



## **World of Work Summit**

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## High-level panel

Thursday, 15 June 2017, 10.a.m.

*Moderator: Ms Mbanjwa*

### A better future for women at work

The President of the 106th Session of the Conference, Mr Luis Ernesto Carlos Rudy, Minister of Labour and Professional Development, Panama, welcomed participants to the World of Work Summit and provided an overview of the morning session on “A Better Future for Women at Work”, including the main themes to be discussed by the panel: work–family balance; women, men and the care economy; violence and harassment as a barrier to decent work for women; and the gender pay gap/equal pay for work of equal value.

Mr Carlos Rudy briefly introduced the distinguished panel members: Ms Sharan Burrow, General Secretary, International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC); Ms Linda Kromjong, Secretary-General, International Organisation of Employers (IOE); Ms Myrna Cunningham, Board Member of the Association for Women’s Rights in Development (AWID), Nicaragua; Ms Rehema Ludanga, Regional Secretary of the Tanzania Union of Industrial and Commercial Workers (TUICO); and Mr Rajeev Dubey, Group President (HR and Corporate Services) and CEO (After-Market Sector) of Mahindra & Mahindra, India. He also introduced the moderator, Ms Nozipho Mbanjwa, CNBC, South Africa.

He stressed the deep transformations in the world of work since the ILO was founded, including the increase in the participation of women, and noted that the day’s conversation would address the question of how women and men could contribute to building a more equal world of work.

In his opening remarks, the Secretary-General of the Conference, Mr Guy Ryder, underlined that for almost a century the ILO had been supporting and, in some cases, leading societal transformations regarding women at work. He recalled the principle embedded in the ILO’s Constitution, that “all human beings, irrespective of race, creed or sex, have the right to pursue both their material well-being and their spiritual development in conditions of freedom and dignity, of economic security and equal opportunity” and that one of the principles designated in the ILO Constitution to be of “special and urgent importance” was that men and women should receive equal remuneration for work of equal value. He also observed that one of the first standards adopted by the newly formed ILO in 1919 was on maternity protection, with a series of Conventions having been adopted over the decades that followed to promote and ensure equality of opportunity for women at work.

He signalled that the situation of women at work was not good enough and that a better future for women at work was possible. Millions of working women did not have adequate maternity protection, the pay gap was closing at a glacial rate, and equal pay for work of equal value remained elusive. Women’s labour force participation was 27 percentage points lower than men’s, while sectoral segregation was on the rise. He remarked on the worrying nature of these trends and that progress would not happen by continuing to do more of the same: this was why the Women at Work Initiative had been launched.

He referred to a recent ILO–Gallup study that showed most women across the globe wanted to work in paid jobs, indicating that there remained an unacceptable gap between women’s aspirations and the labour market reality. The most widely cited challenges for women at work were work–family balance and a lack of access to care, while unequal pay, unfair treatment, harassment and discrimination also came up high on the list. He recalled

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that the Conference would be discussing violence and harassment in the world of work in 2018, and he emphasized the ILO's responsibility to help end this blight on the life of all workers, including women workers.

He concluded by stressing that, in the era of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, where gender equality and decent work were clearly embedded in the Goals, there was an imperative to act on decent work for women, and he called on everyone to work towards transformative and sustainable solutions.

In a video message to the Summit, the Prime Minister of Canada, H.E. Mr Justin Trudeau, spoke of Canada's pride in ratifying the Right to Organise and Collective Bargaining Convention, 1949 (No. 98), stating it was time to recognize the workers' right to bargain collectively. He mentioned that Canada was investing in helping parents go back to work and to study. He also expressed Canada's support for the ILO's work towards a standard on violence and harassment in the world of work, and emphasized the need to respect the rights of all workers, especially the rights of women. Noting that everyone was stronger when women realized their full potential and that everyone benefited when women fully participated in the economy, he closed by calling for gender equality to be made a reality in the workplace and beyond.

The moderator introduced the functioning of an innovative aspect of the Summit – the “ILO EVENTS” application – through which participants could take an online poll. She invited participants to answer the first poll question:

“What is the biggest challenge for women in the world of work today in your country?”

