Honorable Minister of Information and Communications, TESPOK Chairman, Our Partners Internet Society, Ladies & Gentlemen

It is a great pleasure for me to witness the birth of this very important addition to the Internet’s technical community in Africa. The emergence of the African Peering and Interconnection Forum while being timely in context of current infrastructure developments all around Africa, deepens the efforts of the African technical community while focussing on building relevant expertise in a specialized area in support of Internet development in Africa.

I have had the honor to witness the efforts of the African technical community over the years having been privileged to be party to the initiation of some of the core technical groups in the region. The group we casually refer to as the African technical community traces its history to the ISOC’s INETs and NTW.

We were few, we were not resourced so we met and plotted our intentions in the safety of the ISOC community.

In 1998 following the IAHC process leading to formation of ICANN this group planned one of the first Internet governance meetings in Cotonou, Benin, thanks to Pierre Dandjinou for hosting us. His foresight in choosing the theme “Internet Governance in Africa” in 1998 is commendable. At this meeting the focus was on what role for Africa in ICANN and how Africa would respond to the then changing landscape on Internet technical coordination and administration.

At this meeting I presented a paper that postulated an assortment of needed technical institutions to bring focus to our work of expanding the reach of the Internet in the region. We had conceived institutions for holding the community together, capacity building, numbers registry, African ccTLDs, Internet societies, providers, research and other communities.

That was the beginning and we can now refer to well organized institutions including African Network Operators Group (AfNOG), African Numbers Registry, African ccTLDs AFTLD and African Research and Educational Networks AfREN, ISOC Africa and a few others all at different stages of maturity. These groups have become affectionately known as Af* (* - Kleene to mean 0,1 or more)

The Af* organizations have played key roles in Internet development and their contribution to Interconnection to date;

1) AfNOG - The capacity building which included advanced routing technics and IXPs that have a role to play in Interconnection
2) AfriNIC - Their role on IPv4 and IPv6 uptake (where many ISPs were only using IP addresses from their upstreams. The increased uptake of this resources is important for the technical implementation of peering and interconnection. The AfriNIC Anycast program which has helped implement a Root-Server instance in Tanzania is a value added initiative aimed at bringing more value to peering at IXPs in the region.

3) AfTLD - Their role in strengthening ccTLDs in Africa the use of national domain names is a fundamental catalyst for local content development and hosting. With local content and hosting it helps build a case for regional peering and interconnection.

4) Afren - It has played a significant role in supporting the establishment of National Research and Education Networks. learning from the experience of the Western/Developed Countries where NREN Networks play a key role in their Internet growth and development. AfREN has two networks in operation Ubuntunet Alliance and WACREN

5) Internet Society African Chapters and its Regional Bureau - its role in influencing social and policy issues of the Internet in Africa and having direct contributions into national policies as well as building national technical capacity through ISOC chapters and building institutional capacity ccNOGs among others.

It goes without saying that AfPIF was not one of the groups anticipated in 1998 and for a good reason; we were faced with bigger barriers in the digital divide and we could only see the impediments of the time. I am grateful we have an approach that encourages independent yet coordinated growth. Partnerships and collaboration have contributed to the success of the African Internet Organizations.

We have been fortunate to have made long lasting partnerships since the first coming together in AfNOG-1 in May 2000 in Cape Town, South Africa. AfNOG has since provided a meeting space for all Af* to gather, to do their work and share in the larger common community with their own agenda and activities. Some of the global partners at the just ended AfNOG-11 meeting place in Kigali included ISOC, Cisco, NSRC, Google, AfriNIC, KAIST, Oreilly, FreeBSD and OBIT.

We also had a host of local sponsors including RDB, RICTA, KIST, RwandaTel, Altech stream, MTN Rwanda and Artel. Over the years we have recorded supports from UNDP, WorldBank, Carnegie Corporation and IDRC to mention a few.

The role Governments have played in supporting the Af* organizations is also well recognized. Some of you may recall that the setup of AfriNIC one of the flagship organizations in Af* was well embraced by several Governments and Inter Governmental organizations and AfriNIC received handsome seed contributions from the Governments of Egypt, South Africa and Mauritius. The hosting of Af* meeting place events at AfNOG have enjoyed government support through regulatory and development agencies partnering with the local technical community

It might interest you to know that Governments have come to recognize our efforts. In the country Ghana where the technical community had been out of favor in the years 2002 to
2008, more recently the Internet pioneers, the Admin POC and Tech POC for .GH, have both been as recently as yesterday appointed as the Chairman of Board and Director General of a new National IT Agency (NITA) respectively. It is as though we are being asked to rebuild Ghana’s Internet Infrastructure destroyed in the past. Trust me, we don’t intend to miss this opportunity and expect we will call on you all to make this worthwhile.

These few remarks hopefully demonstrate how the various African Internet Organizations have contributed to Internet development in the region. The secret has been to accept that we are strictly speaking the same community and employ an organic approach to grow the community. Each technically focussed group determines its program and expand interests within the Af* family and outside. In so doing the Af* group as a whole grows in the direction the parties desire.

We welcome AfPIF to the community and we are happy to be a party of the Interconnection forum. We have great expectations of AfPIF and believe in its potential for have impact on Internet developments in Africa AfPIF Open Peering