Opening Statement for International Girls in ICT Day

Ambassador Betty E. King

April 25, 2013

Good morning. I’m honored to be here today to celebrate International Girls in ICT Day with such an impressive group of young women. We all need ICT, and ICT needs women.

Women have a long track record of making important contributions to Information and Communication Technologies (ICT). Grace Hopper invented the concept of the programming language. Erna Hoover invented the computerized telephone switching system. For a more colorful story, consider Hedy Lamarr, an Austrian-American actress who was a major Hollywood star during the 1930s and 40s. In those days Lamarr was famous for her beauty, but today she is recognized for her mathematical talent. She co-invented an early technique for spread-spectrum communication and frequency hopping, which forms the basis for today’s most important technology, including Bluetooth, wi-fi network connections, and mobile phones. Although most of us won’t have dual careers as movie stars and inventors, Hedy Lamarr is proof that there is *no stereotype for technical ability.*

This is a key point. The fact that professions in ICT are dominated by men does not mean that men are better at these kinds of jobs. Geena Davis, another movie star who has made it her mission to correct these societal perceptions, is ITU’s Special Envoy for Girls and Women in ICT. Her Institute aims to draw attention to roles that women play in the media, on TV and in movies – showing girls that there are limitless possibilities and harnessing the talent and creativity of girls in the field of ICT. ICT is one of the fastest growing job sectors and one of the best paying. The U.S. Bureau of labor statistics estimates a 21.8% growth in ICT jobs in the United States by 2020. At the same time, there is such a big talent gap in ICT that there will only be enough qualified workers to fill one third of those jobs. On the bright side, this situation presents a great economic opportunity for anyone considering a career in ICT.

If you’re here today you could be thinking about a career in ICT. There are plenty of jobs that pay well, but how do you know it is something you will enjoy?

The best way to find out is to try it. The most successful people I’ve seen are the ones who are doing what they love, and this is the moment for you to experiment and explore your options. Let your own interests guide you. If you stay up all night looking at the stars, then take an astronomy class or join an amateur astronomy group. If you love the feeling of solving practical problems by building something that works, consider studying engineering or try experimenting with your own small engineering project. Many universities in the United States and Europe have outreach programs to help undergraduates find positions in research laboratories, a factor you may want to consider when you choose your university. If you try a variety of things you might surprise yourself and find a passion for something completely unexpected.

In our modern, connected world, ICT has become increasingly the means with which people learn, become informed about the world around them, connect with friends and opportunities, and give themselves a voice. The more pervasive they become, the more opportunities there will be for those who are up to the challenge.

Thank you.