- (a) lack of skills/experience/education;
- (b) unequal pay;
- (c) unfair treatment/discrimination/harassment;
- (d) work–family balance/care responsibilities.”

A video illustrating the current situation of women at work was shown, highlighting the need for work–family balance measures, affordable care services, equal pay for work of equal value, the extension of social protection measures, an end to violence and harassment, and macroeconomic policies that foster job-rich growth and address gender inequalities. The video highlighted that the ILO's Women at Work and the Future of Work Initiatives provided an opportunity to identify and overcome the obstacles women faced in achieving decent work.

The moderator then invited the first round of questions regarding work–life balance.

A Government representative from Australia asked how to bring about the cultural shift necessary to achieve a better future for women at work, given that, even where policies and practices were in place to address the challenges women face, underlying barriers prevented women from realizing their potential.

A Government representative from Japan indicated that, in the context of the demographic trends taking place in Japan, care for the elderly carried a potential for job creation. At the same time, women were the ones doing care work, either as domestic workers or unpaid family members. His question referred to measures that should be adopted to ensure that care work is decent, formal and covered by social protection.

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An Employer representative from Saudi Arabia suggested that fostering work–life balance and more flexible work arrangements could be supported by the digital economy. She asked the panel to reflect on how to accommodate work–life balance without compromising sustainability.

A Worker representative from Malaysia noted that 44 countries had ratified the Workers with Family Responsibilities Convention, 1981 (No. 156), with very few ratifications from Asia. She asked what could be done by States and the tripartite constituents for the achievement of work–family balance and decent work.

In response, Ms Cunningham began by highlighting that nearly 200 million indigenous women were workers and business people. An analysis of the individual situation within their community was critical, particularly regarding care and work–family balance. Indigenous women tended to have responsibilities related to work, family and the community. She observed that many indigenous people’s jobs were based on traditional knowledge and occupations, and there was a need to promote and protect these jobs. She also underlined the importance of having coherent and concerted policies on health, employment and social protection, which needed to be designed through consultations with women.

Mr Dubey observed that there was a strong business case for women in the workforce. He stressed it was critical to have a vision, a strategy and an implementation plan with metrics. He saw flexible work as useful and easy to implement, and he noted the need for a cultural change, including for men.

Ms Ludanga pointed to the multiple roles of women as producers and reproducers and, thus, viewed as solely responsible for the family. She stressed the need to change mentalities, so that men could also take care of the family and accept women’s right to work. She further underlined that women had to change their perceptions about themselves, and acknowledge their potential and valuable contributions.

Ms Kromjong noted that productivity and flexibility needed to be looked at together, and that there was a clear business case for increasing the participation of women. She observed that there needed to be a change of mindset and company culture, which needed to be addressed by women and men together. She further underlined that the pace of change was not fast enough, and that urgent action was needed, adding that companies needed to reflect the diversity of their customers. Furthermore, she highlighted the importance of the G20 process, which had a focus on gender and diversity and hoped this focus would continue moving forward.

Ms Burrow stressed the importance of responding to power imbalances. She underlined that it was critical to “count women in” for good jobs, freedom of association, and leadership roles. She noted that many countries still denied some or all groups of workers freedom of association. Moving forward, she suggested it was critical to focus on the care economy, health and education, and she called for ratification of the Workers with Family Responsibilities Convention, 1981 (No. 156), and the Maternity Protection Convention, 2000 (No. 183). She clarified that if “flexibility” meant the terms of the organization of work, that met the needs of both women and men with family responsibilities, along with job security, there would be support for this. However, if “flexibility” meant forced overtime and other measures that undermined work–family balance, this was not acceptable.

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The moderator shared the results of the first question on the “ILO EVENTS” application, which showed that 58 per cent of respondents believed that work–family balance was the biggest challenge. She invited participants to answer the second poll question:

“Generally, women’s access to decent work is similar to that of men.

- (a) agree;
- (b) disagree.”

A Government representative from Namibia noted that women, particularly in Africa, performed the majority of unpaid work. He asked what measures needed to be put in place to ensure women had access to, and could advance in, the formal and informal economies.

