

SA pins hopes on 4IR to grow economy

As mentioned in his recent State of the Nation Address (Sona), President Cyril Ramaphosa is pinning his hopes on harnessing the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) to help boost SA's economic prospects, writes **Legalbrief**. The President brought together public- and private-sector players on Friday last week at an economic summit where his focus was on digital technology to drive the country beyond its paltry 0.8% GDP growth rate. **Business Day** reports that the Fourth Industrial Revolution Digital Economy Summit 2019 included technology companies, executives and government officials. Ramaphosa explained at Sona that **a presidential commission on 4IR would 'serve as a national, overarching advisory mechanism on digital transformation'** that would 'identify and recommend policies, strategies and plans that would position SA as a global competitive player within the digital revolution space'.

Gauteng Premier David Makhura said SA must take the lead on the continent in advancing technological innovations relating to the 4IR, reports **Business Report**. 'SA must take a lead in order to ensure that we collectively harness the opportunities and navigate the challenges brought about by the advent of 4th Industrial Revolution. **Africa cannot be left behind. We cannot be left out,**' Makhura said. 'We in SA are also moving fast to a future in which 41% of current jobs in SA will be rendered obsolete by automation; when 35% of skills that are considered important in today's workforce would have changed beyond recognition and others would have disappeared completely.'

Government is committed to a skills revolution that will ensure that SA has the human capital required in the digital economy, Ramaphosa is quoted in **Skills Portal** as saying. '... we are introducing subjects such as coding and data analytics at primary school level to prepare our people for the jobs of the future,' he said. Ramaphosa said **government has committed to train 1m young people in data science and related skills by 2030**. The skills are being provided through various partnerships government has with Sector Education and Training Authorities. 'We have also committed ourselves to providing the infrastructure, including spectrum, which will enable our digital ascendancy and bring benefits to all sectors of our economy. As government, working with all sectors of society, we have set ourselves the task to pioneer new technologies and to take quantum leaps towards the economies of the future and to drastically improve our production levels.'

The gathering of about 500 people at the summit was the result of the work of Fourth Industrial Revolution SA (4IRSA), an initiative between the universities of Fort Hare, Johannesburg, Wits, government and major private-sector players such as Telkom and Deloitte SA. Sipho Maseko, group CEO of Telkom SA and a founding partner of the 4IRSA writes in a **Business Day** report that some of the discussions that were on the table at the summit and will continue to be at the centre of the thinking of 4IRSA and its partners include: workplace automation may lead to large-scale economic and social displacement of the most vulnerable in our society; **the fact that the globe may be turned into a pseudo-colonial arrangement of high-tech producer economies and low-tech consumer economies**; increasing economic concentration may lead to a rise in inequality, both between and within nations; if our education system does not encourage the rapid development of 4IR-linked skills, we may face a new, and worse, era of economic exclusion; and lastly, the growth of mega-corporations that operate across the globe without setting up shop in any country presents new challenges for nation states regarding regulation, taxation and the enforcement of nationally determined standards. Maseko writes that in the months to come, SA must define how it will use the technologies of the digital age to solve our problems, both historic and new.