

**SPEECH BY THE MINISTER FOR COMMUNICATIONS, HON. URSULA OWUSU-EKUFUL, AT THE FORMAL OPENING OF THE NATIONAL CYBER SECURITY AWARENESS MONTH 2020 AND THE LAUNCH OF THE CHILD ONLINE PROTECTION (COP) PORTAL
ACCRA, GHANA**

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Minister for Gender, Children and Social Protection, Hon. Cynthia Mamele Morrison

Deputy Chief of the US Embassy, Mr Christopher Lamora, representing the US

Ambassador to Ghana

Country Representative of UNICEF Ghana, Ms. Anne-Claire Dufay

National Cybersecurity Advisor, Dr Albert Antwi-Boasiako

Distinguished Guests

Ladies and Gentlemen.

It is my esteemed privilege to welcome all of you to this year's edition of Ghana's National Cyber Security Awareness Month, themed "*Cybersecurity in the Era of COVID-19*". Hosting this event for the 4th consecutive time, starting in 2017 as a week-long event, is a feat I am proud to be associated with. Our overarching theme for this year's event has been appropriately chosen to reflect the times we are in.

I believe by now we have ascertained that the utilization of the internet has become an integral part of our everyday lives, more so that of young people. Research from ITU and UNESCO in the 2019 report launched by the Broadband Commission for Sustainable Development Goals, posits that more than 50% of the world's population is now online, whereas children constitute more than 30% of Internet users. By 2022, another 1.2 billion new users would have been added to this figure, with children being the fastest-growing online demographic. Evidently, the continuous reliance on the internet by people and nations around the world has become conspicuous over time. 2020 and the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic has further demonstrated how increasingly dependent governments, private sectors and individuals are on technology. Indeed, reliance on ICT and the internet has led to immeasurable opportunities for citizens, especially children and young people who rely on the internet to conduct research, attend classes, study, and socialize, among others.

Ladies and Gentlemen, the theme for this year's event – *Cybersecurity in the Era of COVID-19* is

reflective enough considering the circumstances we find ourselves in where digital infrastructure has become the bedrock of our socio-economic development. In view of this new reality, cybersecurity across all sectors has become imperative.

Ghana has already begun the process to secure its digital journey and a number of initiatives have been implemented over the past 3 and half years of my stewardship as the Minister with oversight responsibility over cybersecurity matters. Ghana launched the Safer Digital Ghana campaign in 2018 to create awareness among Children, the Public, Businesses and Government. Ghana has also ratified two important international treaties on cybercrime and cybersecurity – the African Union Convention on Cyber Security and Personal Data Protection, known as the Malabo Convention, and the Convention on Cybercrime, also known as the Budapest Convention. Ghana has also revised its National Cybersecurity Policy & Strategy and I intend to submit this document to Cabinet for consideration before the end of the year. My Ministry, through the National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC) has also revised the National Child Online Protection framework which has enhanced our preventive and reactive interventions in addressing child online safety issues.

To further improve the regulatory regime for cybersecurity, my Ministry has submitted a draft Cybersecurity Bill to Cabinet for consideration. Parliament is expected to consider this Bill before the end of the year. Ladies and Gentlemen, our work on cybersecurity at the domestic level has won admiration and commendation from the international community. The Council of Europe has recognized Ghana as the hub for cybercrime capacity building in the English-speaking ECOWAS region. The World Bank has praised Ghana's formative developments in cybersecurity and has provided support to consolidate our modest gains. The World Economic Forum has identified Ghana for public-private sector partnership on cybersecurity. In February 2020, Ghana hosted the 8th Annual Freedom Online Conference which brought together over 300 participants from 60 countries across the globe to engage in discussions around cybersecurity and digital rights. With Ghana at the helm, the Conference placed emphasis on reviewing the current state of digital rights across Africa, as well as outlining strategies for improving digital rights on the continent and globally. During this event, Ghana, together with the Government of Germany launched the Digital Inclusion statement which has been adopted by FOC countries.