A Government representative from Norway posed a question regarding the importance of leave policies, childcare policies and care services for ensuring equality both at home and the workplace.

A Worker representative from Canada noted that, almost 100 years since the ILO Constitution was written, women, particularly migrant women, tended to perform the majority of the work in the care economy. She asked how care work, including work by indigenous women and women with disabilities, could be made more visible, given its important contribution, and how could it be ensured that this was decent work. She further asked how men could be encouraged to do more care work.

An Employer representative from Australia noted that pay in the care sector was lower than in other sectors that are dominated by men. At the same time, men tended to have higher positions and better pay within the care sector. She asked how more men could be brought into the care economy and how good-quality care could be ensured for all.

Ms Cunningham highlighted the need to address structural factors that were inherent in colonialism and patriarchy. A change of the legislative framework was needed, with laws requiring equal treatment and equal opportunities, and equal pay, which would create political change. Equipping women so they were able to bargain for what they deserve was also needed. She saw it as essential to create more decent work in countries of origin, and to ensure that remittances of migrant workers contributed to decent work, so that migrant workers could return home. Women’s roles in contributing to food security and to the economy also needed to be recognized.

Mr Dubey indicated that the terms and conditions of jobs in the care economy needed to be made more attractive. He shared policies and practices from his own company relating to maternity leave, and that guaranteed that performance appraisals of workers using this leave would not be affected negatively, and access to external crèches.

Ms Ludanga noted that the informal economy was growing, with the share of women workers, particularly young women, in the informal economy increasing. First, the contribution of women needed to be acknowledged, and informal work needed to be formalized, to make it valued and visible. She noted that women needed to organize, as collectively they would be stronger.

Ms Kromjong agreed that it was important to make jobs in the care economy more attractive. She emphasized the crucial role of educational systems and the need to promote gender-neutral studies. The range of skills needed for the care economy needed to be acknowledged and valued. Traditional gender stereotypes in career paths should be challenged, so that care work became more acceptable to women and men.

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Ms Burrow welcomed the target of the G20 to reduce the gap in labour force participation rates between women and men by 25 per cent by 2025. At the heart of these efforts was the formalization of informal work performed by women. Remuneration in the care economy needed to be addressed so it would become more attractive for everyone, including for men. She highlighted the need for universal social protection, including provisions for child- and elderly care, a recognition of care skills and a minimum remuneration level for care work. She referred to data that indicated that investing 2 per cent of GDP into social infrastructure could lead to a 6 per cent growth of jobs. She stated that the creation of care jobs, many of which would go to women, would also have a multiplier effect on sectors dominated by men.

The moderator shared the results for the second poll question, which showed that 44 per cent of respondents agreed that women had equal access to decent work, whereas 56 per cent disagreed. Following up on this result, Ms Burrow expressed surprise at this result and emphasized the lack of visibility when it came to work performed by women, stressing that it was important to change people's attitudes. The moderator then invited participants to answer the third poll question:

“Who is mainly affected by gender-based violence and harassment?”

- (a) women;
- (b) men;
- (c) both women and men.”

The moderator referred to the ILO's report, “Ending violence and harassment against women and men in the world of work”, which included a questionnaire to be completed by ILO member States by 22 September 2017 after consultation with the most representative organizations of employers and workers. The questionnaire was an essential part of the ILO standard-setting process, leading up to the first discussion on the topic at the Conference in 2018.

A Government representative from Uganda stated that violence against women was an obstacle in accessing decent work and emphasized its often subtle nature. She asked about measures that could be taken to best prevent and address violence and harassment.

A Government representative from Canada asked how to not only increase the labour force participation of women but also how to retain women workers, which was related to creating work environments free from harassment and violence.

An Employer representative from Kenya stated that decent work could not be achieved in a context of violence and harassment. Violence and harassment would also cause economic costs for an employer due to increased absenteeism, sick leave and reputational damage. She contended that social partners needed to be proactive to reduce and eliminate the negative effects on women's well-being and health. She asked how to address stigma attached to victims, both men and women, who reported harassment and violence.

