

# **SPEECH PRESENTED AT FINANCE AND BUSINESS ONLINE PUBLISHERS (FIBOP) OCTOBER 18 – 19, 2025 CONFERENCE ON THE PROTECTION OF CRITICAL NATIONAL INFORMATION INFRASTRUCTURE (CNII) AND BUILDING INDUSTRY RESILIENCE AS A CRUCIAL COMPONENT OF THE COMMISSION'S CONTRIBUTION TO ACHIEVING A \$1 TRILLION ECONOMY**

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a privilege to stand before you at this FiBOP 2025 Conference on "Protecting Critical National Information Infrastructure (CNII) and Building Industry Resilience." Let me begin by commending the organizers for placing this dialogue at the heart of national discourse, because at this moment in Nigeria's history, nothing could be more urgent.

When we talk about building a \$1 trillion economy, we often speak of oil, agriculture, manufacturing, or trade. But what is the invisible backbone that powers all these sectors today? It is our digital infrastructure. Modern Nigeria runs on the resilience of our information and communication networks, from banking transactions to e-commerce, and even the security of our borders. This is why CNII is a matter of our country's economic survival and national sovereignty, and not simply a technical matter.

## **Why CNII Matters**

According to Q2 2025 data from the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), the telecommunications sector today contributes over 11% to Nigeria's real GDP. Yet, this figure only hints at the sector's true influence. To put it in perspective: the sector can best be described as the nervous system of our economy—powering digital and financial inclusion, e-commerce, governance, education, and national security.

This "nervous system" is however under constant attack, whenever there is damage to telecommunications infrastructure or denial of access to this infrastructure by landlords, communities or even government agencies. Between January and August of this year alone, there were over 19,384 recorded fiber cuts, a whooping 19,027 access denials, and 3,241 theft cases across operators. The rising tide of cyber intrusions and ransomware attacks further emphasizes the urgency of protecting CNII to safeguard Nigeria's economy.

## **Our Response So Far**

In response to these threats, President Bola Ahmed Tinubu, GCFR, signed the Presidential Order on Critical National Information Infrastructure (CNII), designating the assets and infrastructure of the telecommunications sector as critical national assets deserving the highest level of protection. In line with this directive, the Commission, in close collaboration with the Office of the National Security Adviser (ONSA)—which is responsible for operationalising the Order—is leading efforts to ensure its full implementation within the telecommunications sector.

We have thus adopted a five-pronged approach to safeguarding telecommunications infrastructure. These include:

1. **Regulation, Compliance & Enforcement:** This entails establishing clear guidelines for operators on the deployment and maintenance of telecommunications infrastructure, while strengthening our compliance monitoring mechanisms and enforcing sanctions where violations occur. We firmly believe that the protection and preservation of telecommunications assets must begin with stakeholders within the industry itself.
2. **Publicity, Awareness & Education:** The Commission is concurrently driving campaigns across various media platforms to educate citizens on the importance of protecting telecom infrastructure and the consequences of vandalism.
3. **Collaboration:** The Commission is working closely with the Office of the National Security Adviser (ONSA), the Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC), the Police, state governments, the Ministry of Works, the judiciary, utility providers, and local communities to safeguard these telecommunication infrastructure, and ensure that vandals and thieves are brought to justice.
4. **Mediation:** We are also proactively engaging with stakeholders especially the sub-national, local governments and communities to resolve disputes relating to telecommunications infrastructure, such as right-of-way charges and denial of access that could create vulnerabilities or delays in telecommunication infrastructure maintenance.
5. **Use of Force as a Last Resort:** When necessary, security agencies are deployed, and the full weight of the law is applied to deter sabotage, vandalism, or theft of telecom assets.

Through this layered approach, the Commission is ensuring that the foundation for a more resilient digital future is protected.

## **From Protection to Resilience**

For Nigeria to reach a \$1 trillion economy, protection alone is not enough; resilient networks that can recover quickly from shocks and maintain connectivity are required. The Commission is correspondingly ensuring resilience of the sector through several initiatives:

1. **Telecoms Disaster Recovery and Business Continuity Guidelines:** A framework has been established for preparedness, mutual aid agreements, rapid service restoration, and consumer education during emergencies.
2. **Cybersecurity and Incident Response:** Through the **National CSIRT (Computer Security Incident Response Team)** and the soon-to-be-launched **Cybersecurity Framework** for the Telecom Industry we are building a frontline defence to anticipate, detect, and contain threats. The **Major Network Outage Portal**, which can be found on our website, also ensures that operators must report significant network outages, while keeping consumers informed and compensated when necessary.
3. **Stronger Infrastructure Standards:** The compliance checklists for Tower Companies (TowerCos), which now require robust site security, redundant power systems, and climate-resilient designs has been enhanced. For rural sites, solar backup, dual backhaul is being mandated, and community partnerships to ensure connectivity is not lost in underserved areas.
4. **Cross-Sector Collaboration:** To further achieve resilience, the Commission is deepening collaboration with the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) to safeguard mobile banking; while strengthening collaboration with the Nigerian Electricity Regulatory Commission (NERC), the Rural Electrification Agency (REA), and Electricity Distribution Companies (DISCOs) to improve power supply to telecom sites. Collaboration is also ongoing with state governments and communities to secure fibre and towers under the CNII Presidential Order.
5. **Redundancy by Design:** Multiple fibre routes for diverse interconnections, and stronger Internet Exchange Points (IXPs) is being encouraged in the industry to ensure that a single outage does not cripple national services.

## Our Call to Action

For Nigeria to succeed, CNII resilience must be treated as a strategic economic priority, thus:

1. **Government** must continue to ensure CNII protection is prioritised in national defence and infrastructure planning.

2. **Security agencies** must treat telecom assets with the same urgency as oil pipelines or power grids.
3. **Industry operators** must invest in redundancy and joint monitoring, moving beyond siloed approaches.
4. **Communities and citizens** must see telecom assets as lifelines, not targets, and guard them as they would their own homes.

For us, our this is more than theory, but an action already in motion. Just last week, the NCC in collaboration with the Nigeria Governors' Forum (NGF) hosted a two-day **Business Roundtable on Improving Investments in Broadband Connectivity and Safeguarding CNII**, with support from the industry, states and partners like the World Bank. The forum set a new tone for collaboration amongst Federal, State, and industry stakeholders.

## Conclusion

Distinguished ladies and gentlemen, the era of half-measures is over. Protecting our Critical Network Infrastructure is not merely about keeping the internet running—it is about powering the trillion-dollar digital economy we aspire to build. The NCC remains fully committed to this goal. Yet, commitment alone is not enough; it must be matched by collaboration—across government, industry innovation, security agencies, and community participation.

Together, we will secure Nigeria's digital backbone, protect our national lifelines, and lay the foundation for sustainable growth and a secure future.

Thank you.

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