Ghana has made great strides in contributing to global response to cybercrimes and we will continue to do so. In June this year, Ghana was nominated to serve on the Independent Advisory Committee (IAC) of the Global Internet Forum to Counter Terrorism (GIFCT). Ghana's nomination to serve on the IAC of the GIFCT is another avenue to continue its sub-regional leadership role in improving

cybersecurity across the globe. Ghana has also participated in a number of United Nations consultative processes on cybersecurity.

One major achievement over the last year has been the successes that have emanated as a result of the launch of the Cybercrime/Cybersecurity Incident Reporting Points of Contact (PoC). Exactly a year ago, I launched the PoC to facilitate the reporting of cybercrime and cybersecurity incidents by the public. Since the operationalization of the PoC, the NCSC has received countless cybercrime/cybersecurity incidents from the public. Key among these reports are online fraud, publication of non-consensual intimate images (sextortion), online impersonation, malware attacks, online blackmail, website defacement, among others. Cumulatively, a total of 11,545 reports have been made through the PoC between January and August 2020. Interestingly, a significant number of people called the NCSC through the PoC to seek for guidance and direction in resolving cybersecurity incidents. Ladies and Gentlemen, the arrest and the ongoing prosecution of the mastermind of the empressleak website is a direct result from the launch of the PoC.

As mentioned earlier, children and young people make up a significant percentage of internet users. Hence, in spite of some of these advantages mentioned, the utilization of the internet has led to children and young people becoming more and more threatened by Child Sexual Abuse Materials (CSAM), whereby children are exposed to online sexual abuse through cyber grooming, cyberstalking, sexting, commercials and gaming applications. That is why the 2020 NCSAM launch is being done in tandem with the launch of the Child Online Protection Reporting Portal. The Internet Watch Foundation (IWF) reporting portal will be used to receive reports of CSAM available on the internet. This can enable reporting of cases to the appropriate organizations such as Facebook, to ensure that the images are taken down. The portal, which will complement the PoC will provide a safe platform for people to report suspected child sexual abuse materials. It is my firm believe that, the National CERT will find the collaboration with the IWF beneficial in responding to cybersecurity incidents involving children.

Ladies and Gentlemen, the NCSC has adopted a hybrid approach of delivering this year's awareness campaign by combining both physical interactions, under strict COVID-19 protocols, and the use of available virtual platforms. A number of activities are planned for the month including the Launch of the Security Operations Centre (SOC) at the National Information Technology Agency (NITA), Cybersecurity Roundtable Forum on the Impact of COVID-19 on Ghana's Digitalization Agenda, Cybersecurity Forum with Industry Players, Joint Freedom Online Coalition (FOC) programme on

Digital Inclusion, Joint engagements with SEI/Mitre through the Security Governance Initiative (SGI), Council of Europe Workshop on Cybercrime & Electronic Evidence Handling for Criminal Justice Sector, Regional Cybersecurity Capacity & Sensitisation Programme among others. In addition, there will public engagements with children and parents on Cyber Hygiene best practices. There will also be a live broadcast of selected events including a Cybersecurity Workshop on Mobile Money Fraud, through virtual & social platforms and media outlets. The need for this is as a result of the wider population's dependency on digital platform, hence the NCSC through the Ministry of Communications (MoC) will leverage on this development to intensify capacity building and awareness creation efforts. This will in turn equip the citizens with the risks associated in these perilous times and the countermeasures they can put in place. Most importantly, the event will go on to highlight what the Government has achieved in the area of cybersecurity within the past three and half years.

I hope you carefully look through the programme outline, identify the events that fall within your scope and participate actively in them.

I wish to express my appreciation to UNICEF, the Council of Europe, the World Bank, United States government and all our partners in supporting our journey to secure Ghana's digital development.

In conclusion, I believe that the purpose of this gathering will continue to reaffirm the Government's commitment to building a secure cyber ecosystem. On that note, I officially declare the 2020 edition of the National Cyber Security Awareness Month and the IWF reporting portal to support child online protection efforts launched.

Thank you.