**Statement By Hon. Selibe Mochoboroane**

**Minister of Communications, Science and Technology**

**at**

**Ministerial roundtable on "Review of Progress made in the implementation of WSIS outcomes"**

Honourable Ministers,

Excellences,

Distinguished delegates,

Valuable guests and observers,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Good morning,

1.     Allow me, Mr. Moderator, to first congratulate you on your appointment as the moderator for this roundtable. The theme is pertinent and highly topical to the Lesotho delegation to assess progress on WSIS outcomes.

2.     I also wish to take this opportunity to thank our host, CSTD and UNCTAD, for the warmth and splendid organisation of this important forum. The opening ceremony statements and the Secretary General's Report earlier provided thought provoking interventions and have set the tune for our deliberations this week.

Mr Moderator,

3.    Lesotho has noted that ICTs can contribute significantly to economic growth and development of countries and thus committed to the pursuit of the goals of the WSIS.

4.    During the last decade, the Internet has revolutionised the information society, on the economic, social and political fronts. Since 2005 at the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) the world has changed drastically, particularly on how people interact and use information technology as a tool for development.

5.    In the context of Lesotho, I would like to focus on key initiatives that are in line with the WSIS outcomes implemented since 2005. They include, improvement of information and communication infrastructure, increase of access to telecommunications services across the country plus other associated challenges. In Lesotho, Universal Access to, and coverage for, all communications networks are being pursued as a means of social development and poverty alleviation. In addition, there is a need to bridge the technological divide and bring societies into the information age, both in the urban dwellers as well as in the remote rural areas.

6.    Lesotho adopted a modern Communications Policy in 2008 which lay a foundation for a forward looking and transparent environment that maintains a clear distinction between policy-making, regulation, and service provision.

Mr Moderator

7.    In pursing inclusive access, the Universal Access Fund (UAF), together with the investment in infrastructure developed by network operators has boasted coverage of the land mass of Lesotho with communications infrastructure at around 75%.

8.    It is gratifying to note that the above interventions have yielded the desired results whereby Lesotho now has market competition as well as diversity of services and products within telecommunications, broadcasting and Internet services. The tele-density of the country has increased to 80% of the population as at December 2012 with 78% being mobile while the remaining 2% is for fixed telephony.  This reflects a remarkable improvement from a mere 12% as at March 2005 when the second phase of WSIS, Tunis phase, was held.

9.    However, as noted in the Secretary General's report of 2014, Sub-Saharan Africa still experiences huge digital divide but the gap has begun to shrink with significant growth in ICT sector through new policies and initiatives of which Lesotho continues to make positive strides.

10.    Lesotho continues to promote an enabling environment for the ICTs through the Telecommunications Policy of 2008 and the Communications Act of 2012 that ushered in a converged and transparent regulatory environment that is geared towards promotion of investment in the communications sector.

11.	These interventions have yielded the market competition as well as diversity of services and products. While we are on course to meet some of the targets for Millennium Development Goals by 2015, in terms of access to ICTs, Lesotho is also faced with challenges of scarce and expensive ICT skills and limited capacity, that are exacerbated by brain-drain and low electricity generation to name but a few.

12.	Regarding the Internet, an Internet Exchange Point (IXP) was also developed under the Universal Access Fund and was commissioned in August 2011. This facility has assisted in handling the local Internet traffic without use of international routes. This was aimed at lowering Internet costs and free the international bandwidth of the local traffic.

13.	In addition, Lesotho has benefited from connectivity to the landing of several submarine fibre optic cables on the African east and west coasts, which saw bandwidth quadruple in 2012. Nevertheless, the improved international connectivity has not yet translated to lowering broadband prices on the retail level. Moreover, the land-locked position of Lesotho still leaves her in a vulnerable and non-competitive position owing to terrestrial back-haul linkages to the landing station of the submarine cable. We are aware of the efforts by international agencies, such as the ITU in addressing problem that are encountered by land-locked countries in accessing international bandwidth. This among others is exemplified by ITU's support to develop the Lesotho Broadband Policy.

14.  Lesotho Government also recognised the importance and contribution that STI can make in addressing major development challenges. The Government has since introduced and initiated an e-Government programme aimed at connecting all the government offices across the country. Today, about 70% of the government offices are connected to the government network to improve service delivery. This has required developing capacity within the government and incorporating ICT in the school curriculum.

Mr. Moderator and Distinguished Delegates,

15.  Another area of focus for Lesotho currently is to migrate from Analogue Television and Radio Broadcasting to Digital Terrestrial Television Broadcasting. The Government of the Kingdom of Lesotho and all SADC member states are putting all efforts to ensure compliance with the Geneva 2006 Agreement of ITU, in particular the decision on digital migration by 17th June 2015.

Mr Moderator,

16.  WSIS was a bold attempt to address the issues of ICTs through a structured and inclusive approach. It would be remise of me not to extend our appreciation to the following institutions, The International Telecommunication Union (ITU), United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) and the African Development Bank, have been our partners in various ways in our efforts to reach the Millennium Development Goals. They have

provided assistance in areas of policy formulation, capacity building, technical assistance and regulatory best practices.

17.    Lesotho delegation looks forward to the WSIS+10 High Level Event that will take place in Geneva from 10 to 13 June 2014 to review progress in the last ten years at the international and regional levels in the implementation of action lines, recommendations and commitments. The outcomes of WSIS+10 are critical in contributing to the Sustainable Development Goals SDGs and Post 2015 Agenda as alluded to by the Special Advisor to the Secretary General on Post-2015 Development Planning earlier.

18.    In conclusion, Chairperson, we are convinced that ICT applications can support sustainable development and contribute to poverty alleviation.  We thus pledge our commitment as a member of the information society to develop and use ICT as tools for socio-economic development.

I thank you for your kind attention.