

**SPEECH DELIVERED BY THE HON. MINISTER FOR COMMUNICATIONS,
HON. URSULA OWUSU-EKUFUL AT THE CLIMAX OF THE NATIONAL GIRLS-
IN-ICT DAY CELEBRATION ON FRIDAY 11TH MAY, 2018, AT THE GREAT
HALL, KNUST, KUMASI, ASHANTI REGION**

**Nana Kwaku Amankwah Sarkofie, Sawiahene and rep of his Royal
Highness, Otumfuo Osei Tutu II, Asantehene**

The Chief of Staff

Hon. Regional Minister

**The Deputy Secretary General of the International Telecommunication
Union, Deputy Minister for Communications, Hon. Sowah Odotei**

The Municipal Chief Executive of KMA,

The Regional Director of Education,

Heads of Institutions gathered here,

Nananom,

Invited Guests,

Pupils from selected schools,

Friends of the Media,

Ladies and Gentlemen.

Let me, first and foremost, convey our sincere gratitude to HRH Otumfuo Osei Tutu II Asantehene for graciously welcoming us to the Ashanti region to conduct this exercise over the past 3 weeks.

His Majesty's passion for education and campaign to expand and improve education in the country is legendary. We pray for his long reign and may his wisdom continue to guide and strengthen our resolve to bring the benefits of education to the youth, especially the girl child. This will enable them realise the potential of ICT to provide empowerment and an escape from the poverty trap that has long haunted our national development.

Your Majesty, we also wish you a belated Happy Birthday.

This is the seventh in the series that is celebrated on rotation basis among the regions of the country but this years celebration is exceptional, indeed, the profile of this year's event has been greatly enhanced in that for the first time, the Chief of Staff, Hon. Frema Osei Pare is here and the Deputy Secretary General of ITU, Mr. Malcolm Johnson, is participating in the event outside the ITU Headquarters in Geneva.

We appreciate your presence, and we are thankful that you have found time to grace the occasion.

The Hon. Regional Minister and his team, including the MCE have been fantastic.
Thank you

Nana Chairman, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,
Our celebration of the Girls-in-ICT Day is in line with internationally adopted recommendations to implement initiatives aimed at bridging the Digital Gender Divide and all countries all over the world are encouraged to carry out activities that are targeted at creating awareness on ICT careers and encourage the participation of girls and young women in ICT and technology-related careers.

According to the ITU News Magazine, in 2016 alone, more than 66,000 girls and young women in 138 countries worldwide took part in the celebrations of the International Girls-in-ICT Day.

As a member of the ITU, we been celebrating this initiative on a regional basis across the country and Greater Accra, Eastern, Volta, Northern and Brong Ahafo Regions have had their turns. over 3,000 girls have been trained since the inception of the initiative in 2012.

During this period, selected girls are given basic computer appreciation skills to help demystify the notion of ICT as a highly technical field reserved for brilliant and exceptional students.

I am glad to say that the Ministry, in consultations with relevant stakeholders has provided basic computer appreciation skills and this year, this has been escalated to provide coding/programming skills.

This is to make programming easy and fun for our girls and also inculcate in them, the **can do** spirit. Software development is about expression, creativity and practical application. The whole concept of coding is to make it easy to bend, join, break and combine code in a much easier way for this new generation of children, hence the need to expose them to it early. I can announce that the ministry of education is in the process of reviewing the curriculum of schools to institutionalize coding as a subject.

From what I observed at Nkwantakese in the Afigya Sekyere District when I visited the girls during their training, and the feedback from their instructors, I can confidently say our girls are really enthusiastic to learn and take advantage of opportunities existing within the ICT sector.

Your Majesty, professional mentorships are vitally important in fields where the odds are **"stacked against"** rising individuals. Women jump multiple hurdles in ICT related careers and having the advice of a woman who has already been there can vastly improve the ability of women and young girls new to or emerging in this field to realise that success is possible. For this reason and also for the first time, a mentorship programme was held for all the girls participating in the event to encourage them as they interact with female mentors to excel.

We will give opportunities to the girls who performed well during the training to obtain further training and also visit exciting places to see the practical application of Information and Communications Technologies.

