SPEECH BY YAB DATUK SERI MOHD ALI BIN MOHD RUSTAM

AT THE OPENING CEREMONY OF THE
NATIONAL INFOKIOSK PROGRAMME
ZANU-PF HEADQUARTERS
JUNE 2, 2003

The Honourable Elliot Manyika, Minister of Youth Development, Gender and Employment Creation

The Honourable Dr. Olivia Muchena, Minister of State for Science and Technology Development

His Excellency Mr. Shaharuddin Md. Som, High Commissioner of Malaysia to Zimbabwe, High Commissioner of Malaysia to Zimbabwe

The Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Youth Development, Gender and Employment Creation, Mr. David Munyoro

Government Officials

Honourable Members of Parliament

Mr. Donald Charumbira, Chairman of DC Africa Internet

Invited Guests

Ladies and Gentlemen:

I am pleased to join you on this important occasion, the launching of a revolutionary programme to empower the youth of Zimbabwe. The National InfoKiosk Programme is set to be a significant milestone in the advancement of youth at all levels in Zimbabwe, and I am honoured to be here today.

As this is my first time in Zimbabwe and in Southern Africa, I am pleased with the rapid advances and development that is taking place, and in particular with the agrarian reforms that are aimed at empowering the people of Zimbabwe, including the youth.

The current economic hardships and sanctions by Western forces are only a temporary thing, which will subside with the emergence of an empowered, educated and energetic generation of Zimbabweans that shall emerge as a result of having access to land and thus to the means of production.

Technology is another major element that is essential for any nation to achieve self-sufficiency and significance in the global marketplace. New ways of producing more and better goods need to be identified in order to become more efficient. Technology has the effect of catalyzing development, and even leapfrogging the development process. The developing world, or emerging nations as they now prefer to be called, needs technology in order to catch up with the rest of the world, and even to surpass it.

It is technology that has brought us here today, as we are launching the National InfoKiosk Programme, run by the youth of Zimbabwe. This important programme will provide technological access to all districts of the country. This unique programme is certainly a first for this region, and one of a few in the world. The youth of Zimbabwe are therefore poised to be at the helm of the technology revolution.

The consequences of being left behind in the digital revolution are serious and far-reaching… isolation from the global economy and lack of educational, scientific and technological advancements. Things are being done faster, easier, better and more efficiently through the use of technology.

The world is rapidly progressing towards an era of knowledge workers and knowledge economies. This is era in which people works smart, more than it working hard. It is a generation that realizes that efficiency and effectiveness can best be achieved through technology.

The digital revolution is presently intertwined with the forces of globalization, although I believe that the two are separate forces which need to be addressed principally at the national level. Globalisation is the inevitable result of technological advancements.

Globalisation refers to the multiplicity of linkages and interconnections between the states and societies which make up the present world system. It describes the process by which events, decisions and activities in one part of the world can have significant consequences for individuals and communities in quite distant parts of the globe. Interpreted in another way, globalisation is a process which is making the world smaller. Decisions taken by a small number of people on one side of the globe can affect millions on the other side. Globalisation results in the whole world being indisputably one global village.

The reality is that, as a process, globalisation can be guided to provide wealth and security for eveyone, preserve and celebrate diversity and ensure the sovereignty of nation states. On the other hand, if left to run on its own steam or through subversive intent, it can widen the economic divide in and between nations, create a global monoculture mainstream and aggregate power to certain factions and interests. Globalisation can become capitalism with an ugly face. But, it could also be capitalism with a caring face.

The reality again is that globalisation is not being managed very well. The implications are that there is growing in equality in ownership of factors of production worldwide. There is increasing human labour dislocation resulting in unemployment and the exploitation of cheap migrant labour. There is environmental degradation. Rather unfortunately, today's globalisation appears to be uncaring and driven only by greedy capitalism.

In the book, **The Rise of the Network Society**, Manual Castell's has argued that there is fast emerging a new pattern of international division of labour constructed around four different positions. Firstly, producers of high value based on information labour, secondly, producers of volume based on lower cost, thirdly,

producers of raw materials based on natural endowments and lastly, the redundant producers reduced to devalued labour. Castell's key point is that these different positions do not coincide with countries per se. They are so organised in networks and flows, using the technological infrastructure of the information economy. The fear is that Malaysia and other developing nations may be trapped in a quadrant not of our own choosing if a laissez faire attitude is adopted. Malaysia would lose control over our own affairs, that could ultimately risk our very sovereignty.

