



Republic of Botswana

Welcome Remarks

BY

**ASSISTANT MINISTER
HONOURABLE NNANIKI WILHEMINA TEBOGO
MAKWINJA,
MINISTRY OF EDUCATION AND SKILLS DEVELOPMENT
(MESD)**

ON THE OCCASION

**OF THE OFFICIAL LAUNCH OF THE BOTSWANA
SATELLITE GROUND STATION (BOTSWANA SAT-1
PROJECT)**

VENUE: BOTSAT 1 Ground Station, BIUST, Palapye

DATE: 29TH November 2022

1. I am really honored and privileged to be here today witnessing the commissioning of BOTSAT-1 Ground station by His Excellency, the President of the Republic of Botswana Dr. Mokgweetsi E.K. Masisi. This is a clear testimony that the Botswana International University of Science & Technology (BIUST) is achieving its core mandate of a research-intensive University, aimed at increasing the number of skilled scientists and engineers; stimulation of research, innovation and technology transfer; as well as increasing a competitive and innovative tertiary education sector for socio-economic development.
2. Your Excellency, I want to assure you that BIUST is moving in the right direction in its undertaking of cutting-edge research projects which are aimed at solving societal challenges. A classic example is the "drones for Health" project, a pilot project which was launched here at BIUST in May 2021 in conjunction with the Ministry of Health and United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). Moreover, there is the pyrolysis plant project funded through the Botswana Innovation Fund which has the potential to convert coal-to-liquid, just to mention but a few.

3. Your Excellency, I recently witnessed the UNISECO India-Africa Hackathon 2022 held in India from 22-25th November 2022. The UNESCO INDIA – AFRICA Hackathon is an annual 36 hours event that brings together students, educators, teachers, and the research community of India and its African partners to tackle the common challenges faced by their countries and serves as a facilitator for cultural amalgamation. I am delighted and proud to share this testimony with you that, 17 Batswana University students participated and won 4 prizes, among these were 5 from BUIST, 10 from UB and 2 from Botho University. We indeed have innovators and researchers who can transform the economy of this country.

4. Your Excellency, among the four who won prizes is Tony Onkgopotse Richard from BIUST under the Agriculture theme. He Developed an Artificial Intelligence (IA) based voice assisted contact centre for assisting farmers with their problems. Farmers can log their problems with the contact centre through phone calls / SMS / Web App and in return an automated voice response can be provided to the farmers with the most appropriate solution for their problems. The students are arriving today from India.

5. Your Excellency, in terms of societal impact, BIUST is working with the Ministry of State President and it is training local communities in sunflower production. This project will be rolled to other areas of Botswana. BIUST is also working with the Ministry of Youth Sports and Culture to train and coach Youth Development beneficiaries and this has resulted in tremendous improvement in the project success. BIUST is truly a catalyst for innovation and transformation, and it is stirring the ship in the right direction towards achieving a knowledge-based economy.

6. Ladies and Gentlemen, it will be remiss of me if I do not congratulate and thank the Ministry of Communications, Knowledge & Technology for their continued support and engagement with BIUST on a number of technological research projects cutting across various sectors of the economy. The success of these research projects has a huge reward in our economic development in terms of skills transfer, reduction of import bill, export substitution and creation of jobs.

7. Your Excellency, I would like to emphasize that other ministries should emulate the Ministry of Communications, Knowledge and Technology and work with BIUST to identify and solve challenges in their work environment as BIUST has

proven to possess great capability in solving both industrial and societal challenges. BIUST researchers have demonstrated the zeal and commitment to work with enterprises and society to address their challenges.

8. Your Excellency, this Satellite project is a golden opportunity to demonstrate the capacity of BIUST and the plentiful knowledge resources at all levels as displayed by its academic staff and graduates who were involved in this first ever specialized project and delivering it on record time. This is a real demonstration of our dreams of transitioning to a knowledge economy being realized.
9. On this note, I would like to congratulate the BIUST's leadership and all those involved in the project in ensuring the successful completion of phase one of the Satellite project, being the Ground communication station, which is key in data reception, interpretation, and dissemination.
10. We have recently given BIUST a go ahead to form a Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV) company to generate third stream income, the BIUST Enterprise Limited. This new company will be responsible for managing the commercial business knowledge market operation of the Botswana satellite project (Botsat1). This will be a major initial step for

Botswana's entry into the multi-billion-dollar satellite industry and knowledge economy.

11. With these few remarks I welcome you all and wish you a productive and interactive day ahead.

I thank you all for your attention.

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