

**For information**

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Limerick, Washington DC, Addis Ababa

**United Nations Economic Commission for Africa and LRC at University of Limerick launch**

**AGIS Africa**

**Supported by GALA and The Rosetta Foundation**

*“Africa is the birthplace of humanity with over 3,000 languages. However, less than 1% of these languages are used & represented in cyberspace, effectively excluding millions of Africans from participating effectively in the current information & knowledge society. This initiative can change all this.”*

Ms Aida Opoku-Mensah, UNECA

The United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) and the Localisation Research Centre (LRC) at the University of Limerick (UL), supported by the world’s largest localisation industry association, GALA, and The Rosetta Foundation are launching AGIS Africa to promote the use of African Languages on the digital airwaves.

The President of UL, Professor Don Barry, and the Director ICT UNECA, Ms Aida Opoku-Mensah, together with Hans Fenstermacher, CEO GALA, and Reinhard Schäler, Director LRC, will be launching a unique initiative that will deliver UL’s MSc in Multilingual Computing in Africa, backed up by an African Expert Group and GALA’s business mentors. The launch will take place at UL’s Irish World Academy for Music and Dance on *Monday, 19 November 2012, 11:00*. It will be followed by a Seminar and Roundtable in the University’s Glucksman Library. A press release will be issued on the day.

*GALA is excited to support this initiative. Making information globally accessible is a paramount mission of our industry, and to do that we need to connect and involve all countries and stakeholders. We look forward to building bridges between our member companies and partners in Africa through these students, says Hans Fenstermacher.*

*Access to knowledge and information in our language is something that we take for granted. But there are billions of people in the world, who speak languages that are not ‘economically viable’. Translation and Localisation is not just a business, it is also a fundamental and universal human right, enshrined in the UN’s Universal Declaration. Ireland has been a world leader in localisation for 30 years and has hugely benefitted from this industry that made the country at some stage the world’s largest exporter of software. Now is the time for Ireland to lead a new revolution in Social Localisation, bringing information and knowledge to people in their language - even if they don’t represent a ‘market’, said Reinhard Schäler, Director of the LRC at UL and founder of The Rosetta Foundation.*

A US\$33 billion industry has emerged to cater for the localisation needs of the 1 billion people on the planet who can pay for it. However, there are large amounts of content and there are a significant number of languages who are not commercially viable and where a profit-driven localisation effort cannot currently be justified.

The consequences of this approach are dire for the content and the languages involved. They have been described more than a decade ago by David Brooks, then Director International Product Development, Microsoft: “Languages not present in the digital world will soon become obsolete”. Should this trend allowed to continue, large populations will be excluded from the digital world and from access to information and knowledge they need to further their education, to secure their economic future and to look after their health.

In addition, the right to access to information and knowledge in *your* language is as a fundamental and universal human right, in accordance with many national and international laws and agreements, and with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in particular (Article 2).

Africa is the birthplace of humanity and of human language. It is the world’s second-largest and second-most-populous continent, after Asia. Over the past decade, six of the world’s ten fastest-growing

countries were African. In eight of the past ten years, Africa has grown faster than East Asia, including Japan. There are over 2,100 and by some counts over 3,000 languages spoken natively in Africa in several major language families. This joint initiative will promote African languages in the Information Society.

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#### **NOTE**

**Ms Aida Opoku-Mensay (UNECA), Hans Fenstermacher (GALA) and Reinhard Schäler (UL/LRC and The Rosetta Foundation) will be available for interviews from Sunday afternoon to Tuesday in Limerick and Dublin.**

**To set up appointments, contact: Reinhard Schäler, 087-6736414**

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#### **Links**

Launch programme: <http://www.localisation.ie/resources/agisafrika.htm>

UNECA website for co-hosted initiative: <http://www.uneca.org/itca/mcla/>

The Rosetta Foundation, blog: <http://www.therosettafoundation.org/index.php/en/archive/284-promoting-african-language-localisation>

#### **About the University of Limerick**

The University of Limerick (UL) with over 11,500 students and 1,300 staff is an energetic and enterprising institution with a proud record of innovation and excellence in education, research and scholarship. The dynamic, entrepreneurial and pioneering values which drive UL's mission and strategy ensures that it capitalises on local, national and international engagement and connectivity. UL is renowned for providing an outstanding student experience and conducting leading edge research. The University's commitment is to make a difference by shaping the future through educating and empowering its students. UL is situated on a superb riverside campus of over 130 hectares with the River Shannon as a unifying focal point. The **Localisation Research Centre** was established in 1995 and works with worldwide digital publishers and their partners who are interested in future technologies and processes for globalisation, internationalisation, localisation and translation. It focuses its activities on the provision of relevant well-researched content rich information on future trends and technologies within a framework of a unique industry and academic collaboration which provides an unparalleled network of expertise.

[www.ul.ie](http://www.ul.ie)

#### **About UNECA**

The Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) was established by the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) of the United Nations (UN) in 1958 as one of the UN's five regional commissions. ECA's mandate is to promote the economic and social development of its member States, foster intra-regional integration, and promote international cooperation for Africa's development. ECA is uniquely qualified to serve Africa. With its multi-disciplinary and multi-sectoral character, the Commission serves as a vital bridge between African countries and their development partners.

[www.uneca.org](http://www.uneca.org)

#### **About GALA**

The Globalization and Localization Association (GALA) aims to be the voice for the language industry and a resource for the language business. The association supports its members and the language industry by creating communities, championing standards, sharing knowledge, and advancing technology. GALA is the world's largest localisation trade association with around 350 member organizations.

[www.gala-global.org](http://www.gala-global.org)

#### **About The Rosetta Foundation**

The Rosetta Foundation was established in 2009 to relieve poverty, support healthcare, develop education and promote justice through the exchange of information and knowledge across the languages of the world. The Foundation promotes Social Localization making vital information available to individuals all over the world irrespective of their social status, linguistic or cultural background, and geographical location. The Rosetta Foundation is a spin-off from the Localisation Research Centre at the University of Limerick, Ireland, and the Centre for Next Generation Localisation (CNGL), a major research initiative supported by the Irish Government.

[www.TheRosettaFoundation.org](http://www.TheRosettaFoundation.org)

#### **For more information contact:**

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