The Minister of Communications and Digital Technologies, Ms Stella Ndabeni-Abrahams is, from 20 – 22 November 2019, leading the South African delegation at the 38th World Radiocommunication Conference (WRC) taking place in Sharm El-Sheikh, Egypt. The delegation comprises of government officials, state-owned entities, private sector companies and industry experts.

Held under the auspices of the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), WRC is a treaty conference convened every four years to review and revise, if necessary, texts of the Radio Regulations. These regulations represent the international treaty governing the use of radio-frequencies and associated satellite orbits. WRC is therefore of paramount importance as the development of international regulations and standards ensure that networks are compatible, interoperable and operate without causing or receiving harmful interference to or from adjacent services.

Attended by over 3000 delegates from about 193 ITU-member states, WRC-19 will see stakeholders working towards reviewing the regulatory framework and building consensus on additional spectrum allocation or identification for these services, if necessary. Consequently, key agenda items include additional spectrum for 5G, high altitude platform systems, terrestrial wireless applications, radio local area networks, intelligent transport systems and railway wireless technologies; amongst others.
Minister Ndabeni-Abrahams posits that the conference outcomes must translate into positive benefits for South Africa and other developing countries. “We are ready to expand into the world of 5G and hopeful that it will benefit societies, industries and contribute to wider economic participation by SMMEs and innovators. This is part of the broader country plan that the department, in collaboration with the Presidential Commission on the Fourth Industrial Revolution is working on in building a digital, innovation-driven economy,” she said.

The Minister will conclude proceedings by signing the WRC-19 Final Acts, thereby paving a way for ICASA to undertake an investigation and report to the Minister on the spectrum requirements of 5G agreed to at the conference and in accordance with the Policy on High Demand Spectrum and Policy Direction on the Licensing of Wireless Open Access Network.

In terms of the Electronic Communications Act, after every World Radiocommunication Conference, ICASA is also required to update the National Radio-Frequency Plan in line with amendments to the Radio Regulations. This plan is subsequently considered for approval by the Minister.

ISSUED BY THE MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS & DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES

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