Information technology skills will boost women's participation in crucial sector – UN

28 April 2011 – Greater efforts to support girls and young women to acquire skills in information and communications technologies (ICTs) could help address projected shortages of manpower in those professions, the United Nations telecommunications agency said today, marking the first "Girls in ICT Day."

"With many countries now forecasting a shortage of skilled ICT professionals within the next ten years, it's vital that we attract young women into technology if we are to sustain healthy growth rates for the industry overall," said Hamadoun Touré, the Secretary-General of the International Telecommunications Union (ITU), in a statement announcing the launch of the Day.

"With excellent employment opportunities and very good remuneration, a career in technology represents an excellent choice for girls in every country worldwide," Mr. Touré added.

The Girls in ICT Day will be observed on the fourth Thursday of April every year to promote gender equality and the empowerment of women through the use of ICTs. It results from a resolution adopted at ITU's Plenipotentiary Conference in Guadalajara, Mexico, last year.

Under the resolution, ITU pledged to incorporate a gender perspective in the implementation of all its programmes and plans, following which the Global Network of Women in ICT was established.

The network is designed to encourage girls and young women to choose technology careers by providing mentoring resources, high-profile role models and toolkits that help national

authorities and organizations promote technology careers to women. It is supported by ITU's Telecommunication Development Bureau (BDT), which, through its Gender Unit, is working on a range of strategies to use ICT to improve the livelihood of women worldwide.

"This new Girls in ICT Day will provide a much-needed boost to female participation in the ICT sector," said Mr. Touré.

ITU's support for the establishment of the Day and for the launch of the Global Network of Women in ICT are among the first in a year-long series of activities around the theme of "Women and Girls in ICT" endorsed by the ITU resolution.

One recent activity was the high-level panel organized to commemorate the 100th anniversary of International Women's Day, with the theme of "Goodbye to the IT girl? Why are young women deserting technology?"

The BDT will also be spearheading a number of gender-related initiatives over the course of the year, including the recent announcement of a new partnership with Telecentre.org to train disadvantaged women in basic use of ICT equipment and applications.

"Technology is now widely recognized as a critical enabler of socio-economic development," said Brahima Sanou, the BDT Director. "Leveraging the power of ICTs to improve the livelihood of women worldwide has the power to dramatically accelerate progress towards achieving Millennium Development Goal 3 on gender equality by the target date of 2015," he said.

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