, including Eng. Donatien Manirampa, Director General, ARCT, Mr. Fred Otunnu, representative of the Executive Director of UCC, Ms. Beata Mukangabo- representing the Director General of RURA.

In addition, I wish to recognize Eng. Virginio Kenyi, the representative of the Director General of National Communications Authority of South Sudan, and all CEOs and representatives of the public postal utilities and telecommunications operators present here with us today.

I thank you all for sparing time off your busy schedules to grace the 23<sup>rd</sup> EACO congress.

Our Guest of honour, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen, this event has brought together ICT stakeholders from different organizations, including operators, regulators, government, academia, as well as regional and International bodies from the EAC region and beyond to deliberate on pertinent issues affecting the ICT sector in the region.

This meeting is significant in light of the important role that ICTs play in driving the socio-economic development of the region. Indeed, ICTs are considered as the life-blood for economic development in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. It is no wonder that governments in the region now increasingly acknowledge ICTs as one of the most strategic sectors that has a catalytic effect on the development of other sectors of the economy.

Our chief guest, EACO brings together ICT regulators and service providers within the six EAC member states together to work towards the promotion of ICT sector in the East African region. EACO's key objective is to strengthen and promote cooperation in the development and provision of postal, telecommunications and broadcasting sectors in the six East African countries.

I am pleased to note that EACO has since inception made a significant contribution towards the development of the ICT sector in the region. In particular, EACO has played a key role in the harmonization of ICT policies, guidelines, and strategies thus transforming the region into a vibrant single ICT market. As I speak, East Africa is considered a reference point for ICT development and innovation in the entire African region.

### **Our Guest of Honour, Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Our focus this week has been positioning East Africa as a digital economic hub. On the first day we had two workshops, namely the Postal workshop on the one hand and a session on telecoms and Broadcasting on the other. The postal workshop deliberated on strategies for positioning and transforming postal sector, while the telecoms and Broadcast session discussed a host of issues

including the role of infrastructure in the development of a digital economy.

I wish to note here that the two workshops also examined the challenges facing the ICT sector in the region, and the role that stakeholders can play towards building a robust environment where the digital economy can thrive.

According to the International Telecommunications Union (ITU), only 29.3 % of the population in Africa had access to mobile broadband in 2016. As a region, East African has made tremendous progress in this area, and is poised to post an approximate growth of 17% in mobile broadband this year. There is no doubt that a lot more work is required in order to ensure that 70% of the African continent that does not have access to mobile broadband is connected. Only then will our region benefit from the digital economy.

Our Chief Guest, the important role played by ICT infrastructure in the development of the digital economy requires no belabouring. It is now projected that every additional US\$1 invested in ICT Infrastructure over time can yield up to US\$5 in GDP growth by 2025.

Clearly, we therefore need to build adequate backhaul facilities and other forms of infrastructure to cater for the projected traffic especially after the onset of 5G technology.

The appropriate allocation and assignment of Radio Spectrum in a fair and equitable manner will create a level playing field and create competitive environment for ICT growth. As a region, East Africa needs to be at the fore-front where decisions on spectrum management are being made. I am happy note that the region is already preparing to participate in the World Radio Conference scheduled to take place in Sharm el Sheik, Egypt, this year in November.

Ladies and gentlemen, we must acknowledge that affordability is still remains a challenge in our region. In particular, cost of the Internet and end-user devices is still high, thus hampering the development of a digital economy in the region. Policy and regulatory interventions are therefore required to ensure that citizens can afford devices and ICT services.

Emerging technologies, such as OTT, IOT, AI, Blockchain, and 5G, have great potential to stimulate the digital revolution in our region.

As a region, East Africa cannot afford to be left behind; we, therefore, need to lurch onto these emerging technologies to ensure digital transformation of our societies and economies. As we enter into the 2019-2021 cycle, EACO will therefore focus on areas that will enhance digital innovation, competition, and develop harmonized policy directions for a digital economy.

**Our Guest of Honour, Ladies and Gentlemen,**

As I close, I take this opportunity to thank you all for the support that members have extended to EACO during my tenure as Chair of Congress. It is my prayer that we shall sustain this support as I later hand over the baton to Tanzania.

I want once again wish to thank our Guest of Honour, our host and all the delegates for agreeing to associate with EACO and participate in this function.

Thank you for your attention.