

**SPEECH BY DONALD T. CHARUMBIRA, SECRETARY
GENERAL OF THE WORLD ASSEMBLY OF YOUTH, AT
THE OPENING OF THE AFRICAN YOUTH
CONFERENCE ON ICTs and NEPAD**

11 August 2003

**His Excellency the Right Honourable Theo-Ben Gurirab,
Prime Minister of Namibia**

**The Honourable Nahas Angula,
Minister of Higher Education, Training and Employment Creation**

Honourable Ministers and Deputy Ministers herepresent

Government Officials

Corporate partners and sponsors of this programme

Members and affiliates of the National Youth Council

Invited Guests

Comrades, friends

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Today is indeed a memorable and proud day for Africa, as we gather to chart the future of the continent. It is inspiring to note the great support that has been extended for this programme, and the excellent response by participants from all over the African continent. From the onset, it is clear that we are on the pathway to a brighter future, and that this conference shall indeed empower the young people of Africa.

The future of Africa lies in the hands of its young people. It is in the youth we have confidence that a brighter future awaits the continent. The energies of youth, supplemented with their ability to adapt, their creativity and their spirit of enterprise, make young people critical players in development work. Investing in the youth is a sure way of reaping manifold returns in the future.

Information and Communication Technologies present Africa with a vehicle for leapfrogging the development process. ICTs enable people to do things better and faster than has been possible before. Through technology, Africa can achieve rapid industrialization, economic development and progress. When properly harnessed, ICTs can result in greater efficiency and optimum utilization of time and resources.

It used to take months to send a message from one end of the world to another. Today, by the touch of a button, a message may be disseminated to all corners of the world in milliseconds. Companies and governments used to spend billions of dollars on meetings and conferences. Today, video-conferencing with anyone, in any part of the globe, is becoming more and more prevalent. It is no longer necessary to go to a physical classroom for lessons, one can simply receive notes through the internet and also view lectures on the internet. Music, videos, files and photos can easily be exchanged through the Internet. Remote communities can be networked to be in constant communication, and therefore having access to the latest information. With ICTs, the possibilities are limitless.

This conference will explore the distinct linkages between the New Partnership for Africa's Development and ICT. We believe that ICTs are a pivotal key to the successful and timely implementation of the goals set out in NEPAD.

Africa is a sleeping giant. It is a continent that is endowed with generous resources, a robust and gifted people, ample natural heritage and unparalleled beauty. There is therefore little reason why Africa must remain in this slumber. There is little reason for us to continue to be holding the begging bowl, and for us to be at the tail end of the developing nations. There is no excuse for us, the youth, to accept the status quo and not feel compelled to effect change in our communities and countries.

If NEPAD is the vehicle, and ICT is the fuel, we must make haste to drive to the greener pastures of Africa's future: a future of peace, prosperity and equity. This conference is the beginning of that journey, and by being here, we are all making a commitment to being not only passengers, but drivers, movers and shakers of Africa.

It is important that we harness and utilize ICTs to the benefit of all peoples of Africa. Africa must be a part of the digital revolution. We cannot afford to sit back when the rest of the world is advancing. Africa's struggle has not ended with the gaining of political independence - great struggles for economic independence and empowerment lie ahead, and ICTs are the most potent aides to this struggle. If we do not catch up with the developed nations, we will find ourselves continuing to spiral into economic and social turmoil.

At the same time, we need to be wary of the dangers posed by ICTs. Issues such as pornography, security, malicious information, cybercrimes and fraud are among the challenges that accompany any ICT progress. However, we must not be held back by these challenges, as the issue is more that the challenges be addressed, than to avoid progress.

This conference will therefore address these issues as they apply to the African context. The outcome of this meeting will be disseminated to all our member organizations in Africa, and also presented to the World Summit on the Information Society in Geneva this December. We hope that we will be able to sensitize young people and governments in the continent on the need to enhance and implement ICT strategies.

We are grateful to all partners and sponsors that have made this event possible, and given us the opportunity to convene this meeting. Your support towards the young people of Africa has really empowered us. We hope that you will continue to support the endeavours of the young people.

To the Right Honourable Prime Minister, we are sincerely grateful that you have graced us with your presence here. You have been an inspiration to the youth in Africa, by your exemplary leadership in Namibia, and when you served as President of the UN General Assembly. We look forward to your continued support for the young people of Namibia, Africa and indeed the world at large.

Ladies and Gentlemen, we have a busy four days ahead of us, and I hope that we will be able to have active dialogue and debate, towards a concrete outcome.

I thank you.