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Statement by His Excellency President Cyril Ramaphosa during the Open Session of the 10th BRICS Summit, Sandton International Convention Centre

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Your Excellency, President Temer,
Your Excellency, President Putin,
Your Excellency, Prime Minister Modi,
Your Excellency, President Xi,
Honourable Ministers,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

From its formation, the BRICS partnership has had its sights firmly set on the future.

It is itself the product of a rapidly changing world, which has seen the emergence of new economies, the realignment of old alliances and shifts in the balance of global power.

It is therefore appropriate that at this moment in the evolution of BRICS, we should focus on collaboration for inclusive growth and shared prosperity in the 4th industrial revolution.

Quantum leaps in technology and innovation present enormous opportunities for growth, development and human progress.

This surge in innovation has the potential to dramatically improve productivity and to place entire countries on a new trajectory of prosperity.

It has the potential to solve many of the social problems we face, by better equipping us to combat disease, hunger and environmental degradation.

However, unless it is approached in a collaborative manner, underpinned by a developmental agenda, rapid technological change could merely serve to entrench existing disparities within and between countries.

It could also create new faultlines in our societies.

This places a great responsibility on all of us.

Through our collective effort, by working together, I am certain that we will be able to confront the challenges and seize the opportunities that this new age of development presents.

We proceed from the understanding that this is not simply a digital revolution, but a fundamental shift in the way people live, work and relate

It is a phenomenon that cuts across all industries and technologies.

There is no area of economic activity that is immune from technological disruption.

According to Professor Klaus Schwab of the World Economic Forum, the 4th Industrial Revolution “is characterised by a fusion of technologies that is blurring the lines between the physical, digital, and biological spheres”.

This means that our response needs to be comprehensive and integrated.

As BRICS countries, we should not become mere adopters of new technologies.

Rather, we need to combine our resources and expertise to become innovators.

We should not allow technology to shape our societies.

We must instead ensure that the needs of our societies shape the technologies that we develop.

We must ensure that mastery of the 4th Industrial Revolution does not become the exclusive preserve of just a handful of countries.

We must promote inclusivity, diversity and cooperation.

Excellencies,

The technologies of the 4th Industrial Revolution provide developing and emerging economies with the opportunity to leapfrog the technologies of the preceding revolutions.

The rapid adoption of mobile telecommunications in Africa and other parts of the developing world, for example, demonstrates how innovation can ignite sudden bursts of development.

It demonstrates that, properly harnessed, new technologies can ensure more efficient processes and more reliable systems of service delivery.

They can expand economic participation by ensuring that knowledge and information is more broadly disseminated across the population.

To succeed, however, we need to equip our people with the necessary skills to thrive in such a society and in such an economy.

The World Economic Forum predicts that the three most important skills for an employee by 2020 will be complex problem-solving, critical thinking and creativity.

Without adequate training, only a few emerging economies will possess these skills in sufficient numbers, while others will see their prospects stifled by automation.

There is a need to develop more agile and applied education models.

While this must start even before a child enters primary school and continue right through to our universities and colleges, there is an urgent need in developing and emerging economies to re-skill a significant portion of the current workforce.

Governments should formulate and institute policies that are supportive of these processes.

Such policies should provide a favourable environment for foreign investment in the development of new sectors and technologies.

Such investment improves the supply of relevant skills, expands the capacity for research and development, and contributes to an environment that nurtures innovation.

Equally important are policies that support and stimulate local industries, especially small, medium and micro enterprises.

It is against this backdrop that BRICS Ministers of Industry resolved to establish the BRICS Partnership on the New Industrial Revolution.

It aims to translate the vision of the second decade of BRICS cooperation into reality through deepened cooperation on industrialisation, innovation, inclusiveness and investment.

Under the partnership, and in support of the manufacturing sector, a new industrial revolution advisory group comprised of policy makers and experts from all BRICS countries will be established.

Excellencies,

As the BRICS Forum, we can neither ignore, nor take for granted, the reality that is the 4th Industrial Revolution and the impact that it will have on the global economy.

As we enter the second Golden Decade of BRICS, we need to look to the future and place ourselves at the forefront of the extraordinary changes that are taking place.

In conclusion, our officials must engage in robust discussions to develop concrete actions.

As a bloc, we should use this opportunity to ensure that we fully appreciate and exploit the opportunities presented by this wondrous new age of technology in building a brighter shared future for humanity.

I thank you.
