

**Message by Dr. Salim Ahmed Salim,
Secretary-General of the Organisation of African Unity,
For the Exhibition on New Information and
Communications Technologies**

23 March 2001

When the first exhibition on New Information and Communications Technologies was held alongside the 34th OAU Summit in Ouagadougou, it demonstrated the determination of African leaders to keep abreast with the information revolution engendered by the rapid changes in technology and to deploy this new facility for the development of the African people. The call for a second exhibition alongside the Lusaka Summit by Regulation CM/OAU/AEC/Regl.1 (VI) underscores their resolve to close the digital divide on one hand among African countries and on the other hand between African countries and the rest of the world.

The objective of the second exhibition is to enhance the rapid introduction of new information and communications technologies so as to improve the quality of life of the population. However, in order to attain this objective, African countries must adopt appropriate policies, including particularly, measures to quicken the faltering steps taken so far towards liberalisation and deregulation of the information and communications sector. A cardinal objective of these policies should be the democratisation of access to the new services of the information age, which hitherto, have been restricted to the privileged few in the urban areas. As a result, the rural areas, which are the mainstay of the economies of most African countries, have been neglected. Most importantly, these policies should have a component, which aims at encouraging content development for the Internet as well as the introduction of innovative and modern information and communications services.

Furthermore, the effective operation of the African Union which encapsulates the hope of the African peoples for a better socio-economic future would, to a

great extent, depend on the availability of integrated and interoperable information and communications networks and services. In this regard, steps must be taken to deepen the knowledge of the population on the utilisation of the computer and the Internet especially, as a tool to promote sound economic management and to enhance their participation in the decisions that affect their livelihood.

The introduction of new information and communications technologies and their attendant services hold a bright promise for the future of Africa particularly, as regards integrating it into the global economy and weaving the thread of solidarity and cohesion within and between African countries. In this connection, Africa's strive towards the fulfilment of these aspirations and its efforts to leapfrog into the information society can succeed only if the continent exhibits a strong determination to strengthen co-operation among all African countries and to take responsibility in shaping the destiny of its people.

It is, therefore, my sincere hope that Infocom Africa: Lusaka 2001 Exhibition will offer African countries and their development partners a golden opportunity to intensify and better co-ordinate their efforts to establish an information society with a view to ensuring that the continent becomes fully integrated into the world-wide community of nations.

Addis Ababa, 23 March 2001