

Message on the Launch of Vodacom in the Democratic Republic of Congo

27 May 2002

Your Excellency President Joseph Kabila,
Members of the Government
Leaders and members of Vodacom,
Our Congolese friends,
Fellow South Africans:

I am very happy to address this important occasion of the launch of Vodacom in the Democratic Republic of Congo. In many ways this strengthens the good relations between South Africa and the Congo. This launch will certainly assist in the reconstruction of the national economy of the DRC and, in this way, must also be seen as part and parcel of the process of the socio-economic recovery of the African continent.

The DRC poses many challenges to all of us as we engage in the process of fighting underdevelopment and poverty. In this regard, the fact that the telecommunication market in the DRC has not developed as it should, with teledensity at only 0.2%, means we should pool together all our resources to assist our brothers and sisters in this important country.

Clearly, if we are to move with the necessary speed towards the development of all our countries in Africa, we cannot allow a situation where a huge country such as the Democratic Republic of Congo, the third largest country on the continent, with a population of over 50 million people, has such a small telecommunication infrastructure.

Together, with the private sector and companies such as Vodacom, we are faced with the challenge of developing and improving telecommunications in our countries, throughout our vast continent, so that the people of Africa can also have access to modern means of communication, including telephones, the Internet and broadcasting. In this way we will ensure that the people of Congo can easily communicate with one another and with the people of South Africa, with the people of Tanzania, Ethiopia, Nigeria and Algeria, so that all our people are engaged in forging ties with fellow Africans.

This important occasion says to us that we are not prepared to allow a situation where one part of the world is rich and developed while the other part of the same world is poor and underdeveloped.

Through this investment from Vodacom, and other initiatives, the Democratic Republic of Congo will become a full participant in the technological revolution sweeping the world. As we all know, communications technologies can serve as catalysts enabling Africa to catch up with the rest of the world and take her rightful place amongst in world community.

This particular initiative will also serve to provide jobs for the Congolese people and offer an opportunity for people to become highly-skilled in what has become a very specialised industry.

The DRC is blessed with abundant natural resources. It is time that these are used to fast-track development for the benefit of all the people of the Congo.

We are greatly encouraged by the determination of the Congolese government, all other Congolese political formations, businesspeople and civil society to steer the country towards genuine peace, stability, national unity and reconciliation, democracy and economic development, as demonstrated during the Inter-Congolese Dialogue at Sun City.

We hope and pray that all outstanding matters on the agenda of the Inter-Congolese Dialogue will be resolved speedily, to begin the process towards peace, unity and democracy as soon as possible.

We would like to thank Vodacom for continuing to show confidence in our continent and for taking this important decision to invest in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

By taking this important step, you have made a significant contribution to the realisation of the dream of an African Renaissance and the implementation of New Partnership For Africa's Development (NEPAD).

We hope that this is only the beginning of a long and fruitful relationship. We wish you the best for the future.

I thank you.