

Africa needs own space agency: Sudan's Bashir

September 5 2012, by Abdelmoneim Abu Edris Ali

Africa needs its own space research agency, Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir told a regional conference of communications ministers who met on Wednesday as the continent's IT sector grows.

"I'm calling for the biggest project, an African space agency," Bashir said in remarks opening the two-day meeting.

"Africa must have its space agency."

Known as AfriSpace, it would enable "cooperation among African states in space research and technology and their space applications," crucial to the continent's development, says a working document issued for the African Union conference.

When they last met in Nigeria two years ago, ministers asked the AU Commission to conduct a feasibility study for AfriSpace.

At the Khartoum talks they are expected to ask for AU implementation of the study, aiming to provide a "roadmap for the creation of the African Space Agency."

The working document noted that only "a tiny minority" of countries control space technologies which play a major role in everything from broadcasting to weather forecasting, agriculture, health, and environmental monitoring.

"A common continental approach will allow the sharing of risks and costs and ensure the availability of skilled and sufficient human resources," the document said.

"It will also ensure a critical size of geographical area and population required in terms of the plan of action for some space applications."

Among its roles, AfriSpace would implement a long-term African [space policy](#), recommend "space objectives" to member states, and coordinate orbital slots and other [space](#) resources, the document said.

Twenty years ago, African nations decided to create the Regional African [Satellite Communication](#) Organisation (RASCOM), an intergovernmental commercial agency which in 2007 launched a pan-African [telecommunications satellite](#).

A replacement satellite went into orbit from French Guyana in August 2010 to support health and education projects, broadband connectivity as well as voice, Internet, radio and TV broadcasting, RASCOM said on its website.

Bashir said he is also looking forward to the ministers' endorsement of a convention on cyber legislation, which would provide guidelines for development of national-level laws.

"I'm calling for the African states to protect and secure all their communications sources," Bashir said.

Cybercrimes are increasing on the continent as broadband Internet access rises, a conference document said.

"Being wired to the rest of the world means that Africa is now within the perimeter of cybercrime, making the continent's information systems

more vulnerable than ever before," it said.

Information and communications technology demand is soaring along with the growth in broadband, another conference document said.

"Demand, around 300 gigabits per second in 2009, will reach 6,000 gigabits per second by 2018," it said.

Fourteen percent of Africa's population are Internet users but the figure is as high as 30 percent in parts of the continent, Aida Opoku-Mensah, of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, told the meeting.

In comparison, Internet penetration last year was 70 percent in the United Arab Emirates and about 48 percent in Saudi Arabia, according to data from the UN's International Telecommunication Union.

The AU has applied internationally to use .Africa as an Internet address which it says would be "a distinctive pan-African identification."

"This is important for Africa," Elham Mahmoud Ahmed Ibrahim, the AU's Commissioner for Infrastructure, told the conference.

A decision is expected next year by the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN), which coordinates online domain names.

Ministers are asked to "urgently" provide written support for the .Africa project, a conference document says, adding 70 percent of Africa's 54 nations have already given that backing.

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