

ITU celebrates the International 'Girls in ICT Day' with 265 school girls dubbed VIGs

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Addis Ababa, 29 April 2014 – Every year on the fourth Thursday in April, ITU and the global technology community celebrate 'Girls in ICT Day', an awareness-raising initiative designed to promote tech careers and studies to a new generation of girls and young women with an interest in becoming ICT creators. This year, the ITU Regional Office for Africa in collaboration with the African Union Commission, UNWOMEN, UNECA and UNDP led the celebration which was attended by 250 girls between the ages of 15-20, from 17 Government schools in Addis Ababa. The event which took place at the AUC Conference Center was also attended by other UN agencies, Embassies, International Organizations and NGOs.

Mr Andrew Rugege, the ITU Regional Director for Africa welcomed the two hundred and fifty Girls who had converged at the African Union Commission and dubbed them **VIGs** (Very Important Girls) which nomenclature spread throughout the day like wild fire and in all the addresses of the various Speakers and presenters at the event, <http://girlsiniict.org/girls-in-ict-day-events/addis-ababa-ethiopia>.

The welcoming remarks were followed by a Panel Discussion comprising of three Inspirational Women, Mrs. Bethlehem Tilahun, CEO and Founder of soleRebels, Mrs. Bruktawit Tigabu, Creator of Tsehai *Loves Learning* and Mrs. Letty Chiwara, Regional Director for Africa at UNWOMEN. The panel discussion which centered on the role of ICT in the successes and experiences of these inspirational women was moderated by Mr. Rugege.

Prior to the Opening Ceremony and following lunch, the VIGs smartly dressed in white tee-shirts with the Girls in ICT logo and those of ITU, AUC, UNECA, UNDP and UN Women also participated in breakaway hands-on workshops where they were able to put their eager fingers on laptops that were connected to the Internet to open their first email accounts and register on some social networks with the assistance of ITU staff, IT specialists and volunteers for the day.

At the time of going to Press ITU staff had already received numerous emails from the VIGs with a wide ranging set of questions on possible future career paths. All emails received so far have been responded to.

The Girls in ICT Day celebrations started with a week-long SMS Competition on Mobile telephones launched on a Premium Short Code Platform 8845 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. The criterion for this SMS competition was that all Girls in schools in Addis Ababa between the ages of 15 and 20 could register and participate. The winners of the SMS Competition were admitted to the semifinal quiz held at the Event. They were also given flash drives for their participation in the Mobile SMS Competition.

The breakout workshops also included presentations from ITU staff and other volunteers on different aspects of the ICT world with ITU experts making presentations on e-Health and importantly, on ITU's Child Online Protection initiative in a bid to instruct the VIGs on how to stay safe while online. The VIGs also had a seminar on the role of ITU in the development and use of ICTs.

The highlight of the event comprised of the Girls being quizzed publicly and going through eliminations rounds which eventually produced winners of various prizes. The prizes included two brand new mini

laptops (Lenovo and HP), three Samsung Galaxy Smartphones and Flash Drives, all of which were donated by ITU staff members in Africa Region who wanted to make a personal contribution to the encouragement of girls in ICT. After the ceremony Mr. Rugege said, *“More importantly, I want you to leave here knowing that prize or not, you are already a winner. Knowing that you can do anything and be anything you want in life. Knowing that ICT is at the center of every profession, be it medicine, education, agriculture and others. Almost all jobs in the world today require you to have some level of ICT skills. There is a serious shortage today of people in ICT jobs and an even bigger shortage of girls who can take up these jobs”*.

International ‘Girls in ICT Day’ has rapidly grown into a global movement, with thousands of events organized in over 140 countries since its inception in 2010. Facebook posts, tweets and emails continue to pour into ITU highlighting the many exciting events being held in 2014. ITU is posting information about all the events around the world on its [Girls in ICT Portal](#)¹. The international day has also inspired year-long actions and advocacy to encourage girls and women to prepare for and take up ICT careers. The discussion around the event can be followed on Twitter #GirlsInICT and Facebook at the ITU Girls in ICT Day 2014 event page <https://www.facebook.com/events/261028464066900/>. View Girls in ICT Day video messages from [ITU Secretary-General Dr Hamadoun Touré](#) and [Director of ITU Telecommunication Development Bureau Brahma Sanou](#).

In the ITU Secretary General’s address on the occasion, broadcast in events around the world, “ICTs are improving the lives of people everywhere, through better healthcare, better education, better environmental management, better communications and better governance,” said Dr Hamadoun I. Touré. He encouraged girls around the world, to “pursue smart careers – careers where you make the very best of technology to help improve the lives of others”.

In his closing remarks, the ITU Regional Director expressed his appreciation to the AU Commissioner of Infrastructure, for her presence at the event and her words of inspiration to the VIGs and through her to the Chairperson of the AUC for hosting the event at AUC. He also thanked the Honorable State Minister of ICT, Honorable Peter Gatkuoth Gey for his presence and address at the event and profoundly thanked the three sensational inspirational women speakers, for their commitment and being role models that would impact the lives of the VIGs. The Regional Director also extended a warm invitation to all, to again join ITU in celebrating “Girls in ICT Day” on April 24, 2015!

¹ <http://girlsiniict.org/>