

---

*#Girl2Leader - Keynote Speech by H.E. Marie-Louise Coleiro Preca,  
President of Malta, at the Women Political Leaders Global Forum Global  
Summit, Lithuania, 7th June 2018*

---

Distinguished guests  
Dear friends

I am pleased to have this opportunity to address you, and to present the work of our #Girl2Leader Campaign. This important initiative was established last year by WPL.

I would like to take the opportunity, to commend, Silvana and Hanna and their team at WPL, for their vision in launching this campaign.

The #Girl2Leader campaign was launched on the 11<sup>th</sup> October last year, on the occasion of the International Day of the Girl Child, with two parallel events in Brussels and Malta, in collaboration with my Foundation for the Wellbeing of Society.

This campaign is focusing on the empowerment of our young women and girls, while also offering opportunities for mentorship, and a safe space for dialogue.

As women, we must be committed, to end all forms of gender stereotyping. We must also be committed to encourage and support young women to consider the possibility of a career in politics and other areas of leadership.

Never before has the world required strong leadership.

The world needs the participation of people of all ages and genders, in order to develop the appropriate legislation and policies, which will lead to equal, inclusive and respectful societies.

In today's world, there are approximately 1.1 billion girls, who form part of the world's population.

This new generation of girls is growing up at a time of unprecedented social, political, economic, and environmental change.

This generation of girls, is growing up in an environment, where only 7 percent of the world's Heads of State and Heads of Government are women.

They are growing up in an environment, where, only 24 percent of national parliamentarians are women.

Our girls are growing up in an environment, where, only 18.3 percent of the world's government ministers are women.

They are growing up in an environment where women's participation in peace negotiations, is minimal; only 2 percent are chief mediators; only 4 percent are witnesses and signatories, to peace accords; and only 9 percent are negotiators.

Our girls are living in a world where, the World Economic Forum is estimating, that it would take 217 years, to end gender-based disparities, in pay and employment opportunities .... if we continue at this current rate of progress.

They are living in a world where, the latest Global Gender Gap Report, is stating that: 'Gender parity is shifting into reverse'.

Undoubtedly, **it's about time** ..... we need to act, and, to act is not a choice.

In order to act and address these gender global challenges, being faced by our women and girls, I believe that, we must, first and foremost, remove the obstacles that are currently holding back our progress.

We need to act .... and to act, is already a commitment.

Our countries are committed to the implementation of the United Nations' Agenda 2030, and its Sustainable Development Goals.

In particular, SDG Number 5 specifically, target 5 demands from us, 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.

SDG 5 demands that the International Community works hard, to achieve gender equality, and women's empowerment within our lifetimes.

Even though all of our countries are committed to the United Nations Agenda 2030, there is currently no country in the world, where men and women are truly treated equally.

I am certain that, in order to create a sustainable and long-term change, we must find new ways, to actively respond, to the lived experiences of our young women and girls.

In the context of this conversation, the wise words of Kofi Annan come to mind. Kofi Annan, the seventh United Nations Secretary-General, said that "There is no tool for development more effective than the empowerment of women."

Let me take this opportunity to draw your attention, to the findings from the first Women's Empowerment Global Survey, conducted by 4GGL, a leading NGO in the sector of female empowerment.

The survey found that, 60 percent of young women, see themselves as primary catalysts for change, in their own lives and for their communities.

However, they also expressed that, it was essential for them, to have access to further opportunities for personal development, in order to achieve more control over their lives.

To be active participants, capable of meeting their personal, educational, and career goals, girls and young women, who participated in this survey, consistently said, that they need to feel that they have a voice, and that their voices are being heard and respected.

In both economically developed and developing countries, only 30 percent of girls and young women said that they use their voice regularly, according to the report.

One participant defined the concept of voice as, and I quote, "having a space to speak and listen, with love and understanding."

That is why I would like to reiterate my congratulations, to WPL, for creating a safe space to give a voice to young women and girls through the Girl2Leader campaign. I would also like to take this opportunity, to thank and encourage, our young champions, who have attended this global summit in Lithuania.

Participants of the same survey, were also asked to identify the biggest problems facing the women in their societies. Respondents in Asia, the Middle East, and Africa spoke about sexual violence, gender discrimination, and domestic violence.

