

Women Leadership In The New Global Challenges

Keynote address

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Hon Sheila McHale, Minister for Community Development and Women's Affairs,

Excellencies,
Friends, Ladies and Gentlemen.

I feel deeply honoured to participate as a keynote speaker in the "Twelfth Annual Women In Leadership Conference". My special gratitude goes to Dr. Leela De Mel, Executive Director of the Office of Multicultural Interests of the Government of Western Australia for her invitation and facilitation of my being here. On my own behalf I thank all of you who have given time, energy and resources in organizing this conference.

For the last twelve years the candle lit by Edith Cowan University by establishing this forum has continued to give light on the unique nature of women's leadership. The forum has provided a venue for personal interaction and networking of eminent female researchers and leaders and therefore making a significant contribution to the promotion of women's leadership. This forum and others such as the UN Fourth World Conference, held in Beijing in September 1995 (of which I had the privilege to serve as Secretary General) have clearly marked a turning point in the world. The world now than ever before recognizes women's participation as a critical requirement for sustainable development.

One of the greatest achievements of the United Nations and its Agencies in the 20th century has been the promotion of Women's Rights as Human Rights. Women issues have become one of the important agendas on major Regional and World Conferences. They include conferences which cover specific women issues, Human Rights, Environment, Social Development and Rights of Children to mention just a few. Government and Civil Society Organization's deliberations particularly in the last two decades have focused on women's role as crosscutting issue in society.

Many international and national conferences have revealed obstacles which exist in the economic, political and social systems that impede women's advancement, women's participation and full enjoyment of basic

human rights which require urgent attention and actions. These include exclusion, marginalization of women, violence against women, lack of access to economic structures, education, health services, lack of decision-making and power sharing.

In the last decade women have effectively participated and contributed immensely to the international deliberations. They have sometimes influenced the results of new thinking and new ideas. The image of women in societies is continuously changing from mere complimentary human beings to that of partners in development. It has been internationally agreed that human development is only sustainable with the full participation of women and men in the economic, political and social activities of society. Violation of Women's rights is violation of human rights. Women's participation in economic, political and social decision-making is not a privilege but a right. Any attempt to address the new challenges of today's globalised world should be taken with that background information on women in society.

Changes are taking place in people's ways of thinking and acting with regards to global issues that are and will continue to influence relationships of people (women and men) of different nations, cultures, political and economic development systems. One of these changes is the revolution in communications, transport and information technology which is creating marginalisation and development gap between developing and developed nations. This situation causes a number of challenges. The challenges include insecurity, instability, conflicts, economic backwardness, the spread of HIV/AIDS, among many others.

It is in this respect that government leaders and leaders of international organizations should address and establish systems that will narrow marginalisation and the development gap among and between people and nations. The system should be built on a meaningful inclusive development paradigm embracing human and environmental security, justice and freedom. There are ongoing discussions on the need for international institutions with democratic principles, which respect and promote a culture of peace and collective interests and values. In this sense, a universal system of international justice provided with mechanisms and means to ensure respect for international rules and agreements is essential. The in-depth reform of existing international institutions and the total process of change requires the involvement of all

nations (developed and developing) and all actors, (governments, NGOs and business).

Will women be part of the process? And who is to guarantee their participation?

Women have demonstrated on many occasions their capacity to promote social, economic, and political agendas that benefit humanity. They have done so through strategic dialogue, networking, debating and pressurizing. They have learnt the skills to organize and speak with one voice. With a properly organized forum, - space can be created for women to participate in the ongoing debate on questions such as globalization, security and economic development.

In the last decade, a number of United Nations World Conferences were held to facilitate discussions and deliberations that resulted into consensus on major issues which include the need to protect our planet, maintain peace, and eradicate violation of human rights. The debate on gender issues asserted more than before women's rights in their societies.

It is increasingly evident that the 21st century development will be greatly determined by economic globalisation. Globalisation will be one of the challenges of this century's development paradigm. Yet a lot of questions remain unanswered as to what the economic globalization process will bring to people's development such as:

-Is globalisation an opportunity for stronger partnership of **developed and developing countries?**

-How is globalization going to narrow the gap between **rich and poor?**

-Will developing countries with their limited access to technology survive the competition in the global economy?

