Good evening and welcome.

It is a privilege to host you once again at MTN's Ambassadors' Appreciation Dinner. Thank you, each of you, for joining us this evening.

This gathering has become one of the most important moments on our calendar. It lets us pause and recognise a simple reality: our success as a business has always been intertwined with the success of the countries and communities we serve.

Who we are: MTN and Africa

Let me start with who we are. MTN began in 1994, at the dawn of democracy in South Africa. Today we are Africa's largest mobile network operator, serving more than 317 million customers across 19 markets.

That is more than 317 million people who rely on us to speak to their families, run their businesses, learn, save, send money and reach essential services.

For more than three decades, MTN has grown alongside this continent. We have witnessed its resilience, its ambition and its transformation.

Scale like that carries responsibility. And through all that change, one lesson has held: progress is built through partnership. For your partnership, we sincerely thank you.

Partnerships for progress

This year's theme, **"Africa Connected: Unlocking Shared Prosperity through Partnerships,"** reflects a conviction that has guided us throughout our journey: connectivity is one of the most powerful enablers of human progress.

- A connected farmer can access markets and information.
- A connected entrepreneur can reach new customers.
- A connected student can access education and opportunity.
- A connected citizen can participate fully in the economy and in society.

Achieving that ambition requires partnership. Governments cannot do it alone. Business cannot do it alone. Nor can development institutions. Progress depends on collaboration across sectors, borders and communities. That is what we mean by Partnerships for Progress.

A year ago, at this gathering, I shared a simple conviction: *"The time is now for Africa to take charge of its own socioeconomic progress. We need to look within for solutions and to develop our own communities."*

I believe that more firmly today. Africa cannot afford to be a spectator while the rules of the next economy, on technology, data and trade, are being written. The choices we make this decade will shape the prosperity of generations. Making them well will take purpose, unity and urgency from all of us.

Ambition 2030 and Africa's digital future

This belief sits at the heart of our purpose: to lead digital solutions for Africa's progress. It is the foundation of our Ambition 2030 strategy.

Africa is home to the world's youngest population, with more than 60% of Africans under 25, and one of the fastest-growing digital economies. Across much of the continent, mobile has become the primary gateway to economic participation.

Yet millions remain excluded because they lack affordable devices, digital skills and pathways into the digital economy.

So our task is not simply to connect people. It is to ensure that connectivity translates into opportunity, inclusion and sustainable growth. That is why we keep investing in digital infrastructure, digital platforms and financial services that widen participation.

The MTN Group Foundation and Y'ello Care

It is also why our Foundations matter. Across our markets, MTN Foundations have spent decades serving communities, creating opportunities and improving lives.

Building on that legacy, we established the MTN Group Foundation as a pan-African platform: to mobilise larger partnerships, scale impact across markets and accelerate digital and financial inclusion on the continent. It complements our market Foundations, and it gives us the means to deliver measurable impact at scale.

And it is why we are here tonight. Because the same spirit lives in our people. Y'ello Care, our flagship employee volunteer campaign, is now in its 19th year.

Y'ello Care is shared value made personal. Later this evening, we will recognise the colleagues and teams who lived it best.

AI: Built for Africa, for good

Perhaps no issue better illustrates Africa's moment than artificial intelligence. It is rapidly becoming one of the defining technologies of our generation. Yet there is a risk.

If Africa is absent from the development of AI, then our languages, cultures, knowledge and lived realities will be underrepresented in the technologies that shape our societies. Today, an estimated 90% of Africa's data is stored on other continents.

That is why I am honoured to serve as a founding commissioner of the AI for Good Global Commission convened by the International Telecommunication Union and launched in July this year. It brings together heads of state and government, business leaders and heads of UN agencies.

Its mission is practical: to identify pathways that strengthen trust, expand access and unlock AI's potential to solve real-world problems, with developing countries helping to shape the agenda and not only receiving the outcome.

This matters because 2.2 billion people are still offline, a quarter of the world cut off from AI. Done carelessly, AI will deepen the divides we have spent decades closing. Done properly, it can drive development. And doing it properly means it must be safe, ethical and inclusive.

The question is therefore not whether Africa will use AI. The question is whether Africa will help build it. For Africa, AI is not simply a technology agenda. It is a development agenda. A competitiveness agenda. And increasingly, a sovereignty agenda.

Closing: African optimism

Your Excellencies, I am an optimist about Africa. Not a naive one. My optimism is built on what we see every day: young Africans building businesses, mothers reaching care, and communities connecting to a wider world.

At MTN, that optimism comes down to three words: hope, dignity and opportunity.

That is what it means to lead digital solutions for Africa's progress. It is about hope, dignity and opportunity for Africans.

And let me be clear about what binds us. Our fortunes are intertwined with the fortunes of the African continent. When Africa's young people thrive, MTN thrives. When Africa's economies grow, MTN grows. That was true in 1994. It is truer today, with more than 317 million customers who trust us across the continent.

Ladies and gentlemen, we are in the midst of the most profound technology developments and shifts, and it's important that the communities from developing markets such as those we serve in Africa have a voice and agency. Voice and agency matters.

As MTN, we remain committed to playing our part. Together, through partnership, shared purpose and a common vision for our continent, we can make Africa's next chapter its most transformative yet.

I thank you, and I wish you a wonderful evening.