

**Remarks for the Director-General at high-level opening of the first Africa eCommerce Week,
11 December 2018**

Excellencies,
Heads of delegations,
Dr. Mukhisa Kituyi, Secretary-General of UNCTAD,
Invited guests,
UN colleagues,
Ladies and gentlemen,

On behalf of the UN family in Kenya, it is my honour to welcome all of you to the United Nations Office at Nairobi for the first eCommerce Week for Africa.

I would like to commend the Government of Kenya for hosting this important event. I would also like to express my appreciation to UNCTAD and its partners, the African Union and the European Union, for choosing UNON as the venue for this meeting. We at UNON are proud to be hosting and supporting your discussions this week.

Indeed, as the only UN Headquarters in Africa and as a major hub for UN activities and programmes, this compound is a very fitting venue for the gathering.

E-Commerce's rapid development on the African continent offers a unique opportunity to boost economic growth and contribute to the advancement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Promoting the development of eCommerce on the African continent has the potential to drive digital access and digital inclusion by making information about products,

services and prices quickly and easily accessible to buyers and sellers.

The increasing number of digital platforms developed and used on the continent, such as OLX and Jumia, are manifestations of how eCommerce can create greater opportunities for trade. It can be a catalyst for improving access to markets for small and medium enterprises, and assist in growing these businesses and creating jobs.

However, many challenges remain: from infrastructure, to policy and legal framework, to digital literacy - which encompass many dimensions and will not be solved only at the domestic level.

Africa has a lot of catching up to do in order to be able to take advantage of the benefits of eCommerce.

Internet access is not equally spread across the continent. The proportion of households with Internet access at home is estimated at only 15 per cent in sub-Saharan Africa.

To grow the digital economy and create greater opportunities for eCommerce of necessity we need to build partnerships between government and the private sector, especially businesses involved in the provision of mobile telephone services and the IT sector generally and which have a clear focus on supporting enterprise development with a view to encouraging the creation of new businesses to build more eCommerce platforms, and the development of the supporting logistics infrastructure to make eCommerce efficient and profitable.

Making smartphones cheaper and more accessible to the general public is also a critical part of this process, given that most of our citizens' access to the internet is through their phones.

To build these partnerships, however, there should be clarity on the roles, responsibilities and benefits accruing to the partners, and a commitment to create the space for the majority of our small and medium enterprises, most of which operate in the informal sector to benefit from the amazing potential that Commerce holds for the African continent.

This eCommerce Week is providing a unique venue for actors from all sectors across the region to examine how to enhance the ability of African countries to engage in the digital economy in a way that can benefit African people and advance the Sustainable Development Goals.

I wish you fruitful deliberations this week.

Thank you for your kind attention.