

## **MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE – DIGITAL RESPONSE TO COVID-19**

### **Remarks by Hon. Minister Biruta**

*July 1, 2020*

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- **Excellencies Ministers; Distinguished participants.**

I would like to begin by thanking my colleagues from Estonia and Singapore, His Excellency Urmas Reinsalu and Dr. Vivian Balakrishnan, for inviting Rwanda to be part of this important dialogue on the Digital response to Covid-19.

As the global response to COVID-19 is gradually taking shape, it thus seems necessary, for leaders across the globe, to reflect on how to leverage from digital transformation, to not only respond to the socio-economic challenges caused by COVID-19 but also to ‘build back better’.

COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted our ways of life, with schools, companies or religious institutions temporarily closing. As a way of retaining normalcy, we are witnessing an acceleration of digital adoption by people as well as companies to be able to operate effectively.

While acknowledging the human distress caused by COVID-19 pandemic, the current worldwide situation has provided an incredible opportunity to fast-track the digitalization of our societies with a view to ensure sustainable development.

As you are aware, Rwanda has positioned digital transformation at the core of its development strategy. In this context, the Government of Rwanda has made substantial public investment in digital infrastructure and digital service delivery. This conducive environment has enabled the Government of Rwanda to leverage from technologies to provide an effective response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Among others, Rwanda is using robots to carry out simple tasks, like checking temperatures, to minimize the human exposure to the virus. Electronic wristbands have been used to monitor people under quarantine and in the bid to increase public awareness, drones are used in lockdown areas, with automated megaphones.

Digital payments, which went up out of necessities during this period of social distancing, have been promoted in Rwanda to facilitate tracing of contacts while slowing the spread of COVID-19 in the country. In the education sector, Rwanda has kept the doors open for learning by resuming studies for all through online platforms.

With this pandemic, more than ever before, it is a priority to tackle digital exclusion to make sure that no one is left behind during these challenging times and as we move toward a more digital world. In this context, different initiatives have emerged in Rwanda such as the “Connect Rwanda Challenge” to give universal and affordable access to smartphones, thus reducing the digital divide.

Finally, I would like to emphasize on the need for international cooperation to ensure a safer digital space and enable a smooth digitalization process within our societies.

As I conclude, I would like to affirm that Rwanda’s digital policy is aligned with the Global Declaration on the Digital Response to COVID-19 initiated by Estonia and Singapore, and confirm our support to this declaration. **Thank you.**