Part of the response, the responsibility I should say, of small developing nations like Malaysia is to be involved in international discussions and be a player at the global arena to develop suitable tools and models of governance to address globalisation. We in Malaysia strongly believe in such participation, advocacy and voice as witnessed by our involvement in the multilateral international organisations and agreements and in our active participation in regional initiatives such as the Association of South East Asian Nations and APEC. Malaysia is for globalisation, I cannot stress that strongly enough. But globalisation will be and must be at our own terms and at our own pace. We call it globalisation at the pace of localisation, both in capacity and capability.

Another aspect of our response, which is just as critical, is to prepare Malaysia and Malaysians for globalisation. Our internal response must be the development of a knowledge economy and a knowledge society. This is to enable Malaysians to compete at a global level and to take advantage of globalisation by creating real value at the local level. The Government has developed a K-Economy Masterplan. The Masterplan will be a coherent and comprehensive set of strategies for Malaysia and Malaysians to undertake, to enable our smooth migration from the current production (or "P") economy to a K-Economy. A key issue which is of concern is the Digital Divide. Access of Malaysians to information and knowledge is crucial and critical for the success of the K-Economy. The Masterplan suggests strategies for bridging the Divide and ensuring that the majority of Malaysians have the requisite access.

The K-Economy Masterplan is not the first of our initiatives on the road to K-Economy. In 1996, the Government adopted the National IT Agenda (NITA) which has its objective, the creation of a knowledge society. In furtherance to this objective, the National IT Council (NITC) created working groups to study five areas critical to Malaysia's migration to the electronic world. The five areas identified were E-Economy, E-Community, E-Sovereignty, E-Learning and E-Public Services.

The Multimedia Super Corridor (MSC) initiative, launched at the first Multimedia Asia Conference in 1996, was the first concrete step taken to prepare Malaysia for the K-Economy. Intended to function as a hub and promoted a gift to the world, the MSC is based on the premise of the web-economy. It is a concrete statement of Malaysia's preparedness to face the changes and challenges that globalisation will bring. But the MSC is not merely about physical infrastructure, miles of fiber in the ground, flagships and tax incentive. It is about a vision of creating a culture that can produce world-class knowledge products, about leading edge research and development and about providing a test-bed for new ideas and innovations.

And so in the spirit of south-south partnership, we are here today to celebrate the launching of Zimbabwe's National InfoKiosk Programme, one which has the potential to bridge the digital divide and to catalyse Zimbabwe's entry into the Knowledge Economy. Let us not underestimate the potential of this programme. As it is driven by young people, youth have the passion, the energy, the drive and enthusiasm to achieve anything that they set their minds on.

It is very likely that the Infokiosks at the district levels will soon become community hubs… centres of commerce, trade, education, and social activities.

The fear that technology may be manipulated by aversive forces can easily be countered by the introduction of patriotic and useful content onto the information servers of the InfoKiosk programme. People need access to information that will benefit them and their communities, be it an agricultural, mining, trading or tourism community. We should never let our fears hold us back from taking

bold steps and measures to achieve our developmental goals. The internet gives nations the opportunity to protect is sovereignty, and to enshrine and imbue patriotism in its citizens.

I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate the Ministry of Youth Development, Gender and Employment Creation and DC Africa Internet for conceptualizing and driving this programme. The support of the Minister of State for Science and Technology Development, and other governmental agencies, departments, and community structures, is highly inspirational.

We hope that the programme will continue in the same spirit of cooperation, and of smart partnership between government, private sector and community. Zimbabwe will therefore be a model for other nations, and a key driver of the K-Economy and information revolution in Africa and beyond. We are confident that the progressive international community will be supportive of Zimbabwe's endeavours as far as this programme is concerned.

On behalf of the State Government of Melaka, the World Assembly of Youth and the World Youth Foundation, I thank you for your hospitality and invitation to this beautiful country. We hope that this visit shall be the beginning of greater concrete cooperation between our nations.

I thank you.