

Text As Prepared

**Welcoming Remarks by Commissioner Kevin J. Martin
To the African VoIP Conference
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Thank you, Professor Akwule. It is a pleasure to be here and to bring greetings from my FCC colleagues. I look around this room and I see old and new friends. We have a rich history of working together . . . one that I hope will continue.

I applaud the collaboration between Afcom, the ITU, and TIA that makes this conference possible. These are economically turbulent and technologically unpredictable times, and more than ever, regulators and policymakers around the globe need to reach out to each other and learn from each other's experiences. Mr. Toure and the ITU are critical partners in this regard. And, that's why the dialogue you will have over the next two days is so vitally important.

Let's imagine for a moment that we could open the windows and see into the future of converging technologies . . . A future where your hard work and technology have created a true global community; a future where the Internet is no longer viewed as a threat by existing businesses, but as another distribution vehicle for content, with new revenue-generating models and choices for consumers; a future where consumers are focusing on interactivity, and a single device, possibly wireless, can deliver voice, video, and data; a future where there are multiple platforms and routes to the home. You are here to explore one slice of that future. I applaud your foresight.

As regulators, while we each have different systems, priorities and sometimes political realities, we often face many of the same challenges. First, we are each trying to maintain or develop a solid and reliable telephone infrastructure. Second, we are striving to ensure that the infrastructure is competitive. And third, we are all looking to find ways to introduce new and advanced technology, broadband and Internet services.

Additionally, we all face the challenge of promoting competition in turbulent economic times. At the FCC, we have learned that building public confidence in regulatory decision-making through transparent and efficient processes is especially important when the financial markets are unstable.

Telecommunications regulators can play a pivotal role in ensuring that their countries maximize resources to build strong and inclusive telecommunications and information infrastructures. Establishing an independent regulatory authority is a crucial factor in the success of any country's effort to introduce competition and to privatize and liberalize the telecommunications sector. A transparent regulatory process builds trust; encourages private investment, innovation, and infrastructure buildout; ensures fair competition; and manages scarce

resources efficiently.

In addition to establishing an independent and transparent regulatory process, it is critical that telecommunications regulators focus on enforcement. As competition increases, so does the potential for consumer complaints and disputes between carriers. Moreover, increased competition permits deregulation, and as unnecessary requirements are eliminated, it is important to focus on enforcing the ones that remain.

In the United States, we are struggling with all of these challenges, particularly with the appropriate regulatory framework for broadband services. Ultimately, we view ourselves as ambassadors for broadband. Technology and broadband bring economic efficiencies and can be engines of growth. We recognize that broadband deployment is an economic development issue. And, we've made a commitment that broadband must exist on as many platforms as possible. To achieve this, we believe that the broadband environment should be one of minimal regulation.

Broadband is new and unique, and the services that will flow to consumers have yet to take shape. At the FCC, we are fearful of intervening prematurely in a way that frustrates experimentation and creativity.

We are especially concerned about this in the context of IP telephony. As you know, in the United States, we have not chosen to regulate IP telephony, but are continuing to monitor marketplace developments. We refuse to just assume that it is a new form of an old friend. As regulators, we have to remember that IP telephony will not only enable voice communication, but also offer the promise that you or I can speak in English and our voices come out in French on the other end of the transmission. Or that relevant data accompany could accompany our spoken message. Indeed, VoIP presents an incredible opportunity for consumers worldwide and we have found that our approach has encouraged its development. At the same time, VoIP challenges settled definitions and preconceptions about what is voice and data, who provides which technology, and which regulatory boxes they should occupy.

Ultimately, I believe that one principle cuts across all the challenges we face: whether our decisions will create incentives for investment and innovation in our countries and communities and whether they will promote competition and consumer choice. Over the next two days, I urge you to be bold and to think outside the traditional boxes about the future of converging technologies and how, as policymakers, we can get there together. Through the work of the FCC's International Bureau and our joint efforts in the ITU, I look forward to our continued partnership in bringing the benefits of the information age to all peoples. Thank you very much.