

DoC hosts historic switch-on

The switch-on of the country's digital broadcasting signal formed part of the closing plenary session of World Telecommunication Standardisation Assembly (WTSA-08) at the Emperors Palace in Kempton Park on Thursday, 30 October 2008.

The Department of Communications (DoC) hosted the historic event to mark the advent of a new digital era in South Africa's broadcasting sector.

With the switch on, South Africa joined a few leading countries in the world such as the United Kingdom, New Zealand, United States, France and Mauritius that have started the digital migration process and it also placed the country well ahead in respect of meeting one of its broadcasting guarantees for the 2010 FIFA World Cup.

The digitisation of the country's broadcasting infrastructure is in line with a Cabinet decision taken on 21 February 2007 that the migration from Analogue Terrestrial Television (ATT) to Digital Terrestrial Television (DTT) should commence on 1 November 2008 and end on 1 November 2011.

The event was commemorated earlier than the actual switch on so that the 98 International Telecommunications Union (ITU) member countries attending the WTSA-08 could share in the historic occasion of the digital signal ushering in a new era for broadcasting.

South Africa's exciting digital migration process is in accordance with the ITU directive to ensure ongoing co-ordination and protection from interference. The analogue TV frequency protection that all countries enjoy will come to an end by the year 2015. It is therefore crucial to complete migration before 2015. South Africa has entered into agreements with other countries to ensure that there is no interference between various countries through its integrated frequency plans.

The broadcasting industry has acquired state of the art technology to ensure that signals are optimized to offer the best possible solutions that are currently deployed in many countries all over the world.

However, the migration is not just a project for broadcasters and signal distributors, it is truly a project for the nation and expected to take a minimum of three years. Viewers will still be in a position to receive the current analogue services of SABC1, 2, 3, MNet and e.tv.

The digital switch-on will allow for more channels to be broadcast in the same bandwidth as one current analogue channel uses. SABC estimates that up to eight new video channels can be provided in the same bandwidth as one analogue channel. The migration from analogue to the digital terrestrial TV will release valuable spectrum which can be utilized for other services given that it is a scarce resource.

ENDS.