Subject: **World Telecommunication and Information Society Day 2012 (WTISD):**
                "Women and Girls in ICT"

Dear Sir/Madam,

World Telecommunication and Information Society Day, celebrated each year on 17 May, marks the anniversary of the signature of the first International Telegraph Convention in 1865 which led to the creation of the International Telecommunication Union.

I am pleased to inform you that this year World Telecommunication and Information Society Day (WTISD-2012) will be held on the theme **"Women and Girls in ICT"**.

I invite you to organize activities in your country to mark WTISD-2012 and I encourage you to involve all sections of society to formulate awareness and consensus on the issues underlying the theme, **"Women and Girls in ICT"**. Please consider my Call for Action in the Annex.

In order to emphasize the theme of WTISD-12 and in line with ITU Plenipotentiary Resolution 70 (Rev. Guadalajara, 2010), ITU will also mark international *"Girls in ICT Day"* this year on 26 April 2012. "*Girls in ICT Day*", to be held every year on the fourth Thursday of April, encourages members to host events where girls and young women are invited to ICT companies and government agencies to appreciate the opportunities the ICT sector holds for their future**.** I encourage our members to support women and girls in their country by organizing such a national event this 26 April and sharing their experiences with ITU. Please see the Note on page 4 (Annex).

The theme for World Telecommunication and Information Society Day 2012 will influence our work not only on the Day but throughout the year and in the future as well. Let us resolve to use ICTs to provide new digital opportunities to women and girls in every corner of the world.

I join you in celebrating the 147th anniversary of ITU and wish you a very successful World Telecommunication and Information Society Day 2012.

Yours faithfully,

(Signed)

Dr Hamadoun I. Touré
Secretary-General

ANNEX
ITU Secretary-General' Call for Action
World Telecommunication and Information Society Day 2012

As the leading specialized agency of the United Nations for information and communication technologies (ICTs), ITU looks towards its Members to harness the catalytic role of ICTs in creating far-reaching opportunities for women and girls by eliminating gender disparities and empowering them to meet their goals and aspirations. I call upon all stakeholders (including policy makers, regulators, operators and industry) to adopt policies and strategies that will promote ICT opportunities for women and girls.

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 must be addressed 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 the female half of the world's population to achieve their rightful place as equals in the world. And this effort with ICTs must begin not only from the cradle, but from antenatal health care, reaching out to the remotest communities – with every mother, every girl and every woman guaranteed her birthright.

I also call upon the ICT sector to 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 opportunities within the sector.

The World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) declared a global commitment to ensuring women's empowerment and full participation in the information society and to use ICTs as a tool to mainstream a gender equality perspective. Calling for building capacity in the use of ICTs, the WSIS Declaration of Principles further states: "Literacy and universal primary education are key factors for building a fully inclusive information society, paying particular attention to the special needs of girls and women."

National governments, private sector, donors, civil society and education actors 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 theme of this year's WTISD, *"Women and Girls in ICT",* aims to ensure that this vulnerable female half of the world's population will march forward as equals. As a means of bringing global attention to this theme, ITU will present the annual World Telecommunication and Information Society Award to eminent personalities who have contributed to bringing attention to the world's women and girls and used the power of ICTs to empower them as equals.

ICTs and related e-applications are key instruments providing basic services and achieving the Millennium Development Goals, such as providing community health care, safe drinking water and sanitation, education, food and shelter; improving maternal health and reducing child mortality; empowering women, girls and the more vulnerable members of society; and ensuring environmental sustainability.

Developing a global partnership for development and using the power of ICTs to meet the MDGs is a goal in itself. ITU calls upon 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 the digital opportunities available.

Call for Action: "Women and Girls in the ICT Sector"

- **Promote national policies encouraging girls, teenagers and women to study and take up careers in ICT.**

  <u>Call for action:</u> Relevant government ministries and agencies should prioritize the implementation of policies that develop human talent and the right skill sets for the building of a vibrant and diversified ICT sector, engaging women and girls at all levels in order to fully utilize and promote the full breadth of talent in the country. This could include the following:
  a. Ensuring closer collaborative links on ICT policies and initiatives among Ministries of Information and Communication Technologies, Communications, Science and Technology, and Ministries of Education and Youth/Women's Affairs.
  b. Launching awareness raising campaigns, including posters, videos, broadcasts and the staging of public events to encourage girls into taking up ICT studies and careers.
  c. Targeting more funds and providing scholarships and subsidies towards technical training and incubation programmes.
  d. Participate in and support "Girls in ICT Day" events every year on the fourth Thursday in April.

