

**KEYNOTE SPEECH BY H.E. MARIE LOUISE COLEIRO PRECA, PRESIDENT OF  
MALTA AT THE WORLD OF WORK SUMMIT, ILO GENEVA**

**15 June 2017**

**Your Excellencies, my colleagues, President of Mauritius and President of  
Nepal**

**Director General**

**Dear friends**

**I would like to take this opportunity to commend the International Labour  
Organisation, and your collaborators, for hosting this summit, as part of the  
Women at Work Centenary Initiative.**

**It is an honour to participate in this World of Work Summit, which is focusing  
on building a better future for all the people of our world.**

**I am convinced that a future for all of humanity will only be possible if we  
take action together, to ensure proper access to education, and dignified  
work opportunities for all women, across the globe.**

**I believe that, by targeting such an important issue, and inviting so many  
contributors, this Summit will help us, to keep on track, with the United  
Nations' Agenda 2030, and hopefully implement its Sustainable Development  
Goals.**

**I believe that Agenda 2030, and its Sustainable Development Goals, offers us  
the most structured framework, that can help us achieve meaningful change.**

**Agenda 2030 is a pathway, to help us hold ourselves, our authorities, and our nations accountable, to the most essential socio-economic issues.**

**At this point, I wish to draw your attention, in particular, to some of these global goals.**

**Addressing global inequity and injustice is our first, and most urgent, concern. For this reason, Sustainable Development Goal Number 1 focuses our attention on the eradication of poverty.**

**The United Nations Development Fund for Women, identifies feminisation of poverty as an issue of global concern, by calling, for us to focus on, and I quote:**

***“The burden of poverty borne by women, especially in developing countries, is different from that of men [and] a multi-dimensional approach is critical, to assess issues of gender and poverty.”*** End quote.

**Education is key to ending such poverty and precarity, in all our societies.**

**This is highlighted in Sustainable Development Goal Number 4.**

**I believe that the international community must put in more effort, to prioritise equitable access to quality education for all.**

**Access to education, and the opportunities which this brings, must be an intrinsic component in our global strategies to empower women and girls.**

**In the inspirational words of Nobel Peace Prize laureate, Malala:**

***“It is not time to tell the leaders to realise how important education is - they already know it - their own children are in good schools. Now it is time to call them to take action.”*** End quote.

I believe Malala’s words condemn the lack of effective action, which is still going on, when it comes to the education of our girls.

We must support these young women, including the large numbers of girls in refugee camps, who are being denied the opportunity to receive a quality education, which could transform their future, and our future, for the better. We cannot be short sighted. When women and girls receive a quality education, which is their due, then our societies and our nations also stand to benefit.

Definitely, the whole of humanity benefits, through the education of our children.

Therefore, when we prioritise education, we shall be creating the groundwork that leads to Sustainable Development Goal Number 5, which explicitly commits the international community, to achieve gender equality in the process of transforming our world.

I believe that, as an international community, we must focus more energy on target 5.5, which states, and I quote;

***“[To] ensure women’s full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life.”*** End quote.

**In order to achieve this target, many more women must be included in positions of social and political influence. This must be paralleled by an increase in the number of women, who hold managerial and policy-making positions.**

**Women's voices must be heard, and women's needs must be acted upon, at all levels of influence, including management and leadership.**

**It is in this way, that, I believe, that we can do much more, to ensure that our policies accurately respond to women's real challenges, with real solutions.**

**Furthermore, Sustainable Development Goal 8, especially target 8.5, highlights the importance of decent work.**

**It reminds us of the crucial need to stimulate our economies, and provide equal opportunities for both women and men.**

**The importance of building an inclusive economy, which celebrates the participation of all individuals and communities, makes it clear that we are committed to achieve a more respectful and sustainable future, for all of us.**

**As we can clearly see, the Sustainable Development Goals, and their targets, offer us a new way to think of our global development, as fundamentally interrelated.**

**The SDGs present us with a roadmap for the future, by encouraging and empowering us to take action, particularly on behalf of, and with, the vulnerable, the marginalised, and the oppressed.**

In the words of Martin Luther King, Jr., and I quote:

*“We are caught in an, inescapable network of mutuality. We are tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly.”* End quote.

We must be aware, and make others aware, that any and all experiences of exclusion, within the tightly interlinked systems of our social, economic, political, and ecological lives, are having devastating repercussions, which are felt by all of us.

This is because our lives, as one humanity, are profoundly interconnected.

Whatever disadvantages are experienced, in one part of a system, are, inevitably, experienced by all. So, too, will our efforts to achieve positive changes have far-reaching effects, across the board.

For this reason, women’s full, equitable, and global participation in the world of work is not only a matter of importance to women.

The participation of women, at all levels of society, is a matter of fundamental human rights. It is imperative, for all humanity.

The participation of women in the world of work is an essential component, to create practical solutions for prosperity.

