

Honorable minister, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen. It is an honour and a privilege to be here with you today, at A4AI's first stakeholder forum in Nigeria. Na gode!

I am Sonia Jorge, the Executive Director of the Alliance for Affordable Internet. On behalf of the Alliance and our 55 members, let me say it is an honour and a pleasure to be here today at the kind invitation of the Ministry of Communication Technology. We are truly delighted to have the opportunity to facilitate this first gathering of the A4AI-Nigeria Multi-stakeholder Coalition.

First, a little bit of background on the Alliance for Affordable Internet – or A4AI as we are known. We are a diverse global coalition of public, private and civil society sector members, committed to driving down the cost of Internet access in less developed countries. Why is this important? Study after study has shown that affordable internet access boosts economies, reduces poverty, enhances democracy and allows people to exercise their basic human rights. Tomorrow, March 12, marks the 25th birthday of the World Wide Web and so it is a particularly auspicious time to be here, on the continent that will play a defining role in its next 25 years.

A4AI is just seven months old and we already have over 55 diverse member organisations - including some of the world's largest technology companies, country governments and major civil society players. Our Alliance focuses upon creating the conditions for open, efficient and competitive broadband markets via policy and regulatory reform. Why policy? Put simply, we recognise that even the best and most innovative technologies in the world can't drive prices down if policies and regulations hamper their use.

In many ways, today feels like a homecoming for myself and my team. It was a little over five months ago that we launched A4AI just down the road in Abuja and we got to meet many of you and experience the warm Nigerian hospitality. Just a few days later, Nigeria, under the leadership of the Honourable Minister, took the progressive step of becoming the first country to sign an MOU with the Alliance.

We are particularly excited to be here today because we know what happens in Nigeria matters. It matters to your 170 million citizens, many of whom are already doing amazing things with the Web. It matters to the 1bn people, myself included, who call this continent home, and where Nigeria has always played a leadership role and can shape Africa's future. And through your

powerful influence at a global level, a ripple that starts in Nigeria has the power to spread like a wave around the world.

So here we are, today, taking the first step after we signed the Memorandum of Understanding with the Ministry of Communication Technology. The primary objective of today's Forum is to establish a Nigerian multi-stakeholder coalition. This coalition will work together to complement and support the development of policy and regulatory proposals that will contribute towards the implementation of the Government's ambitious broadband plan to provide affordable access to the Internet for all Nigerians.

We are delighted to be off to a great start – having gathered here today a wide range of key stakeholders, including the Minister of Communications, the Hon Omobola Johnson, senior officials from the National Communications Commission (NCC), sectoral Ministries and other government agencies, industry representatives, leading Nigerian academics and researchers, civil society organisations and members of the media.

We thank you all for your participation in today's Forum – we look forward to working with you today to establish the A4AI-Nigeria multi-stakeholder coalition and outline our joint draft action plan for 2014. We are here to listen, share expertise and collaborate – and we recognize that this is a complex area and that many different views must be taken into account in order to succeed. By working together, I truly believe that we can make a difference to the lives of millions of Nigerians.

Without further ado, I am delighted to introduce you to the Honorable Minister Johnson to provide us with the keynote address. Honorable Minister, we have been privileged to be able to experience your dynamism and passion in the past months, and we have no doubt that with you at the helm, the Communication Technology Ministry will grow stronger and stronger and bring benefit to all Nigerians. Thank you in advance for the continued support and your leadership. We are truly honoured to have the opportunity of working with you towards our common goal of bringing affordable internet access to all Nigerians.