A Worker representative from the Netherlands highlighted that women migrants were disproportionately affected by violence and harassment. Noting that in 2018 the Conference would have a first discussion on the standard-setting process on violence and harassment in the world of work, she asked about what steps could be taken, including to ensure women were safe in access to work, when at work and commuting.

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Ms Cunningham stated that not only should violence against people be addressed directly but also ecological violence (for example, the use of pesticides and other dangerous chemicals). She referred to the increase in government-issued licences for extractive industries as having an adverse effect on indigenous communities, such as their eviction from traditional lands and territories, endangering the social fabric and fostering violence in people's homes and communities. She also pointed to the importance of understanding and addressing domestic violence.

Mr Dubey described how discussing harassment was part of a regular reporting procedure during board meetings of his company. He also spoke of the usefulness of committees on harassment and the importance of a zero-tolerance policy.

Ms Ludanga noted that women needed to be empowered to understand that sexual harassment was not part of the job, and to demand their rights at work. Laws needed to be developed and enacted to create safe environments, and to ensure accessible dispute resolution procedures, and protection against victimization.

Ms Kromjong stressed that all forms of violence and harassment were unacceptable. She noted that women comprised a higher percentage of victims, although men could also be victims. Company cultures should provide mechanisms to report violence and harassment, and to do so without stigma. Governments needed to provide guidance and legal frameworks and to raise awareness early on in the education system that violence and harassment were not acceptable.

Ms Burrow indicated that there was not an environment of safety at work, given rising misogyny, increasing harassment and bullying, discrimination and a culture of impunity. Environmental and human rights defenders were increasingly at risk, including death. She hoped that the Conference discussion on violence and harassment would lead to standards by consensus. She mentioned collective agreements that had been negotiated on domestic violence, as well as new legislation, including providing leave for workers who were victims of domestic violence. The business case for this was based on the fact that victims needed time to obtain court orders to feel safe in their workplace. This also required that governments ensured freedom of association.

The moderator shared the results for the third poll question, which showed that 72 per cent of respondents had answered that mainly women were affected by gender-based violence and harassment, that 27 per cent had answered both women and men were mainly affected, and that 1 per cent had answered that men were mainly affected. The moderator then invited participants to answer the fourth poll question:

“What would make a bigger difference to increasing the participation of women in the labour force in your country?”

- (a) more pay;
- (b) access to affordable childcare.”

A Government representative from Bulgaria stated that her country had a lower gender pay gap than the European Union average and had almost achieved equal pay for work of equal value. She asked why the gender pay gap was a challenge in developing countries, and what impact it had on their economies.

A Worker representative from Italy observed that the gender pay gap remained a persistent problem in both developed and developing countries. Despite good legislation in her country, there was a wide gender pay gap. It was especially a problem for specific groups of women such as migrant workers. She suggested the need for more public awareness and



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policies, and that workers needed to have the right to freedom of association and collective bargaining and the right to strike. As these rights were denied in many parts of the world, she asked how it would be possible to achieve equal pay for all.

An Employer representative from Argentina noted that employers were concerned about gender pay gaps and had taken measures to help workers better balance work and family responsibilities. Training was being used to help women qualify for operational, management and sales positions, yet government action was needed on such issues as social protection. Women often left the labour market due to obstacles to promotion and because they needed to care for elderly, disabled or other family members. She asked how the State could help employers and social actors in their efforts.

A Government representative from Panama asked why there was a difference in perception in the ILO–Gallup survey among people from emerging and from developed countries regarding whether the gender pay gap was the biggest challenge.

Ms Cunningham responded that this perception may come from the fact that many women in poverty would accept any job in order to feed their families, so were not focusing on the salary and whether it was decent. She also pointed to the importance of the intersection of gender, race and ethnicity regarding this issue, and to the fact that pay gaps for indigenous women were very high.

Mr Dubey stated that in his company pay was based on the job and its responsibilities. He noted that there were more and more women on the shop floor, which had contributed to innovation, motivation and higher productivity.

