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**KEY-NOTE ADDRESS AT THE FORMAL LAUNCH OF THE AFRICAN TAX
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Mr Chairman, Faculty members, members of the Government of the Republic of South Africa here present, my colleague tax administrators, distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen. I am profoundly pleased and singularly honoured to be with you this evening and participate in this epoch-making event of formally launching the African Tax Institute as a continent-wide institution designed to achieve a significant improvement in tax policy formulation and related tax administration capacity of African countries.

The transformation of SATI into ATI is a significant milestone for the African continent. Whilst Southern Africa is undoubtedly important, we must also remember that beyond the 14 countries of SADC there are a further 40 African countries spread across Central, East, Northern, and, of course, my part of Africa - the West. Whilst we may have different languages and cultures we all have taxpayers and the similar challenges they present for us concerning tax policies, tax administration and tax compliance. Sharing our respective expertise and experiences can only be good for the development of Africa. We need to work together across the African continent and learn from each other. We need to relentlessly work together in order to achieve greater harmonization of tax policies especially in challenging areas such as the granting of relief and exemptions in key sectors including the exploitation of our natural resources. Undoubtedly a continent-wide institution such as ATI and its capability to conduct research on cross-cutting issues will be of immense value in the realization of this vision.

My country, Sierra Leone, is one of the smaller African countries just emerging from several years of a brutal conflict: we established a Revenue Authority in 2002 and we are still in the early days of modernising how we do things. Our systems and processes are antiquated, and based largely on what we inherited at Independence some 46 years ago. We have precious little in the way of computerisation and many gaps in our capacity to administer taxes and Customs in a professional way. The several countries that belong to this category in Africa certainly need help and the independent forum ATI will provide is of immeasurable value to us and, I am sure, will help us modernise and transform how we do things. This opportunity has been realized by a number of West African countries who have in the past and even as we speak sent employees and managers of their Revenue Authorities to participate in the highly productive and popular SATI Winter Taxation Programme.

Like many other countries, we in Sierra Leone, have had our problems in the past with wars and insecurity. Revenue is the lifeblood of any country. Without it the State cannot function and democracies might collapse. Revenue provides our people with the basics of life - clean water, sanitation, education, health services and so on. Beyond that all of us are striving to see our countries develop economically. Sound tax policies and tax administration can be an engine for economic growth and we all need to learn from each other what works and, more importantly, what does not. ATI can play a key part in this important learning process.

We all need to develop our current and future middle and senior tax policy and tax administration officials and the training ATI will provide, together with the post-graduate degree programs in taxation, promises to play a key part in this capacity building endeavour. ATI also aims to undertake tax-related research in Africa; this is particularly welcome - only ATI will be able to present what we have done (or not done) impartially and overcome the obvious risks of Revenue Authorities putting their own gloss on things or, for example, the Bretton Woods Institutions giving research a particular slant.

I am not going to make a long speech and keep you further from the rest of this function. But I would like to leave you with a parting plea. Let us all, countries large and small, East, West, North, Central or South, give ATI our full support. We must put our individual national interests to one side and work together, so that ATI will grow from a small institution providing a dozen or so short courses annually, to a towering academic and research body, and gradually to an institution that can provide the support we all need for the development of tax policy and tax administration across our continent. We must ensure that the ultimate goal of ATI is achieved, namely building independent capacity within Africa to enable African countries to address internal, regional and global tax policy and tax administration issues. On behalf of West Africa I welcome unreservedly the launch of ATI and I call upon all countries represented here tonight to pledge their fullest support to helping ATI achieve this goal - if we all work together I am sure the African Tax Institute will be a great success.

I thank you all for your kind attention.