The meeting of WTO in Cancun, Mexico illustrated the "Master and Servant Model" of North-South relationship. The developing countries found the unity and strength to say **No!** to the manipulation of the negotiation process by Europe and the United States. G-20+, the group of over twenty developing nations forged a united front to put forward its own proposals, included such major global players as China, India, Brazil and South Africa. "This is a change in the quality of negotiations between developing and developed countries".

It is also a result of a system that breeds resentments. The excluded feel not only poor and dispossessed, but also defeated and humiliated. People may resort to violence personally and as a group once they feel not to be taken seriously, not respected or recognized as a culture or as a society.

Jan Pronk, former Minister for International Cooperation of the Netherlands once said:

“But if you experience that the system does not only ignore you, but brushes you aside, doesn’t want you, cuts you off, excludes you, then you may become inclined to consider it your turn: to turn away from the system”

Dear friends, how many times us women have experienced this and felt that way?

President Thabho Mbeki of South Africa dramatically summed this situation in his statement in Johannesburg when addressing the meeting of the World Summit on Social Development by saying,

“Globalization is apartheid which takes away living space. Globalization is appropriation. Globalization means fencing off. Globalization is occupation. Occupation of space – living space, expropriation of resources, sealing off societies, subjecting cultures. The poor are told to stay in their homelands, in occupied territories, separated from each other by boundaries drawn by those who do have access to the resources, the capital and the technology which lay at the basis of the modern Western cultures”.

Have women at one time or another not experience being trapped in the “ global apartheid” of one kind or another?

Some people who have come as far as this do not seek access to the system any more. *Is this what Africa is trying to do when it established the New Partnership For Africa’s Development (NEPAD)*. NEPAD is a serious candid initiative to establish new model of economic development in Africa. The discussion of NEPAD by women on the African continent is a step toward empowering women to own the development process in Africa. This should be an example to be emulated by women at the global

level in discussing and owning the process of change that will meet the challenges of the 21st century.

While there are many good initiatives that should be taken in the name of sustainable development, it is also true that many good initiatives and tools that are already available to policy makers are under-utilised. The Millennium Development Goals and Targets, together with Agenda 21 and the World Summit on Social Development Plan of Implementation, the Beijing Platform For Action, the Human Rights Convention and the Rights of the Child. None of these agreements have yet lived to their potential and all need to be, and can be, put to better use than they have till now in the global quest for sustainable development.

Do we really need another international conference of the magnitude of Beijing to address the questions of:

- Peace
- Science and Information Technology
- Environment Sustainability
- Poverty
- Health
- Terrorism
- Good Governance

If so, when, where and by whom?

If the world has to avoid the “global apartheid” there is a need to bridge the development gaps of the South. Deliberate measures are needed to:

- Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger.
- Provide universal primary schools for Girls and Boys.
- Promote gender equality and empowerment of women.
- Reduce child and maternal mortality.
- Improve maternal health.
- Combat HIV/AIDS and other diseases.
- Ensure environmental sustainability.
- Establish global level partnership for development, which will ensure the mobilization of resources, human capacity development, and development of democratic political and social systems without discrimination and marginalisation.

As we search for a more sustainable development path we should not lose sight of women's relatively low social and political status that continues to marginalize them in all areas of development including education, health and employment and to severely limit their access to productive resources. Furthermore gender based discrimination has systematically marginalized women in governance structure and undermined their political participation in all nations regardless of the level of development of their nations.

At the same time, the new world situation presents challenges as well as opportunities for women's skills experience and perspectives to be mainstreamed into development activities by:

- a) Women acquiring skills to manage technology particularly those of information.
- b) Establishing economic partnership between women and with men, at national and international levels in order to mobilize resources and access market through trade.
- c) Ensuring participation in decision making at all levels in order to bring about quality of leadership, equitable distribution of resources, and democracy.

I wish to conclude my statement by saying that the efforts to promote women in leadership is far from completion. More work and dialogue for action is needed. For the government of Western Australia your support is more critical now.

*“The revolution has begun, there is no going back”
Ambassador Gertrude Mongella – 14 Sept , Beijing 1995*