Ms Ludanga stressed that women in developing countries were most concerned with access to jobs, and were not well equipped to understand their right to equal pay or to bargain for better pay.

Ms Kromjong saw the need to build women’s capacities to bargain, to express their voice and to ask for what they wanted including in individual negotiations. She noted that there was still discriminatory legislation, which created barriers for women, that needed to be repealed.

Ms Burrow asserted that in some countries the gender pay gap was up to 70 per cent. Women needed living wages and social protection. Without collective bargaining, there was no solid base upon which to build. She recalled that some countries had taken innovative measures in law, including mandated time-bound processes for addressing gender pay gaps and providing an important role for the social partners. Valuing women’s skills equally was important in addressing the issue.

The moderator shared the results for the fourth poll question, which showed that 72 per cent of respondents answered that affordable childcare would make a bigger difference to increasing the participation of women in the labour force in their country, while 28 per cent responded that more pay would make a bigger difference. Ms Burrow, along with others attending the session, stressed that in fact both were needed and were closely interrelated.

In closing, the Secretary-General of the Conference observed that the conversation had been reassuring because there was a clear consensus on the unacceptability of the current situation of women in the world of work. At the same time it was worrying because progress was not being made quickly enough. He signalled real opportunities to move forward, and he mentioned the importance of the Conference standard-setting discussion on violence and harassment in the world of work in 2018. He stated that the ILO was faced with an important rendezvous that it could not fail to meet.

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He noted the importance of changing attitudes, mindsets and culture, and he saw the ILO's particular task as focusing on how to organize work, regulate labour markets and advance institutions and mechanisms in order to ensure equality in the world of work. Work responsibilities and private life responsibilities needed to be reconciled. He noted the discussion on flexibility and the various opinions about it, and he encouraged the ILO to dig deeper into these complex issues.

He concluded that, as the ILO moved towards its centenary, the Women at Work Initiative was essential to the Future of Work Initiative. The Summit would inform this process. He called for determination to think, reflect and act on these issues and stressed the importance of all ILO constituents taking up a leadership role on these.

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## **Special sitting**

Thursday, 15 June 2017, 3 p.m.

*President: Mr Carles Rudy*

## **Addresses by the Presidents of Malta, Mauritius and Nepal**

### **The President**

*(Original Spanish)*

Welcome to this second special sitting of today. As you know, as part of the 2017 Summit on the World of Work, we are honoured this afternoon by the presence of three Heads of State: Her Excellency Ms Marie-Louise Coleiro Preca, President of the Republic of Malta; Her Excellency Ms Ameenah Gurib-Fakim, President of the Republic of Mauritius; and Her Excellency Ms Bidhya Devi Bhandari, President of the Federal Democratic Republic of Nepal.

I congratulate you, Mr Ryder, on such a good choice of guests. I have no doubt that the testimony of these three women – who, despite the obstacles that women still face in the world of work, have been able to reach the very pinnacle of a political career in their respective countries – will feed into the work of this session of the Conference. We will listen carefully to their statements to this august assembly.

I now give the floor to Mr Ryder, the Secretary-General of the Conference.

### **The Secretary-General of the Conference**

Let me welcome everybody back to the Conference after the very successful panel that we had this morning to start our World of Work Summit on the future of women at work.

This afternoon we are going to carry our Summit forward listening to the three Presidents who are our honoured guests this afternoon; I welcome them all.

At the panel session this morning, many issues were raised and there was recognition of the distance that we still have to travel to get to full equality at work. One issue that was highlighted was the issue of leadership: political leadership, leadership in employers' organizations, in the trade union movement, in government, in general. We are privileged to have as our speakers this afternoon three women who I think can tell us more about leadership and gender equality than most. Let me introduce our guests.

The first is the President of Malta, Ms Coleiro Preca. Welcome to the ILO, Madam President. I think this is your first time here in our Organization but your career displays your long-term commitment to values and principles that are very much those of the ILO.

Yours has been a lifelong dedication to achieving a better life for people who we sometimes, I think mistakenly, describe as "ordinary people". I would say "all people". Since your student years you have worked actively to achieve a fairer society – since 1998, as an active member of Parliament in Malta, where you have served in a variety of posts both in the Shadow Cabinet and, since 2013, as Minister for the Family and Social Solidarity.

