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Digital Dzonga launched

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South Africa's Minister of Communications General (Ret) Sipiwe Nyanda formally launched the country's digital broadcasting migration office, Digital Dzonga, at Constitution Hill in Johannesburg on 21 July.

Minister Nyanda spoke about the challenges of meeting South Africa's analogue switch-off deadline in November 2011 and praised the Digital Dzonga's progress thus far, in having drafted The first Digital Terrestrial Television Readiness Report.

He noted that the South African Bureau of Standards (SABS) had finalised the specifications for the set top box (STB) required to decode the digital signal, which paves the way for the commercial launch of digital terrestrial television (DTT). The Department of Communications is in the process of finalising the STB Manufacturing Strategy.

In closing the Minister urged the media to work with the Digital Dzonga and the Department to help raise public awareness around the digital migration process.

Here is the Minister's speech in full:

The long journey to 2011 is on in South Africa!

When Cabinet took a policy decision in 2007 to migrate the country's broadcasting system from analogue to digital, we knew that we will be facing a huge challenge in this process. For us, broadcasting digital migration is not only about accessing digital television, it is also a means to address our socio-economic challenges and meet the Millennium Development Goals. The long-term benefits of the policy choice we made as a country far outweigh the costs inherent in the route taken. We did so knowing the magnitude and complexity of the work at hand and the impact of this process on all of us alike: government, labour, industry, consumers and the general public.

It is on this understanding that government established Digital Dzonga as an inclusive forum to drive the digital migration process in South Africa.

Today marks another major milestone in our journey to broadcasting digital migration as we formally launch Digital Dzonga, following the successful switch-on of the digital signal on 30 October 2008. The men and women serving on Digital Dzonga Advisory Council bring with them a lot of experience and expertise to drive migration activities in the public interest.

On behalf of the Government, I would like to thank industry and labour for making these resources available. This gesture augurs well for a continued positive relationship between the Department, civil society, organized labour and industry in working towards achieving a common goal.

I appreciate the progress made thus far regarding Digital Dzunga activities. The first Digital Terrestrial Television Readiness Report released by the Council earlier outlining critical factors to be in place and our progress in respect of these factors was a great reality check. From now on, such reports will be used as a monitoring tool for our performance against the target set for our journey to 2011. I look forward to receive an updated version so that urgent decisions can be taken.

Digital Dzunga's nomination alongside countries such as Finland and Sweden for the best digital switch-over plan at the Digital Switchover Strategies in London earlier this year underlines the recognition for our sterling work. Without doubt, this underlines the fact that the journey to 2011 is on track in South Africa.

On our part as a Department, we will in the next few weeks expedite the establishment of the Digital Migration Office to support the Digital Dzunga Council and management of migration project on a day to day basis.

I understand that the South African Bureau of Standards (SABS) has released the Set-Top-Box (STB) Specification, which is a positive development. We therefore, urge all parties dealing in software related issues to conclude their agreements so that manufacturing of STBs can commence in earnest. This will run concurrently with the finalisation of the STB manufacturing strategy by the Department of Communications.

Lessons learnt elsewhere, including countries with bigger economies have adequately demonstrated that migration is a challenging project that no country can claim to have mastered. We all learn as we go along.

I have taken note of the raging debates regarding our ability to meet the analogue switch-off deadline in 2011.

The decision about this date was taken by Cabinet taking into account the policy imperatives.

Until such time that Cabinet, has made new pronouncement on the matter, the date remains. Ours, therefore, should be to work with Digital Dzunga in ensuring set targets are met.

As lessons from developed countries have demonstrated, it is not necessarily the long period of dual illumination that determines success. It is the commitment and spirit of togetherness reinforced by constant communication with the public that can make migration a successful reality. Informing the public is not only a government responsibility, neither is it the exclusive domain of Digital Dzunga. It is the responsibility of all of us including the media. I therefore wish to make a humble appeal to the media, particularly print sector to work closely with both the Department and Digital Dzunga in ensuring that Broadcasting Digital Migration awareness takes place in the country. It is our combined responsibility that the public is well-informed on the impact of this process to them.

Digital Dzunga has provided a good model for many countries to follow. We need to share our lessons with our neighbouring countries, particularly those in the SADC region, and assist them where possible as part of our contribution to Africa's development.

Launching Digital Dzunga is the beginning of a long journey of accelerating the country to digital switch-over in 2011. We will not rest until this deadline is achieved. Admittedly, there lies

a lot of work ahead of us, but that should not deter us from continuing on this path of changing our people's lives for the better.

I would like to see the rest of South Africa, with special emphasis on the rural areas, being galvanised and ready for digital switchover. This is a responsibility that we as government have placed on Digital Dzonga.

Finally, I urge all of you to join us in this long journey because it is in the interest of the people of South Africa.

I thank you.