

## **Broadband Commission for Digital Development**

### **Remarks by Geena Davis, Academy Award-winning Actor and Advocate and ITU Special Envoy for Women & Girls**

Mr President, Mr Slim, Ms Bokova, Dr Touré, distinguished members of the Commission,

It gives me great pleasure to join you today as a special guest of the Commission.

I guess quite a few of you know me from my work in Hollywood. What some of you might not know is that eight years ago I established the Geena Davis Institute for Gender in Media. This organization works in advocacy, education and research, and has the specific aim of working within the media and entertainment industry to engage, educate, and influence the need for gender balance. Through our research and actions, we're striving to convince the media industry in the US and worldwide to reject gender stereotyping and to create a wider and richer variety of female characters, particularly in the area of entertainment targeting children 11 years and under.

Most of us, when we are driven to launch an initiative like this, are prompted by something deeply personal. In my own case, it was watching children's films and TV with my then very young daughter Alizeh. Whenever we sat together on the sofa, or in movie theaters, I was struck by the terrible lack of female characters, and remembered that my own viewing experiences as a child were much the same. Had nothing changed in children's entertainment in decades? It seemed almost too unbelievable to be true, given the enormous strides forward women have made in the US in other areas.

As a first step, we set about quantifying the problem. We set up the largest research project on gender in film and television ever undertaken, conducted by Dr Stacy Smith at the USC Annenberg School for Communication & Journalism.

What Dr Smith found shocked us: in family films, on average there is only one female character for every three male characters. In group scenes, only 17% of the characters are female. And the repetitive viewing patterns of children ensure that these negative stereotypes are ingrained and imprinted, over and over again.

Since those early days my Institute has amassed the single largest body of research on gender in entertainment. We're now actively working with some of the world's leading media and entertainment conglomerates, educational institutions and multinational companies to try to redress the gender imbalance. Bodies such as the United Nations, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, the Wall Street Journal Women in the Economy Task Force and many others. We also hold a biennial symposium that is unique in convening over 300 decision makers, content creators, and thought leaders to share best practices and create a blueprint towards establishing a gender-balanced media landscape.

How is all this relevant to your work as Broadband Commissioners?

I think you all know much better than I do that broadband networks are increasingly serving as the key channel for content delivery of images, movies and games. Increasingly, people are bypassing traditional entertainment devices and getting most of their media content online. Home video gaming is now the fastest-growing segment of the international media market, and estimated to be worth over 70 billion dollars annually worldwide. Analysts in the US are forecasting double-digit compound annual growth in Internet advertising. IP TV is taking off worldwide, and YouTube now has over 800 million viewers every month, with new videos going up at a rate of 60 hours of new content every minute, in 54 different languages.

So it's clear that broadband is having a transformational impact on the industry I work in.

But broadband is much more than that. We all know that broadband-connected devices, from desktop computers to smart phones to tablets, have enormous potential to empower girls and women by giving them access to essential services like education, health care advice, and personal security. These are services those of us lucky enough to live in rich countries like the US take for granted. But for most women in the world these are hard-won privileges, or simply not available at all.

Distinguished Commissioners,

The UN has recognized the global gender power imbalance and made empowerment a Millennium Development Goal in its own right – MDG-3. Broadband will be key to meeting this goal, with existing and new technologies providing women with the means to educate themselves and their children; improve their own health and the health of their families and communities; start their own businesses; keep themselves safe; and innovate to build and shape the future they want.

An influential group of leaders such as this Commission can play a powerful advocacy role in this area. I would love to see the Broadband Commission speak out strongly for the greater engagement and empowerment of girls and women in the digital revolution that is taking place all around us.

So I'd like to take advantage of the unique opportunity I have in addressing you today to call for this Commission to create a new Working Group around Broadband and Gender. Such a Working Group could endeavor to quantify the current situation and identify opportunities and areas where we could make fast progress in harnessing the power of broadband to empower girls and women.

In the technology sector itself, women and girls can make a powerful contribution as future entrepreneurs, content creators, role models, employers and employees. We have a responsibility to ensure that they are fully included in the vision of tomorrow's digital world, and that their voice is shaping the agenda of the UN's post-MDG development strategies.

I'm personally very pleased to be one of the champions of ITU's recently launched 'Tech Needs Girls' campaign, a global initiative in the area of education that aims to encourage girls to play a much more substantive role in the technology sector.

One important aspect of the campaign – and an aspect very close to my own heart – will be bringing together governments, tech companies and the media and entertainment industry to address the portrayal of women and girls in the media and promote more positive role models.

Next month, I will have the pleasure of addressing the Asia-Pacific Broadcasting Union at its annual general meeting in Seoul, Korea. At that event I will be proposing that the media and technology sectors sit down together and take this leadership opportunity to promote more positive portrayal of women and girls in the media, starting – why not? – with some inspiring tech-savvy role models.

ABU already regularly organizes TV co-productions in the fields of children's programming and documentary programmes. It is my hope that, through this campaign, we can work with the Children's TV Drama Co-production team to create some exciting new content ideas. Because changing attitudes will be the real game changer in achieving greater empowerment and participation of girls and women in the technology sector.

Finally, I have great pleasure in announcing, in partnership with Dr Touré, that on October 11<sup>th</sup>, which the UN has declared the first **International Day of the Girl**, ITU will launch its Tech Needs Girls prize.

This important new prize aims to highlight the creativity and inspiration of girls in the 9 to 18 year old bracket. The prize, which will awarded next April 25 on annual 'Girls in ICT Day', will be much more than a one-off recognition for the winners. It will be a journey highlighting the enormous untapped potential that exists for the ICT sector. Partners in this prize already include Intel and Skype, with a number of other organizations also lined up to join in the next few weeks. I hope you agree that this is an exciting new development, and I hope to see many more of you here join us as a partner or a participant in this exciting event.

I'd now like to hand back to Dr Touré, who I hope will put my proposal to create a new Broadband Commission Working Group on Gender to the floor.