The second of our speakers is the President of Mauritius, Ms Ameenah Gurib-Fakim. Welcome, Madam President, to the International Labour Conference.

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I think it may be true to say that the role of president was not perhaps one that you sought, but which you are intent on using to promote social and economic progress in your country. You have been described, or have described yourself, as a biodiversity scientist, a chemist, a leading expert on the flora of Mauritius, an academic or, simply, a gardener. We should not forget to add entrepreneur to that list. Your work has brought you international recognition and we are very pleased to add to that today.

Since assuming office as President of your country in 2015, you have put your rich experience at the service of your country and your region. Importantly, given today's theme, you have pledged to use the influence of office to promote gender equality, to be a role model and to send a clear message that "Yes, it is possible if you are a woman". I think that this is a message that has already resonated very strongly today in this hall.

You bring your passion for science and technology to the development challenges of Mauritius and of your continent. It is natural that you are a powerful advocate for developing an African scientific capacity, playing a part in launching the Alliance for Accelerating Excellence in Science in Africa. You also bring your scientific background to the challenge of climate change which has been much discussed from this podium in the last two weeks, as an advocate for developing the knowledge that is needed to develop effective responses in your region.

Madam President, thank you for being with us and bringing all of your experience and all of your vision for the future of work in Mauritius and in the world.

The third eminent president whom we receive today is the President of Nepal, Ms Bidya Devi Bhandari. Madam President, you are also extremely welcome here. I am tempted to say "welcome home" because you have been a lifelong activist for labour rights and particularly for the rights of women at work. The fight for gender equality has been woven into your lifelong dedication to values and principles. As a charismatic student leader, you stood up for equal rights and opportunities for young people across your country. You were also part of a broader movement demonstrating great courage during a 15-year struggle to promote equal rights for all, against political obstacles.

In 1993, you joined the General Federation of Nepalese Trade Unions where, as Chief of the Central Women Workers' Department, you succeeded in raising the prominence of women in the modern Nepalese trade union movement. Not long after, in 1994, you were elected to Parliament and became a powerful advocate for greater female representation in government. You were instrumental in establishing a one third quota for the representation of women in all elected bodies in government and in state mechanisms. Today, women of all castes and ethnic groups are represented in the legislature of Nepal.

Defying all common gender stereotypes – and not only in Nepal – in 2009 you took on the role of Minister of Defence. Madam, you are very welcome here, we are honoured to have you among us.

We are honoured by the presence of all of our guests. You have welcomed them most warmly. I am tempted to say that this is a three-star event, but it is actually a six-star event, a unique moment when we welcome three women leaders, three presidents of our member States in a setting which could not be more appropriate, the International Labour Conference with the subject the future of women at work.

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**The President**  
(Original Spanish)

It is my honour to give the floor to Her Excellency Ms Marie-Louise Coleiro Preca, President of the Republic of Malta.

**Ms Coleiro Preca**  
President of the Republic of Malta

I would like to take this opportunity to commend the International Labour Organization and your collaborators for hosting this Summit as part of the Women at Work Centenary Initiative. It is truly 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 offer 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 1 focuses our attention on the eradication of poverty. The United Nations Development Fund for Women identifies feminization of poverty as an issue of global concern, by calling for us to focus on the fact that “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”.

Education is key to ending such poverty and precarity, in all our societies. This is highlighted in Sustainable Development Goal 4. I believe that the international community must put in more effort to prioritize 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 Yousafzai: “It is not time to tell the leaders to realize 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.” 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 prioritize education, we shall be creating the groundwork that leads to Sustainable Development Goal 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, “[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”. In order to achieve

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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, 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 Sustainable Development Goals 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 marginalized, and the oppressed. In the words of Martin Luther King, Jr.: "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." We must be more 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 of us. 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. Undoubtedly, 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: "More than a decade of data has revealed that progress is still too slow for realizing the full potential of one half of humanity within our lifetimes." 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 achieving women's equality can add over €10 trillion 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 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

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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 presented in *The World's Women 2015*: "Only 50 per cent of women of working age are in the labour force, compared to 77 per cent of men." We must also focus our attention on these women who face multiple levels of exclusion from dignified work. In particular, we must stand by 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 well-being 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 "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."

