**STATEMENT BY AMBASSADOR XOLISA MABHONGO, DEPUTY PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF SOUTH AFRICA TO THE UNITED NATION ON THE MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE ON DIGITAL RESPONSE TO COVID-19**

**1 JULY 2020**

Thank you, Programme Director,

I would like to thank Estonia for organising this Ministerial Conference on Digital Response to COVID-19, which gives us the opportunity to welcome to discuss how we can emerge stronger and better equipped from this COVID-19 pandemic by using innovative and flexible digital solutions.

At the end of March 2020, President Ramaphosa declared a national state of disaster, including a nationwide lockdown to contain the spread of coronavirus and to slow down the transmission rate of its infections. Thus far, South Africa been successful in delaying a surge in infections. By delaying the spread of the virus, South Africa has been able to strengthen the capacity of the country's health system and to put in place wide-ranging public health programs to better manage the inevitable increase in infections. Despite the existing digital divide that exists within the country, the South African government has been proactive and successfully utilized the Internet and mobile communication in various platforms to provide transparent, accurate and timely information, including a fact sheet and infographics on the COVID-19 pandemic; which is available through free online platforms, telephone short message services (SMS), as well as WhatsApp.

The COVID-19 pandemic has shown all of us that it is imperative that we all, from governments, international organisations, public-private partnerships, technical experts as well as ordinary citizens must all work in unison to mitigate this virus. To this end, the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR), in collaboration with the University of Cape Town Division of Global Surgery and other partners have launched a self-diagnostic application and dashboard (COVID.za.com) in South Africa to assist health authorities in identifying communities with a high prevalence of COVID-19 symptoms and facilitate targeted testing and treatment interventions. This application will be rolled out to other African countries in the upcoming months.

As the world is adapting to the Fourth Industrial Revolution and deliberating on the pros and cons, we see a clear advantage of digital technology playing a critical role in combatting the spread of the coronavirus; and providing innovative ways for people around the world to work and stay connected.

Whilst recognising that the digital-industrial revolution is in its early stages of growth, South Africa is aware and respects the rapid pace at which technology is developing. In this regard, South Africa is investing in various initiatives intended to build resilient infrastructure, support research and innovation and domestic technology development in an inclusive and sustainable manner. The policies that have been introduced have led to the introduction of various programmes intended to support domestic technology development and research and innovation.
Mr Programme Director,

South Africa supports efforts to promote a safer digital space devoid of online/offline national, racial, ethnic and linguistic hatred incitement. South Africa is also aware of the void created by the lack of an international instrument on cybercrime. It is no longer prudent to rely on Bilateral Agreements and Technical Cooperation to eradicate cybercrimes, thus there is urgent need to find a global solution to address this challenge.

I thank you