

ITU Council Plenary Meeting
Remarks by Ambassador Hamamoto
Tuesday, May 31, 2016

Thank you very much. Let me start off by thanking Secretary-General Zhao and the International Telecommunication Union for the opportunity to address the Council today. I'd also like to recognize Council Chair Julie Zoller, and to note that last week we were very proud to see not one, not two, but three women open the annual session of ITU's governing Council for the first time. This is a great testament to this institution's vision to become a model organization for gender equality. And it is always an honor to share the podium with my good friend, Director General Moller, who has been a wonderful partner on many issues, including those focused on gender.

It's undeniable the world is changing fast, thanks in large part to information and communication technologies. ICTs have transformed markets, enabled the creation of industries, accelerated research and development, facilitated social movements, improved healthcare outcomes and, as you recently said, Mr. Secretary-General, *"connected billions of people to new and previously unimaginable possibilities."*

We all know that technology is critical to social and economic development, and that's exactly why it is also critical that women and girls have equal access to ICTs and to opportunities to develop 21st century skills. Again, as you recently said, Mr. Secretary General, *"gender equality in the tech sector is an urgent and priority issue, not simply a 'nice to have' but a 'must have.'"*

But if technology has progressed fast, unfortunately, progress on gender equality remains painfully slow – so much so, that by some estimates, gender equality in the workplace won't be achieved until 2095. I've seen it firsthand -- as a young engineer, years ago in the energy and telecommunications sectors -- women were vastly underrepresented then – and this remains the case today.

To change that, we need transformational tools, and Geneva Gender Champions is such a tool, uniting the leadership here in Geneva to demand and to drive real change. Some of this change is already visible – such as the increasing number of women on panels and delegations – while other times, this change is more difficult to see, but no less meaningful, such as tackling unconscious gender bias or changing workplace culture.

Significant change is being driven by our Champions, who are at the forefront of this initiative, and as DG Moller said, have all made personal commitments to promote gender equality on behalf of their organizations. But equally important, is the change being driven by others within these organizations, who are passionate about these issues and now feel empowered to act.

Much of the incredibly valuable work is happening in what we call “impact groups” of knowledgeable and committed member state, NGO and international organization staff, who meet periodically to address a particular GGC work stream.

For example, ITU is leading the impact group focused on increasing the number of women in delegations. This provides an opportunity to exchange information regarding the work being done on the collection of data, tracking, target-setting, advocacy and communication on the need for gender equality in delegations.

Secretary General Zhao has been encouraging countries to increase women's participation in ITU meetings, and at the last World Radiocommunication Conference, in line with his own GGC commitments, he congratulated the delegations that had achieved gender parity, and he set a 30% target for women's participation at the next WRC.

Underlying all these efforts is of course the Gender Equality & Mainstreaming Policy adopted by the Council in 2013. And I'd like to commend the Council, in its role as the organization's governing body, for showing leadership in this regard.

Because of these actions, ITU conferences foster a real conversation about gender equality. Which is why the Federal Communications Commission chose last November's WRC to launch WeLead, a mentorship program with the goal of raising women's voices throughout the ICT community. And I know that WeLead has been active again during this Council.

When I was in Busan for the 2014 ITU Plenipotentiary Conference, I was inspired by the ambitious vision to reach gender equality among Internet users by 2020. ITU's Connect 2020 agenda – and Global Connect, the initiative recently launched by the U.S. State Department to bring 1.5 billion additional people online by 2020 – will harness the power of ICTs. Both initiatives combine efforts from the public,

private, and civil sectors, and both highlight the inextricable link between connectivity, global growth, and stability.

I don't need to remind you that an estimated 200 million fewer women than men are currently online in developing countries — and 300 million fewer females own a mobile phone. For women and girls everywhere, Internet connectivity is not a luxury, it's a necessity, a 'must have.' With programs like Girls in ICT Day, ITU delivered this message to 137 countries around the world this year. It's a message of hope – the message that no woman or girl will be left behind.

With Geneva Gender Champions, we have been working to build a sense of community, not just among the Champions, but throughout and across organizations in Geneva, and that has proved to be invaluable. In this community, we engage and share with each other. We don't hesitate to say what works and what we can do better. In this community, we inspire each other, constantly pushing the initiative forward.

Because gender equality is not the work of any one person or one network. Rather, it's a collective effort by all. So I hope if you haven't already done so, that you will consider joining us as a Geneva Gender Champion, or that you will consider launching a Gender Champions network back in your capitals, and commit to making a difference, so that next year, through our collective efforts, we will be that much closer to achieving our goals.

Thank you.