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."

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 well-being of women and girls is at the heart of our initiatives?

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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 prioritize 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 prioritize 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 recognizes 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 of 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 that, 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 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 childcare 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 across our world.

**The President**  
*(Original Spanish)*

I now give the floor to Her Excellency Ms Ameenah Gurib-Fakim, President of the Republic of Mauritius.



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**Ms Gurib-Fakim**

President of the Republic of Mauritius

I am pleased and honoured to be here among you this afternoon for the World of Work Summit. I would like to thank Mr Ryder, Director-General of the International Labour Organization and Secretary-General of the Conference, for his kind and cordial invitation to address this august assembly and to share the podium with two eminent speakers and Heads of State: the Presidents of the Republic of Malta and the Federal Democratic Republic of Nepal.

This year's World of Work Summit focuses on the theme of Women at Work. Inviting three women Heads of State to discourse on this theme no doubt sends a strong and serious message: that women have a future of work and that the Women at Work Initiative should be an important component of the Future of Work Initiative. As we head towards the centenary of the ILO in 2019, let us reflect on the state of women at work today with some questions: How do women fare on the job market today? Are there more job opportunities for women? Do women get the jobs they want? Do women get equal pay on the job? Why should more women continue in informal employment? It all boils down to one stark reality: women's progress in the world of work is slow and still fraught with challenges in terms of quantity and quality of and access to jobs. It is our hope that the Future of Work Initiative will create the necessary impetus for a better future for women in the changing world of work.

As a small island developing state, Mauritius' initial history was shaped by men and women slaves from the shores of Africa and indentured labourers from India, who were brought to Mauritius to till the soil. I am proud to say that they constituted the first labour force in our country and laid down the foundation of our economy. Over the years, we have built on their determination, perseverance and sweat and we continue to thrive on their legacy and hard work. Their footprints in our economic development are indelible; Mauritius is now a middle-income country and has the ambition to become a high-income economy. It has a population of 1.2 million, of which 581,000 constituted our labour force in 2016, and women represent 39 per cent of our workforce. Women are present in all sectors of our economy and some of them hold high posts in the public and private sectors. Our unemployment rate stood at 7.3 per cent last year. Among the unemployed, women outnumbered men although they are generally more qualified.

Since our independence in 1968, successive governments have committed themselves to protecting women's rights and improving their standard of living and quality of life. The establishment, as far back as 1982, of a specific Ministry of Women's Affairs, which has now become a Ministry of Gender and Development, is testimony to the importance attached to women's rights. A whole range of legislative reforms, policies and programmes has been put in place at all levels over the past 40 years in order to empower women and promote their safety, well-being and economic security and those of their families. We are also witnessing slow but sure improvement in women's participation in decision-making, such as a feminization of the civil service with an increased number of women in top decision-making positions. As regards women in politics, there has been a significant leap from 5 to 17 per cent in the national Parliament and at the level of local government.

Moreover, Mauritius has launched a National Gender Policy Framework (NGPF) that calls for a strategic partnership at all levels, including the private sector, the media, political parties and civil society organizations, in order to consolidate resources and achieve gender equality. The NGPF also urges private sector organizations to create an enabling environment for making use of the potential and talents of women as well as men and develops human resource strategies that allow for family-friendly policies. The objective is to build partnerships with the private sector in order to promote inclusive, sustainable development

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and growth and contribute to the achievement of gender equality and empowerment for women and girls.

Women's empowerment and upward mobility in our society have been anchored in our overall development drive through free education up to the tertiary level, free health services and the extension of social safety nets and benefits. The ILO Conventions, which Mauritius has ratified and incorporated into domestic law through the Employment Rights Act, have also helped to improve the working conditions of women in Mauritius as they guarantee a gender equality mandate in terms of equal remuneration; equality of opportunity and treatment in respect of employment and occupation; equal access to the labour market; and protection from all forms of discrimination and violence, including sexual harassment in the workplace. Other safeguards, such as fundamental workers' rights, the right to dignity and to economic and social welfare, protection against unfair practices and decisions, and maternity protection ensure adequate protection of working women in Mauritius.

