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**Welcome Remarks by Martin Mokgware, Chief Executive, Botswana Communications Regulatory Authority on the occasion of the official opening of the 4th Sub-Sahara Spectrum Management Conference; PRIDA Initiative Kick-off Meeting; and ITU Capacity Building Workshop on Cross Border Frequency Co-ordination**

Director of Ceremonies

Cooperating Partners ITU, ATU and Forum Europe

Dear Delegates

Members of the Media

Ladies and Gentlemen

Good morning and welcome to Botswana. I trust you had safe journeys from your respective arears of departure. You have come to Botswana at a time when the temperatures are just about optimal. May is the first month of our winter season. It is not yet too cold, and it is not too hot either. So, enjoy your stay in Gaborone. Unfortunately, winter is also a flu season in Botswana according to health experts. Should you feel feverish with a headache, aching muscles, sore throat, nasal congestion, tiredness and weakness, you may want to seek medical attention because those could be symptoms of flu.

Director of Ceremonies We are gathered here this week to interrogate the single most critical resource to communications – Radiofrequency Spectrum. As the world talks Internet of things, Forth Industrial Revolution, Big Data, 5G networks and other exciting future outlooks for ICTs, availability of appropriate Spectrum is the single most critical factor for the success of such technologies. Spectrum is even more critical for Africa as a developing continent given that we are seen as potentially the next area of growth for ICT innovation and uptake. We will only realise this potential if we have all the spectrum we need.

Cross boarder spectrum issues are equally important as we strive for regional integration through such regional groupings as Communications Regulators Association of Southern Africa (CRASA). On the 17 May as we were commemorating World Telecommunication and Information Society Day, His Excellency the President of the Republic of Botswana Dr Mokgweetsi Eric Keabetswe Masisi who was the guest of honour asked me why Botswana airwaves are dominated by broadcast signals from South African radio stations. I wish he was attending this week workshop because I think the answer lies in cross boarder coordination.

Personally, I have always asked my technical team to explain why we can’t licence additional commercial radio stations. The answer I have always received is that we have run out of coordinated frequencies and we need to coordinate for additional frequencies with neighbouring states. The irony of the issue is that Botswana has only five national radio broadcasters while our neighbouring states each have many times our number, yet we need their understanding and cooperation to get additional frequencies for our domestic use. This goes to prove the importance of cross border coordination.

It is fitting that the programme for this week is punctuated by the launch of Policy and Regulation Initiative for Digital Africa (PRIDA) programme. It is my understanding that PRIDA aims to advance the noble idea of promoting accessibility of affordable broadband to all citizens across the continent to enable the wider African community to benefit from internet-based services. This programme is indeed a welcome initiative as it will help many of us who are currently pursuing development of broadband infrastructure and services. Using ICTs for social and economic development in Africa will certainly benefit a harmonised and enabling legal and regulatory framework.

Director of Ceremonies, mine was to welcome our guests to Botswana. I have welcomed you and wish to once again invite you to enjoy your stay in Botswana and more importantly have fruitful deliberations on the subject matter that I believe we are all interested in as we inch closer to Egypt for World Radiocommunication Conference (WRC). I trust that this process will allow us to sift through the complex issues of spectrum management and find common rallying points for Africa during the WRC19. I am aware that Southern Africa is currently meeting in Lesotho under the chairmanship of Botswana trying to agree on issues to take to Africa level. I believe our meeting here this week is yet another avenue for trying to arrive at the same destination – acquiring the spectrum for future ICT growth that promises to stretch the concept of digitalisation beyond our imagination.

I thank you for your kind attention.

As we say in Botswana, PULA