



Monday, June 8, 2026

**KEYNOTE ADDRESS BY THE HON. MINISTER FOR COMMUNICATION,
DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY AND INNOVATIONS, HON. SAMUEL NARTEY
GEORGE, AT THE ECOWAS REGIONAL HACKATHON 2026 AT 10AM
9TH JUNE 2026,**

Mensvic Grand Hotel, East Legon -Accra

Your Excellency, Ambassador Mohammed Lawan Gana, Resident Representative of ECOWAS,
Director-General of the Cyber Security Authority, Mr Divine Selase Agbeti,
Distinguished representatives of the ECOWAS Commission,
Members of the diplomatic community,
Young developers and cybersecurity professionals from across West Africa,
Sponsors and partners,
All protocols observed,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me be direct: the future of West Africa's digital security is being shaped here—by the people and innovators in this room.

I am genuinely delighted to be with you for the opening of the ECOWAS Regional Hackathon 2026. And I say 'genuinely' because, as Minister for Communication, Digital Technology and Innovations, this is the kind of gathering that gives me real confidence about where we are headed as a region. This optimism is rooted in the remarkable progress we are witnessing daily.

We are living through one of the most consequential shifts in human history. Across West Africa, digital technology is no longer a luxury add-on — it is the backbone of how we trade, govern, learn, and connect. Mobile money has brought financial services to people who never had a bank account. Digital platforms are helping farmers in rural Ghana get better prices for their produce. Telemedicine is reaching patients who would otherwise have no

access to healthcare. AI is helping governments deliver services more efficiently than ever before. This is the promise of our digital era — and it is real.

Let us now consider the challenges that come with this progress.

Every system we build, every platform we launch, every database we create — creates a surface that someone, somewhere, is trying to exploit. The Interpol Africa Cyberthreat Assessment Report of 2025 paints a picture that should concern every policymaker, every business owner, and every citizen in this region. We are seeing a sharp rise in ransomware attacks that lock hospitals out of patient records. Business email compromise scams are draining millions from companies and government institutions that believe they are making legitimate transfers. Organised criminal networks are running sophisticated fraud operations that span multiple countries, moving seamlessly across our borders in ways that our enforcement agencies are still catching up with.

These are not distant, abstract threats. They are happening in our cities, in our financial systems, in our institutions — right now. And the people behind them are technically capable, well-resourced, and increasingly sophisticated.

The Cyber Security Authority has done important work on this front. Working alongside other security agencies, the CSA has helped dismantle cybercrime and trafficking-linked scam centres operating right here in Ghana — operations that have led to the arrest of hundreds of suspects.

What is particularly sobering is that many of those caught up in these operations are young people. Young people with real technical ability — but whose skills were pointed in the wrong direction.

This brings me to why the work you are doing here matters so much.

There is a global shortage of over four million cybersecurity professionals, with Africa facing the widest gap. This isn't a sign of weakness, but of opportunity. The world needs your skills urgently. Our challenge is to build and direct enough talent, quickly, to address real problems.

Building on this, the WEF is also clear on something else: as artificial intelligence accelerates the pace of digital adoption, the risk of what they call 'cyber inequity' grows. Countries that cannot defend their own digital infrastructure become dependent — on foreign vendors, foreign expertise, and foreign decisions about their own security. That is not a position any sovereign nation wants to be in.

As a government, we have taken deliberate steps to change this. We believe that digital transformation only delivers its full promise if it is underpinned by digital trust — and that trust has to be built on local expertise and local ownership.

To address this gap, our One Million Coders programme was developed. This is a four-year national initiative, led by the Ministry of Communication, Digital Technology and Innovations, to equip one million Ghanaians with skills in coding, cybersecurity, data science, and network support. We are

not waiting for these professionals to come from elsewhere. We are building them here — and the framework we are developing can serve as a model for our neighbours across the ECOWAS region.

The future of work is in building and securing digital infrastructure. The jobs are there. The demand is growing. What we need are the people ready to step into them.

Just as important as technical skill is responsible innovation. The most powerful technology in the wrong hands, or without ethical guardrails, does not create prosperity. It creates risk. As you build solutions over the next 48 hours, I encourage you to think not just about what is technically possible, but about what is responsible — what protects citizens, what respects privacy, what earns trust.

This is what separates great engineers from good ones. Anyone can build a tool. The question is whether your tool makes people safer, more empowered, and better off.

To every participant gathered here today — I want to speak to you directly. You have come from across West Africa. You have different backgrounds, different stacks, different experiences. But you are all here because you have the curiosity and the capability to solve hard problems. Do not underestimate that.

Over the next 48 hours, I want you to build as if the solution you create will be deployed in the real world — because it might be. Some of the most

impactful cybersecurity tools, fintech solutions, and digital platforms in Africa began exactly this way: a hackathon, a team, a problem, and the stubbornness to solve it.

Another crucial opportunity this hackathon presents is collaboration across borders. The connections you build this weekend — with developers from Nigeria, Senegal, Côte d'Ivoire, Sierra Leone, and across the region — will outlast this event. Build networks. Share knowledge. Create solutions that reflect African realities, not imported templates.

Events like this embody more than just competition; they are vital pipelines. I commend the ECOWAS Commission, the Cyber Security Authority, the organising committee, mentors, sponsors, and all technical partners for creating this platform. They feed talent into startups, into institutions, and into policy. The ideas prototyped here can become the tools that protect millions of people across our region.

West Africa's digital future depends not just on access to technology, but on securing it, governing it wisely, and building leaders who truly understand it. Ghana is fully committed to that future — and to working with every ECOWAS member state, every partner, and every one of you to make it real.

Build well. Build securely. And show us what Africa's next generation of digital defenders can do.

Thank you.