



## A STATEMENT PROPOSING COSTS REDUCTION FOR ICT AND INTERNET SERVICES IN TANZANIA DURING THE CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19) PANDEMIC

The Tanzania Human Rights Defenders Coalition (THRDC), would like to take this opportunity to address the costs of ICT products and services, mobile and internet services and urge service providers to reduce charges on consumers in light of the current Coronavirus outbreak in Tanzania.

Ever since the government of the United Republic of Tanzania declared the first case of the coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19) on 16<sup>th</sup> March, 2020, and subsequently closure of schools, institutions of higher learning while imposing bans on unnecessary gatherings, there has been a sustained reduction of business activities in the country as offices and many businesses closed to prevent further spread of the virus. As of 28<sup>th</sup> April 2020, according to Prime Minister Kassim Majaliwa, the number of COVID-19 case victims have risen to 480, with 167 recoveries and 16 deaths.

The current state of affairs has forced, students, teachers, businesses, human rights defenders, Civil Society Organizations and the public servants to close offices as part of implementing social distancing and stay at home rules. This situation, however, is a blessing in disguise for mobile network operators, internet service providers and those working to provide Information and Communication Technology services, who have been earning huge profit, since electronic equipment such as mobile telephone and computers are increasingly being relied upon for most communications locally and across the world during these times of the coronavirus pandemic.

In the United States and United Kingdom for example, where coronavirus infections have intensified— forcing authorities to impose curfews, mobile networks and internet service providers in those countries such as AT&T and Comcast of U.S and Virgin Media and Vodafone of U.K and many others, have slashed service costs for their customers. Other service providers have gone an extra mile by offering free internet services for two months or more.

Therefore, the Tanzania Human Rights Defenders Coalition (THRDC) calls upon internet service providers, mobile networks operators, ICT companies, the Tanzania Communications Regulatory Authority (TCRA), HRDs, CSOs stakeholders, the Tanzanian Government and internet and mobile service users to consider the following;

### OUR CALL:

- 1) We urge Human Rights Defenders (HRDs) and CSOs stakeholders to set a good precedent for the public by making the best use of online communication tools and services as they work from home. We recommend using Zoom.com, Jitsi Meet, BlueJeans, Wire and Skype for easy video conferencing. And WhatsApp, Signal and Telegram for chat and instant messaging.
- 2) We call upon mobile network operator, internet service providers, and vendors of ICT services to reduce costs for their services and products, but rather offer cost effective internet bundles to ease the burden on Tanzanians at this time where many people are working from home and students need internet services for learning purposes.
- 3) Also, we ask the Tanzania Communications Regulatory Authority (TCRA) to instruct mobile service providers and internet service providers to reduce service costs or to provide free service packages to users such as free Wi-Fi at commuter bus stops.

- 4) This is the right time for TCRA to reduce or completely waive registration costs for owners of online accounts like YouTube and Blogs, so that teachers could make use of these platforms to teach students from home, let alone allowing the wider society to use them for educational purposes.
- 5) We advise students to stay at home and use social media platforms and television for educational purposes.
- 6) Vendors of ICT products including mobile telephones and computers should reduce prices for their products to ease the burden on their customers given that most families have suffered a substantial loss of income as the coronavirus pandemic continues to tighten its firm grip.
- 7) We request mobile network users, internet users, and other users of electronic equipment including mobile telephones and computers to protect themselves against online criminals, conmen and hackers, as well as upholding the social distancing policy to avoid being infected with the coronavirus.
- 8) We also advise internet service providers as well as mobile money and other users of banking services to wisely use their monetary resources and save as much as possible since it is not known when this tragedy will eventually come to an end.
- 9) We advise the Ministry of Finance through the Tanzania Revenue Authority (TRA) to reduce relevant taxes related to internet services for service providers, so that Tanzanians can enjoy using the internet at this time.
- 10) We advise business owners to seize the opportunity and use social networks to promote and sell their products or services to prevent people from flocking in their stores.
- 11) We call upon the police force to stop arresting Tanzanians who use their fundamental right to accessing and imparting information through digital platforms during this time. The police should instead continue to protect online users against criminals who take advantage of the coronavirus pandemic to commit cybercrimes.
- 12) We acknowledge the role of the National ICT Broadband Backbone in supplying internet services in Tanzania and in neighboring countries. We call upon respective authorities to ensure that mobile network providers and internet users keep getting access to fast and reliable internet connection during this time.
- 13) Lastly, we request the Government, Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, and parents with school-going children to arrange to compensate teachers so that they can run online classes on multiple platforms, since teachers have their own needs as it is the case of other professionals.

*Issued by:*



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