

## **AU Summit Recognizes Importance Role of ICTs**

**By Michael Ouma**

The 14<sup>th</sup> Ordinary Session of the Assembly of the African Union (AU), held in Addis Ababa under the theme, *Information and Communication Technologies in Africa: Prospects and Challenges for Development*, was a break from the past where security has featured prominently since the union was formed in 2002.

The African Union Commission works around four pillars or agenda items - peace and security; development, integration and cooperation; shared values and institution and capacity building.

The Assembly heard that the past year had mixed fortunes for Africa, presenting the continent with various challenges, setbacks and successes.

Jean Ping, chairperson of the AU Commission said that ICTs present challenges and various prospects for development in Africa, noting that cost of connectivity to the Internet impacts on access to information.

Ping highlighted a number of concrete projects that have been launched by the AU Commission in various sectors including ICT, infrastructure, energy, agriculture and education.

The AU Commission chair said that the Inga dam in Central Africa and the Kafue Gorge in Southern Africa were examples of satisfactory projects energy projects, adding that in education, the Pan African University project is underway and would help in the attainment of the UN's Millenium Development Goals (MDGs) of 2015.

“The AU Commission has also made progress in driving the science, technology and information society. An example is the tele-medicine facility opened at the AU clinic during the Summit through partnership with the Indian government,” said Ping.

The AU tele-medicine facility, financed by the Indian government, is part of the Pan African e-Network project, which is meant to enhance Africa's capacity by imparting quality education to students and to provide tele-medicine services, tele-education and video-conferencing as well as voice services for heads of state.

Addressing the opening session, UN secretary general Ban Ki Moon said that Africa needs to harness the benefits of ICTs to realize development and realization of MDGs.

The MDGs have identified ICTs as key to bridge the scientific and digital divides, reduce poverty, ensure socio-economic development and eventually support sustainable evolution in Africa.

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