**Undoubtably, the participation of women is essential, to meet the social, economic, political, and ecological challenges that are taking place around the globe.**

**According to last year's report from the World Economic Forum, it could take up to 170 years to eradicate the growing disparity, in pay and employment opportunities, faced by women worldwide.**

**The report states, and I quote;**

***"More than a decade of data has revealed that progress is still too slow for realising the full potential of one half of humanity within our lifetimes."* End quote.**

**Such reports and indicators are an urgent call to action, for the international community, to accelerate gender equality and equitable participation in the economy.**

**I believe we must be courageous, to develop bolder policies, which target the economic, social, and cultural barriers still faced by women, across the globe, to achieve parity in the world of work.**

**Gender inequality is not only a pressing issue of moral significance. It is a challenge of critical importance to our economies.**

**The global economy will continue to suffer, greatly, if women continue to be excluded.**

**A recent report, published by the international consultation group McKinsey Global Institute, makes it clear that advancing women's equality can add over 10 trillion euros to global growth.**

**We cannot afford to keep ignoring these economic implications. We cannot ignore the negative effects which a lack of gender parity is having, on the economies of our communities and nations.**

**Even after decades of progress, to ensure the equal representation of women alongside men, in social, economic, and political spheres, the gap between men and women remains unacceptably wide.**

**We must tackle the complex causes of this gap, including obstacles of culture and tradition.**

**We must use our clout, to encourage a global process of empowerment, which gives women full sovereignty over their own choices in the world of work.**

**I believe that the private sector, through the business communities of our different nations, has a strong role to play.**

**I urge the private sector to focus on the substantial economic opportunities, which we all stand to gain from, by achieving gender parity.**

**Moreover, we cannot fool ourselves into thinking that gender disparities, in the world of work, are simply a problem for developing nations.**

**The gender pay gap, in developed countries, is also a cause of great concern.**

According to the World Bank's gender indicators, women in most countries are earning, on average, only 60 to 75 per cent of the wages received by men. Women are more likely to engage in unpaid family work, or to be involved in low-productivity activities, in the informal sector.

According to data from the United Nations' Statistics Division, about the Women of the World, and I quote;

*"Only 50 percent of women of working age are in the labour force, compared to 77 percent of men."* End quote.

We must also focus our attention on those women who face multiple levels of exclusion from dignified work. In particular, we must stand by the women and girls who have been caught up in migration.

Migration is often a desperate way to escape poverty, precarity, and conflict. For many women, migration creates its own risks, such as exposure to modern forms of slavery, which include exploitative work, abuse, and increased vulnerability to violence.

I believe the international community must take urgent action, to protect women who are at risk of these dangers.

We must ensure that the dignity and the wellbeing of all individuals are at the centre of our migration legislation and policies.



Let me urge you to join the call, being led by UN Women, who are advocating, and I quote;

*“for employment policies that improve labour market conditions and advance decent work for women, including domestic workers [and] promote women’s economic leadership, whether in public decision-making, on corporate boards, or in labour unions.”* End quote.

Furthermore, I believe that this summit presents us with an excellent opportunity, to celebrate a recent indicator, from the United Nations, which reveals that two-thirds of countries, in developing regions, have now achieved gender parity in primary education.

As I have stated, education is a cornerstone of our strategies to address poverty and gender equality. We should, therefore, acknowledge this important achievement, in the light of the importance of education, to empower communities, and to achieve all other kinds of change.

In this context, let me remind you of the inspiring words of Nelson Mandela:

*“Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use, to change the world.”* End quote.

However, we cannot lose sight of the fact that such successful outcomes in the sphere of education do not, automatically, translate into larger economic or social benefits for women, in the world of work.

In fact, there is much more that must be done.

**For this reason, I believe that we need an approach that is sensitive to differences of culture, in which education, economic empowerment, and political visibility are closely interlinked.**

**In this context, I believe we must challenge our mindset, by asking some pertinent questions;**

**How can our indicators reflect the needs of specific communities, so as to make visible the real challenges that they are facing, and create a practical change?**

**How can we measure the ways that different communities perceive their own standards for success, in the journey towards gender parity in the world of work?**

**Rather than impose our own standards, how can we do more to ensure that the wellbeing of women and girls is the heart of our initiatives?**

**I believe that we must do more to listen to what women and girls have to say, and then take action to address their experiences.**

**Therefore, I urge all stakeholders, involved in this summit, to prioritise the needs and requirements of all local communities.**

**We must highlight a bottom-up approach, which puts the individual and community at the centre of all our strategies.**

**In this way, we shall be better placed to achieve greater gender parity, while also understanding the contextual needs of particular communities.**

**Moreover, when we prioritise gender mainstreaming in education and other sectors, this will naturally lead to women playing a greater part in the social, economic, and political life of their communities, societies, and nations.**

**In this way, our efforts will encourage a collaborative system of empowerment, which recognises and celebrates the differences of our cultures, while still upholding the fundamental rights of each and every woman, to be in control of her own destiny.**

**We need structured processes of participation and dialogue, so as to create safe spaces to listen; to understand how people think; to discover what they believe; and to know how best to work with them.**

**Encouraging communities to make choices about their own values, rather than imposing our own, will certainly increase our chances of success.**

**When communities take ownership over the values of equity and equality, then a cultural legacy is created. It is this legacy, of benefit to both present and future generations, which is the only truly sustainable way forward.**

**I believe, at this critical time in the history of our world, we must work together to create a legacy of social, political, and economic empowerment for women.**

In order to achieve this goal, we must promote policies that highlight a healthy work-life balance, as part-and-parcel of decent and dignified work conditions for women.

These policies must include a focus on supporting structures. Let me share an example from my own country, Malta.

Last year's Eurostat figures showed that Malta experienced the largest employment increase of any other EU member state, which has had direct benefits for women of working age.

These were supported by legislation, structures, and policies, which targeted the needs of women. Such structures included free access to child care centres for working women.

This has had an immense impact on women's working lives in Malta. Furthermore, there has been a slow, but steady, increase in the participation of women in the Maltese workforce.

Inspired by such developments, which are taking place in our various nations, we must create a legacy that places women, and their experiences, at the centre of our deliberations.

In this way, we shall build truly inclusive economies, which value the equitable and equal participation of women, alongside men, as full and respected collaborators, who are strengthening our societies and our nations.

**We cannot afford to be complacent.**

**The time for action is now.**

**Let us work together, to make a difference for all women and girls,  
everywhere.**

**Thank you for your attention.**