

Information and Communications Technology

Excellencies,

Distinguished invited delegates,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Good morning.

On behalf of my Government and the people of the Republic of South Sudan, I extend our thanks and appreciation to the United States Government and the co-sponsors that include the United Kingdom, Norway, Turkey, the African Union, the European Union, the United Nations, the World Bank, the International Finance Corporation, the Corporate Council for Africa, and InterAction. Thank you for organizing this successful International Engagement Conference for the RSS.

This is one of the most appropriate mechanisms for introducing this newly born country to the international community and a great warm welcome for the RSS into the family of civilized nations of the world.

I am also delighted to have the opportunity to speak to you today about information and communications technology and specifically with regards to the current and future state of mass media in the RSS i.e. information.

Indeed, this is the fourth pillar of the state. There is no doubt that the media plays a central and crucial role to inform and enable dissemination of information and new ideas to the public, which includes education of the citizens about the decision making processes of government or its development policies.

Therefore, in order for the media in South Sudan to play this role effectively at a national, state, and local (including regional and international levels); it is important to identify all those factors and drivers which enable and empower the media in its nation building mission. This demands the use of appropriate and modern technology.

Also among these drivers include, among many, the current state of media, legal and regulatory structures, socio-economic and political environments under which the media operates and the constraints upon it in these environments and settings, or indeed the opportunities available to the growth and promotion of media sector that portrays transparency, accountability, good governance, and human rights in this newly born country being founded on the principles of a strong, democratic foundation. We are all looking forward to the RSS to be a country where its citizens have the right to choose or reject their leaders in the spirit of the freedom of expression and association. “A government of the people, by the people, and for the people shall not perish from the earth” to quote President Abraham Lincoln, sixteenth President of the United States from March 4th, 1861 to

April 15th, 1865. This great political and human statement of all time, the Gettysburg Address reveals the sincerity, the simplicity, and the essential nobility that marks Lincoln as one of the greatest Presidents of this great country, the USA.

Therefore, with the knowledge and evaluation of the current state of our media would offer a better insight into the challenges and opportunities which exist in the development of the media sector to a target future state, one that is achievable through the implementation of well-defined policy and regulatory framework.

Up to now we have seen the rapid spread and growth of mass media (newspapers, private, community and state owned FM radio stations, internet) use in the Republic of South Sudan since the onset of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in 2005. WE have noted the diversity and the number of media outlets and its users or beneficiaries are on the increase far more than the number of people and areas that had access to information by Radio or Print media before the CPA in the RSS.

There are also new communications channels of information dissemination using the internet and VSAT technology, thus reaching underserved in remote rural areas.

This has encouraged new entrants in the provision of information services to our citizens through mobile operators to extend the reach of voice and data (mobile phone calls and SMS) services.

We can say that there is an acceleration of access to information in both rural and urban populations through ICT infrastructures. This reduces the balance of poverty in information for the new nation.

The questions we ask are:

- a) What is the state of media in the RSS?
- b) Is media doing enough to educate the population on social, political, and economic issues?
- c) Are the population being informed on development policies, programmes, and projects that the government is undertaking in our country?
- d) Which of our media outlets are more effective in outreach to urban and rural populations?
- e) Are there any restrictive policies on press freedoms that can hinder the media in their professional work?
- f) Is media reporting objective and balanced news to the people of RSS?
- g) Is the media a competent watchdog to hold public officials to account for their performance and behavior in public office?

h) What is the status of independent mass media? Are any state interventions necessary? Or what enablement is required to empower and strengthen the independent media?

Therefore, it is our duty as founders of this new nation to answer these questions in a manner that will satisfy and guarantee the nation we want to build, the Republic of South Sudan.

We will need to know the different models and trajectories of development in media, information and communications through lessons learned and experiences of other countries with developed ICT infrastructures.

Incidentally, the Transitional Constitution of the Republic of South Sudan which replaced our Interim Constitution of Southern Sudan broadly provide for the right of freedom of expression and the right of access to information.

These constitutional rights will be strengthened with policy and legislative measures, thus giving these rights their protection by law in a democratic governance system. This is fundamental of all other human rights such as economic, social, and cultural rights that are enshrined in the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights and the African Charter of Human and Peoples Rights.

We as the government under the oversight of our legislators would want to see a mass media (print, broadcast, and internet) that serve the important and critical civic role in society that engages in public discussion, debate and exchange of ideas, knowledge and information through avenues of print, broadcast, internet and audiovisual technologies. This definitely creates and inspires new ideas that will benefit informed participation in decision making processes by citizens and reduces the lack, or to be more specific, reduces poverty of information.

In fact, one of the most important tasks of Government is the provision of clear, truthful, and factual information – information about government policies, activities, and services. Here in the RSS, we must get it right. Without proactive communications, the ground is fertile for the propagation of false rumors.

The new republic needs to be assisted in the following:

- 1) Capacity development of the mass media. This is crucial for the Republic's democratic nation building: This should target media personnel for the mass media to play its watchdog role.
- 2) Creation of an enabling environment through the enhancement of media-activity-related equipment.
- 3) Training journalists in both broadcasting and print media.

- 4) Because of low literacy, this will require having broadcast as a priority for now.
- 5) We need a multi-pronged and coordinated support approach from all of our development partners, including United Nations agencies, European Union, international NGOs, and a bilateral basis from individual countries.
- 6) There is need to build a new infrastructure from scratch that will include studios and equipment, all in a new building that needs to be constructed based on modern basis to print the new technology in information i.e. mass media i.e. office space facilities.
- 7) The media related bills are awaiting approval by the Council of Ministers and Legislative Assembly, i.e.
 - a. South Sudan Broadcasting Cooperation Bill
 - b. Independent Media Authority Bill
 - c. Right of Information Bill

The passing of the above bills, this will make the RSS chart the road map in moving and transforming gradually the TV and Radio from a national broadcasting institution to public broadcasting institution. This is our dream within the context of our vision 2040.