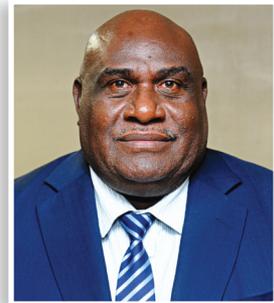




## Statement by the Minister for Information and Communications

**Hon. Timothy Masiu, MP**



Today, the global community is celebrating International Girls in ICT Day, as observed by the International Telecommunications Union (ITU), the lead United Nations Agency for Information and Communications (ICT) under the theme “Connected Girls, Creating Bright Futures”.

This commemoration takes place every fourth Thursday in April and is aimed at encouraging girls and young women to pursue careers in the dynamic field of ICT. For us in Papua New Guinea, it is also about bridging the digital divide by addressing the disparity in human capacity in technology.

Today’s theme of “Connected Girls, Creating Bright Futures” is fitting and in line with the Government Digital Transformation Policy which acknowledges Digital Skills as a key element in the digital journey of our nation. No more than ever, the Girls in ICT should serve as a call to action to inspire girls and young women to learn more about digital technology and for us as a government to empower them with digital skills to pursue a career enabled by technology.

NICTA has been promoting ‘Girls in ICT’ initiatives for some time now and I want to thank all partners and stakeholders that have joined the cause to recognize “Girls in ICT” annually.

ICT can provide girls and young women with education, improve access to health care, promote literacy and democracy, participation in government and digital transformation agenda set by our government.

Digital technology has proven to be a key driver of economic growth, social inclusion and sustainable development. Yet despite rapid progress, we know that there is a shortage of young people – and in particular, girls – studying in the science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) fields.

We know that there are many challenges such as limited access to quality education, affordability, as well as inherent biases and cultural norms that may prevent girls from entering such fields. We must make sure that girls are provided with the right knowledge, skills and creative minds to secure their meaningful participation in the digital economy.

With the COVID 19 pandemic and the growing resources sector including the oil and gas industry, the need for an ICT proficient population is even more relevant. Many possibilities will be open to girls when you continue to acquire higher skills and training in ICT.

As the Minister responsible for ICT, it is my considered view that commemoration of this day signifies our commitment to the Digital Transformation agenda for greater and wider application and usage of ICT within Government, and nationally, to bring about positive transformation in socio-economic landscape. We are seeking to further harness the potential of ICT in realising our sustainable development objectives whilst addressing the digital divides, including the gender divide so that the ICT sector is enriched by the contributions of both men and women, based on their unique but complementary

perspectives and skills. Today’s International Girls in ICT Day theme is of particular significance, as it seeks to develop a digitally literate population while promoting digital inclusion through which all citizens, male or female, able or differently abled, have access to and can develop the skills to use ICT.

Addressing the digital divide for girls in Papua New Guinea is a challenge to all of us. It requires a collective effort from Government and non-government organizations and the industry.

The Government’s focus now is to ensure ICT services reach all parts of the country where our girls and women, particularly in rural areas can access the services. And, I am pleased to inform you that the Government through NICTA has approved for the third mobile telephone operator to enter PNG ICT market. This decision has been made to facilitate and promote competition in the ICT sector to drive ICT services to rural and remote parts of PNG. NICTA will ensure the new entrant has coverage obligations to extend services to unserved and underserved areas of PNG, particularly rural and remote parts of PNG.

In closing, I wish to encourage all the Girls in ICT to stay on course for a digital future, making new grounds and to continue to take pride in the essential work that you do in bringing about digital transformation of our young nation.

Happy International Girls in ICT Day!