In Western European and North American cities, young women spoke of a glass ceiling, created by societal expectations and structural oppressions.

For this reason, I believe that the #Girl2Leader campaign, moving forward, must develop additional sensitivity, to the cultural and social contexts, in which our girls and young women are living.

We must respond accordingly, with effective and practical strategies, to provide our girls with the empowerment to use their voices, boldly and courageously.

Girls and young women are essential stakeholders in the global journey towards positive change. We must set our girls on a journey, in which they are given the same opportunities to thrive, and to reach their full potential, just like our boys.

This is the soul and the spirit of the #Girl2Leader campaign. We are focused on enhancing the participation, the visibility, the inclusion, and the empowerment of our girls and young women, across all levels of our diverse societies.

Girls must be assured of equitable access to opportunities in all aspects of their lives, from education to employment.

When we respect the full dignity and wellbeing of women and girls, and the value of their unique contributions, then we can make a real difference in our communities and our societies.

For this reason, we must raise our daughters, to think of themselves as potential leaders and innovative thinkers, to give a worthwhile contribution in the best interest of our societies.

There is an urgent need to widen the opportunities for girls, and our young women, by empowering them to become women who lead.

During last year's observance of the International Day of the Girl Child, our activities in Malta, coordinated by my Foundation for the Wellbeing of Society, included several workshops with female students, which were facilitated by my dear friend, Silvana, as President and Founder of WPL.

During these workshops, further discussion was stimulated, to create a context for these young women to share their aspirations and to build stronger networks.

This is an example, of what we can achieve, through this campaign, by mobilising our resources and capacities, to encourage, and empower, our girls and young women.

If we hope to overcome the many challenges faced by our girls and young women, we cannot afford to be complacent.

I believe that, our aspirations for the #Girl2Leader campaign must be taken to the next level of engagement.

We must reach out beyond the borders of Europe, and effectively connect with girls and women in other continents.

Let me therefore reiterate the need to create specific opportunities for mentorship and training, which respond to the real needs and ambitions of all of our girls and young women.

According to the Women's Empowerment Global Survey, girls and young women all over the world reported that they felt they had choices over their education, yet, they said they had the least control over their careers.

However, many of the respondents in South Asia, Africa, and the Middle East, still regard the struggle for fundamental human rights as their most urgent concern, and these include access to basic education.

For this reason, while it is important to continue promoting, the economic aspirations of girls and young women, in some countries, we must also recognise that, there is a larger need for the international community, to support girls and young women in more fundamental areas of activity, all around the world.

If we are truly committed to fulfill our global responsibility, to address the crucial social challenges such as violence, war, injustice, and inequality, then the empowerment of women and girls, must be our first priority.

Education will always be key for women and girls to achieve their empowerment. Empowerment leads to a sense of resilience, which is equally important.

Education is the only way, to end the damaging culture of discrimination, abuse, harassment, inequalities and social tensions, which is reducing the role of women to harmful and reductive stereotypes, in all of our societies.

As the President of an island-nation, at the heart of the Mediterranean Sea, I am sure that we can make a powerful contribution, through the #Girl2Leader campaign, to promote gender equality, in new and under-reached areas.

Let us therefore consider new strategies for the expansion of the #Girl2Leader campaign, with the aim of reaching our entire global family.

To face this changing world, we need inspiring examples of female leadership, to help create, and to nurture, equality, equity, justice and peace.

This is the message we must keep promoting, through the #Girl2Leader campaign, and throughout our deliberations during this conference.

The international community must prioritise the active contributions of all our women and girls, alongside our men and boys.

As women political leaders from around the world, it is our responsibility to take action.

I look forward to your support in our efforts, to further develop the #Girl2Leader campaign, and to achieve the best, for our girls and young women all over the world.

I encourage each and every one of you, to use the 11<sup>th</sup> October, the International Day of the Girl, as an opportunity to organize workshops, training sessions and networking events, to empower the young women and girls of your respective countries, to see themselves as the future leaders of their nations, and our world.

On Concluding, I would like to address, the young women and girls participating in this Summit, to be courageous to stand up for equality, equity and social justice, so that you will be today's champions of equality and inclusion, and tomorrow's wise leaders of our world.

Thank you for your attention.