This year's celebration is unique, as the best 10 girls will be given awards. In addition computer laboratories will be established in the schools of the first 3 exceptional

students for the benefit of their colleagues who could not get the opportunity to be selected.

The world is gearing towards automation and it has been estimated by ICT experts that about five (5) million traditional jobs will be lost by the year 2020 to be replaced with IT jobs. This has caused a global reawakening and hence, the need to properly engage, condition, and introduce our girls and young women to ICT much earlier in their growing life in an orchestrated effort with the help of parents, teachers and society at large in order to enable them take advantage of this opportunity and make informed choices on their career paths.

As we implement the Girls-in-ICT initiative, and bridge the digital gender divide, it is important that we create the appropriate environment to sustain the interest of not only our young maidens but their male counterparts as well.

The Ministry of Communications will ensure the availability of broadband infrastructure throughout the country and through its Agencies such as the Ghana Investment Fund for Electronic Communications (GIFEC), it will provide support to equip schools and the various Community Information Centers (CICs) to promote e-learning and other digital services. I urge our girls to take advantage of these facilities and break through all the barriers,

The protection of the cyber space is a key priority of Government and effort is being made under the national cybersecurity policy and strategy to ensure the security of our ICT infrastructure and the online services provided so that they do not pose a threat to citizens, especially children who have become conversant with ICT.

A Child Online Protection framework document has also been developed to guide the implementation of activities aimed at protecting our children as they take advantage of the opportunities that ICTs bring. This is being undertaken in collaboration with other stakeholders, and I take the opportunity to invite Us all to take part in sensitising

our youth on the positive use of the Internet and its protection from abuse and exploitation.

In line with the digitisation agenda of the Government, we will continue with broadband infrastructure to make ICT services available, accessible and affordable. I am pleased to announce that the Ministry will install a Switch for Internet Exchange Point (IXP) in Kumasi this month. This will be the second IXP in the country. This infrastructure facility is to facilitate the exchange of local Internet traffic to reduce bandwidth cost and eventually a reduction in prices.

This is a demonstration of His Excellency the President's commitment to deploy ICT for the realisation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and part of the Government's programme to make Kumasi a major hub for business.

The Ministry of Communications will continue to support the incubation centre established at the KNUST and will shortly provide connectivity to the Regional Innovation Centre in Kumasi to promote R&D and nurture ICT business growth through innovation, and supporting creativity to build an entrepreneurial spirit among the youth especially women. It will further support the digitize Ghana module of NABCO

I look forward to seeing our girls becoming technology creators and innovators, and not users only in order to also take advantage of these opportunities to establish their businesses in future.

I believe that when the training received are taken seriously, our young ladies would master the art of coding and the development of applications to position themselves for greater opportunities in the ICT sector.

In line with the theme for this event, "**Expanding horizons: Changing attitudes**" we will continue to put measures in place to encourage our girls to become ICT

techies. This will help reduce the gender stereotyping and disparities in the ICT/engineering sector and income inequality.

To you my beautiful, brilliant young ladies, I would like you to know that you are the next generation of leaders in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) and therefore, must take advantage of every opportunity that is given you to make this a possibility.

Celebrate your right to be here and be bold, daring and different.

To you, Hon. Regional Minister, I say a big thank you for receiving this initiative and ensuring its successful implementation. This event would have been difficult to organize without you and your team of staff at the Regional Coordinating Council.

I also thank the MCE of KMA and his colleagues for gracing the occasion. I thank the organizing team for their painstaking work in the organization of this celebration and your efforts to make it happen.

In a special way, I extend appreciation to all teachers, Girl-Child Coordinators, CIC Managers and all others who lend a helping hand in training the girls.

I would like to extend special appreciation to the parents of the 600 selected girls who, in spite of the holidays, permitted their children to be selected to participate in the week-long training. I salute the two persons with disability who ably participated in the training. This clearly shows that disability does not mean inability.

We intend to organize this event bi annually now due to the tremendous interest and impact it has had. We will train at least one thousand girls each year and will work to scale it up. We will also introduce other competitions like 'miss Geek' to encourage and award female app and software developers

God bless our Homeland Ghana.