- **Support ongoing work aimed at building capacity** that will enable women and girls to independently and competently use ICTs.

  <u>Call for action:</u> ITU Member States and Sector Members are encouraged to:
  a. Establish and support policies and programmes that place a premium on promoting ICTs skills among girl students in primary, secondary and higher education with complementary investment in vocational training.
  b. Develop and nurture partnerships with both governments and educational bodies with the objective to invest in advanced on-the-job ICT skills and industry-based training initiatives.
  c. Involve women in research and innovation processes to increase the potential for creativity, new research content and user-centred design and application

- **Develop and implement national policies to restructure current education systems and infrastructure** with the objective of integrating science and ICT-related subjects with mainstream curricula to better respond to present industry needs and standards as well as future ICT workforce requirements.

  <u>Call for action:</u> Administrations and educational agencies are encouraged to ensure that:
  a. Courses offered are constantly upgraded to ensure relevance to industry needs – this includes integrating science with other subjects.
  b. Teaching pedagogies emphasize holistic and hands-on team-work and problem-solving teaching methods rather than rote individualistic and 'silo' learning.
  c. Concepts of life-long learning beyond basic schooling are promoted.
  d. Theoretical and practical modes of learning are brought closer together through internships, mentoring and social networking.

- **Develop broadband connectivity and inclusion for all,** in particular women and girls, through broadband backhaul, wireless or wireline, and including satellite communications.

  <u>Call for action:</u> ITU Member States and Sector Members are encouraged to:
  a. Partner with ITU, share experiences and contribute experts and resources to develop practical tools to establish a framework plan of action.
  b. Renew efforts to mobilize public and private support for a significant improvement of basic ICT infrastructure to connect schools and educational institutions.
  c. Undertake economic analysis to determine sustainable business models for adequate returns on broadband investment at minimum income levels with maximum spill-over benefits across multiple sectors of the local society and economy; consider innovative use of 'digital dividends'.

- **Connect all institutions**, in particular schools, and encourage them to foster gender equality. Schools are community hubs, places of learning and accessibility. By connecting schools we connect youth as well as others in the community to knowledge and information, leading to employment and social and economic development. Connected schools can serve as a point of service for under-served groups in the community, including women and girls. They may become vectors for e-applications, including health, education and commerce.

  Call for action: ITU Member States, Sector Members and partners are encouraged to help connect all schools by 2015 and ensure gender equality in education:

  a. Make connecting schools a priority or formal requirement in the disbursement of Universal Access / Universal Service Funds.
  b. Include school connectivity requirements directly in Universal Access / Universal Service Obligations.
  c. Allocate radio-frequency spectrum for school connectivity and reduce or eliminate spectrum fees for schools.
  d. Include school connectivity a condition to obtain operator licenses to ensure that a given percentage of schools are connected by a specific date.
  e. Provide incentives for operators to connect schools and to offer special tariffs for schools, such as tax breaks, or reduced Universal Access / Universal Service Fund contribution levies.

Note:

To support these efforts, ITU will showcase the most successful "*Girls in ICT Day"* events during the WTISD celebrations in Geneva. **I encourage our members to contact girlsinict@itu.int no later than 15 March 2012 to inform us about your plans to organize a national *Girls in ICT Day*.** This will enable ITU to provide you with additional information and guidelines to support you in organizing the event. More information is available at www.witnet.org and www.girlsinict.org

ITU will post promotional WTISD-related material for downloading at: www.itu.int/wtisd/index.html in order to help organize activities and events on 17 May. Messages from UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and ITU Secretary-General Hamadoun Touré will be posted online along with high-resolution files of the WTISD poster in Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish that can be reproduced locally. A neutral poster will also be available for use in other languages.

Please send us your reports or supporting material, including photographs and videos to be posted on ITU's WTISD website through the online form at www.itu.int/wtisd/2012/form.