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Opening Remarks – African Peering and Interconnection Forum  
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Honorable Minister of Information and Communications Samual Poghisio, Chairman of TESPOK Mr. Tejpal Bedi, Convener of AfNOG Dr. Nii Quaynor, distinguished government representatives, industry participants, guest speakers, ladies and gentlemen, (all protocols observed) Jambo and Good Morning. My name is Karen Rose, Director of Regional Development at the Internet Society and it is a pleasure for me to welcome you to the first African Peering and Interconnection Forum.

Before starting, I would like to thank our local host TESPOK – the Telecommunications Service Providers Association of Kenya, our event sponsors Orange and Google, and European Internet Exchange points – NetNOD, AMSIX, and DE-CIX for their help in making this event possible.

The theme for this two-day event is “Unlocking Africa’s Regional Interconnection” and I’d like to discuss the Internet Society’s motivation in helping to facilitate this meeting and what we hope will be accomplished.

As you may know, the Internet Society is an independent, international non-profit organization dedicated to the growth and advancement of the Internet globally.

We have been involved in assisting Internet growth in emerging economies since our inception in 1992. For nearly 20 years the Internet Society has run international Internet capacity building programs for emerging countries and has played an important role in helping to establish and support Internet connections across the world.

In Africa, we have over 20 local chapters, an African regional Bureau, and staff located in Ethiopia, Kenya, and South Africa. We engage in numerous capacity building, policy, and development projects across the continent – working with many partner organisations and regional bodies, industry, technologists, government, and other stakeholders.

The Internet Society is engaged in this work not just to expand the Internet for its own sake – but because we know the Internet is a fundamental driver of economic growth and social development around the world and a foundational tool for improving business opportunities and entrepreneurship, scientific advancement, health care, education, and public administration.

Yet these benefits of the Internet cannot be realized unless fundamental Internet infrastructures and related investments have the environment and tools to grow and flourish.

Indeed, the long-term sustainability of the Internet in any region – including Africa -- relies on the ability of ISPs and other data network operators to conduct their operations efficiently, manage costs, provide reliable service to users at a reasonable prices, and take advantage of growth opportunities.
This is true for small and large networks, for-profit companies or non-profit networks.

There have been many exciting developments in the Internet landscape in African in recent years. This includes new undersea cable landings around the coasts, new domestic and foreign investments, and increased dialogue between government, industry, and other stakeholders on the development of access-enabling public policies, among many others.

However significant challenges still remain to achieving sustainable, efficient, and cost-effective networking on the continent – and many relate to the interconnection and peering topics of this Forum.

Let me give you some examples.

The lack of network interconnections between many countries in Africa, especially those in the interior, means that data traffic destined to neighbouring countries is often shipped overseas, just to return back to Africa.

With per megabit satellite connectivity costs of $2,000 to $5,000 dollars or more in many African countries, this not only contributes to high end-user access prices that dampen growth, it also ships precious financial resources overseas that could be used to grow stronger networks here in Africa.

Further, in some countries that have physical connections to undersea cables, much traffic still flows through inefficient routes. A good example is to a trace the path followed by an Internet packet from Nairobi, Kenya to Kigali, Rwanda. The packet from Nairobi will often be sent off shore to Europe then back around to Kigali, despite the fact that terrestrial fiber infrastructure is present directly between Rwanda and Kenya.

On a domestic level, network operators in many countries are yet to establish Internet exchange points, or maximize the use of IXP infrastructures already in place.

At the Internet Society, our vision is an Internet in Africa that is truly interconnected: One in which its reach and benefits are spread to all people across the continent and where network providers can sustainably grow and provide new services, and do so on a cost-effective basis.

It is also a network where businesses and entrepreneurs realize new economic opportunities, where e-enabled services sustainably support the aims of the Millennium Development Goals, where African Universities can affordably empower the next generation of leaders with on-line access to the best of African and global knowledge, and the richness of Africa's cultures and creativity can be accessed by the world.

I know this is a vision that many of you share.

Achieving the vision of a ubiquitous and cost-effective Internet in Africa will take efforts on many fronts. But one important step will be achieving greater regional interconnectivity and developing local capacities to manage current and new network resources more efficiently.
Fundamental to this is ensuring that network operators -- and governments -- understand the unique economics of the Internet and can leverage them to the greatest efficiency and benefit, are equipped with global and regional insights in order to maximize interconnection opportunities, and space is provided for constructive cross-sectoral discussions on African interconnection approaches and challenges.

And this is what the African Interconnection and Peering Forum is all about.

Providing a platform in which world-class knowledge can be acquired, experience and perspectives exchanged, and where representatives of industry across Africa, as well as government and other stakeholders, have the opportunity to interact.

As I mentioned, this is the first meeting of what we hope will be an ongoing Forum, supported not only by physical meetings but also through on-line means. Facilitating this Forum is one part of a multi-year the Internet Society project to advance Interconnection and Exchange Points Development in Africa, which aims to contribute to the growth of the Internet on the continent in partnership with local stakeholders and technical communities.

For this inaugural meeting we have set forth quite an ambitious two-day agenda, will cover the fundamentals of Internet economics -- including peering and transit arrangements -- peering and interconnection strategies for operators, cross-border policy challenges, factors in growing regional operations, and the role of content in the interconnection and peering equation.

In addition to sparking your interest in advancing these issues further, we hope that you will be able to apply some of the information from these two days immediately when you return to your own network environments.

We have tried to leave plenty of time questions and we hope you will contribute actively to the discussion.

I’d like to note that, social networking with peers and colleagues is also an important part of the meeting and the form. We hope you will take the opportunity to seek out individuals from your own and other industry sectors for discussions during the breaks, lunch, and evening receptions. The event has representatives from over 20 African countries here spanning South Africa to Egypt, and from The Gambia to Somalia.

In closing, let me say thank you for attending. The Internet Society looks forward to working with the many stakeholders represented here to advance this work, and help deliver on the promise of the Internet in Africa.