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Message from ITU Secretary-General, Dr Hamadoun I. Touré

WTISD 2012

WOMEN AND GIRLS IN ICT

ICTs play a catalytic role in creating opportunities for people in every walk of life, especially for those among us who are vulnerable and disadvantaged, while providing the framework for long-term sustainable development.

This year, on World Telecommunication and Information Society Day, we are determined to harness the full potential of ICTs for the benefit of women and girls by eliminating gender disparities and empowering them to meet their goals and aspirations. The theme of this year's WTISD, "Women and Girls in ICT", aims to ensure that this significant, female half of the world's population will march forward as equals.

Women are the bedrock of our societies. They are the pillars of strength in every family and community. Yet gender inequalities remain deeply entrenched. Women and girls are denied access to basic health care and education and to equal opportunities at work. They face segregation in economic, political and social decision-making and often suffer violence and discrimination.

This situation is unacceptable and we must address it with all the means available to us.

Gender equality is a basic human right enshrined in the UN Charter, and it is one of the main objectives of the UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). ICTs are tools that can help accelerate progress towards achieving this target, and it is for this reason that ITU Council proposed that we focus our efforts this year on women and girls, using the power of ICTs to provide new digital opportunities to end discrimination and empower women and girls to achieve their rightful place as equals in the world. This effort with ICTs must begin not only from the cradle, but from antenatal health care, reaching out to the remotest communities through telemedicine and other means — with every mother, every girl and every woman guaranteed her birthright.

I call upon ITU Member States, Sector Members and Associates as well as academia and citizens' groups to pull together every conceivable resource to ensure that women and girls in every community around the world have full access to ICTs in order to empower them with information and knowledge, to know their rights, and to seize every available digital opportunity.

I also call upon our other partners and stakeholders — political leaders, policy makers, regulators, operators, industry and civil society — to adopt policies and strategies that will promote ICT opportunities for women and girls.

National governments, private sector, donors, civil society and educationists need to acknowledge and support the central role professional women can play in further developing and servicing a dynamic and competitive ICT sector. The growing demand for a range of ICT skills around the globe present a unique window of opportunity to properly position girls and women in the industry and provide them with the tools necessary to succeed.

The ICT sector in particular can pave the way by providing avenues of advancement to professional women at the highest echelons of decision making and by encouraging young women to seek new careers within the sector.

I urge you to celebrate World Telecommunication and Information Society Day this year by paying particular attention to the special needs of women and girls, extending to them the benefits of ICTs so as to create a paradigm shift in opportunities offered now and in the future. An egalitarian and just society is the basis for a peaceful and prosperous world.

Dr Hamadoun I. Touré
ITU Secretary-General

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