

KEYNOTE SPEECH DELIVERED BY THE EVC AT THE FAMILY JOY INTERNATIONAL EVENT IN COMMEMORATION OF THE WORLD CYBERSECURITY MONTH AT THE AFRICAN UNIVERSITY OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY (AUST) , ABUJA, ON WEDNESDAY 29TH OCTOBER, 2025

THEME: “Building a Safer Digital Future – Empowering Youths and Women in Cybersecurity”

Ladies and gentlemen

It is my pleasure to stand before you today to speak on a matter that affects us all: *building a safer digital future*, one that not only holds great promise but great risk if we do not tackle the challenges of cybersecurity together. Today, I want to highlight not only the threats we face, but the opportunities we have, especially when we choose to empower **youths and women** in building a safer digital world.

We live in a time when digital technology has become the backbone of our economies, our education systems, and even our daily lives. This spans from remote work and online learning to financial transactions and health services. Intricate within this digital world are also cyber threats that are growing at an exponential rate, from data breaches to ransomware attacks, identity theft, social engineering and more. These cyber incidences threaten digital trust and socio-economic growth.

Cybersecurity is about safeguarding our networks, systems, devices, and our critical services. When systems are disrupted, real people are affected: students lose access to lessons, businesses lose income, patients lose medical care, even governance is threatened. A safer digital future thus protects the vulnerable, scales innovation, and nurtures trust—trust being the driving force for a growing digital economy.

To build a safer digital future we need to involve more people in cybersecurity especially those who have been underrepresented. This brings me to two important, yet often overlooked, groups: the youth and women.

Why Youth some might ask?

This answer is simple and right before us: It is because they are the largest group of digital users. They are tech-savvy, curious, and innovative. They are on social media, they are attending virtual meetings, streaming videos and games and coding. Yet, digital literacy cannot be simply limited to social media and coding. It must include cybersecurity awareness, ethical responsibility, and the skills to defend against cyber

threats. Empowering young people in cybersecurity means equipping them to not only become consumers, but guardians of the digital space.

The 2024 Global Cybersecurity Index (GCI), released by the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), highlighted significant gaps in our continent's cybersecurity preparedness, despite the potentials, growing tech ecosystem and economies of countries like Nigeria.

Further statistics shows that, Nigeria for instance has only about 25,000 professionals within its cybersecurity workforce—this is a meager number when compared to the responsibility to protect a population of over 220 million.

Flowing from this, it has become imperative to introduce cybersecurity not only as a course of study at the university level but also to create early awareness in secondary and even primary schools through educational programs. There is also a need to organize mentorship initiatives, hackathons, coding bootcamps, and competitions focused on cybersecurity that encourage critical thinking, ethical hacking, and collaborative problem-solving. With the right tools, training, and guidance, young people could help prevent cyberattacks and develop innovative cybersecurity solutions.

Women

The second underrepresented group is Women. Nigeria cannot afford to ignore nearly half of its population in the fight for digital safety. Women bring diverse perspectives, collaborative leadership styles, and problem-solving approaches that the cybersecurity industry could benefit from. The International Information System Security Certification Consortium (ISC²) **Cybersecurity Workforce Study (2025)** reports that women account for an average of **22%** of security teams. The **Global Cybersecurity Forum** also indicates similar figures, estimating that women hold **24% of security roles worldwide and some regions hold even less.**

This is not due to a lack of talent, but a lack of opportunity, visibility, and support. To change this, we must break down the social, educational, and professional barriers that women face, and introduce scholarship programs that target women, mentorship programs, women-led cybersecurity events and inclusive hiring practices.

More importantly, we must challenge the stereotypes which attributes Cybersecurity to “tech guys”. Cybersecurity is for analysts, communicators, researchers, policymakers, and strategists. It is not for any single gender. It is for anyone with a passion to protect, to investigate, and to build a safer digital space. Empowerment of youths and women

not only strengthen our defenses but build systems that are secure and resilient. A diverse team spots risk others might miss, and design products and services that cater to a wider audience. Inclusion leads to innovation, diversity leads to deeper thinking and empowerment leads to sustainable development.

Therefore, Governments, industries, and civil society must collaborate to invest in training, infrastructure, and public awareness campaigns thereby creating a global digital culture where security is a shared responsibility, and where no one is left behind.

The Nigerian Communications Commission believes in and supports the inclusion of young people and women in cybersecurity. The Commission is actively involved in Child Online Protection initiatives and Cybersecurity Awareness and Education, from publishing online safety guides, activity books, and resources such as Parenting 101 for Digital Citizens and Cybersecurity Awareness Tips to educate families, teachers, and young people about safe online practices and cyber threats.

The Commission also supports capacity building and stakeholder engagement with children's and women's organizations such as Girls in ICT, Women in Cybersecurity, and others. The Commission is also developing a Cybersecurity Framework for the telecommunications industry that will ensure the security of Nigeria's digital infrastructure.

We wish to use this gathering as an opportunity to reaffirm our commitment to the promotion and empowerment of young people through annual cybersecurity awareness campaigns. This is our testament to the principles of including youth and women in safeguarding our digital space.

In closing, I invite everyone to join us in co-creating a secure, inclusive, and sovereign digital space. On behalf of the Nigerian Communications Commission, I reaffirm our commitment to working hand in hand with stakeholders to build a digital future full of opportunity—one that embraces investment in people, especially our youth and women.

Thank you.

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