I would also like to highlight the fact that we have nurtured a culture of rich dialogue, consultation and collective bargaining between the public and private sectors and workers' groups, which has paved the way for sustained economic growth and the diversification of our economy. The role of workers and that of the private sector have doubtless been crucial for our economic progress while the Government, with its sound and proper mix of policies, has acted as facilitator throughout this process.

In Africa, there has been significant progress in closing gender gaps but, despite these gains, African women continue to face adverse situations. Girls are still much less likely than boys to benefit from a secondary education and have little influence over resources and norms. This restricts their access to jobs and thus limits their earning potential in agriculture and enterprise and on the labour market. It should not be forgotten that the women of Africa make a sizeable contribution to the continent's economy. They are more economically active as farmers and entrepreneurs than in any other region of the world; it is women who grow most of Africa's food and own a third of its businesses. In 11 African countries, women hold close to a third of the seats in parliament, more than in Europe. Over and above their income-earning activities, women are central to the household economy and to the welfare of their families and play a vital – if sometimes unacknowledged – leadership role in their communities and nations. However, African women are held back from fulfilling their potential by many constraints, whether as leaders in public life or the boardroom or in growing their businesses and this, in turn, holds back the potential of the continent's economy. Eliminating gender inequality and empowering women could raise the productive potential of 1 billion Africans, delivering a huge boost to the continent's development potential.

I would like to commend all of the heads of delegation and representatives of the Government, Workers' and Employers' groups on the formidable spirit of dialogue and consensus that have always accompanied and underpinned their discussions and decisions and on the various resolutions and Conventions adopted over the span of almost a century. This spirit of consensus has transformed the world of work; you have shaped the ILO's agenda and your legacies will be important milestones in the history of humankind. I also congratulate you on the fruitful outcomes that you have achieved after intense and constructive deliberations at this 106th Session of the International Labour Conference and on the adoption of the Recommendation on employment and decent work for peace and resilience. I am happy to note that the ILO encourages the Government, Employers' and Workers' groups to include a high percentage of women in their delegations with a view to gender parity in participation in the International Labour Conference.

In 2015, world leaders endorsed the United Nations (UN) 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are inextricably linked through Goal 5 on gender equality and Goal 8 on decent work and economic growth. The challenge to their implementation is that the burden of achievement of the SDGs is universal;

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it is borne by both developed and developing countries. Increasing gender parity and addressing achievement of the SDGs in a holistic, comprehensive manner has the potential to shape synchronous outcomes by lowering infant and child mortality rates, increasing labour force participation and earnings, and fostering further educational investment in children. We believe that the ILO, like other UN agencies, should discuss and take the necessary steps to assist with achievement of the relevant Goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda.

I would like to underscore that the challenges to achievement of the SDGs are also shaped by global geoeconomic and political realities. The world of work is being influenced by changes in production methods during the Fourth Industrial Revolution era; leaps in science and technology are having a profound impact on the nature of jobs, with zero job growth and increased automation in the manufacturing and service sectors. These profound changes are placing on governments, the business community and the workers a heavy responsibility to discuss and embrace the right strategies for sustaining employment, narrowing income and social inequality and ensuring development of the right mix of human capital and skills in order to sustain growth and economic development. Decision-makers must contend with growing discontent regarding the nature of globalization and I am comforted by the fact that in discussions in various forums, including the ILO, an increasing need for inclusive growth and increased participation of women in economic activities is being felt.

Women make up half of the world's population and deserve equal access to health, education, economic participation, earning potential and political decision-making power. To quote the World Economic Forum, “[i]mproving gender parity may result in significant economic dividends”.

For developing countries, increasing girls' participation in the education system has a multiplier effect by sharing future income equivalent to a potential increase in gross domestic product (GDP) of 1.5 per cent. Similarly, broadening women's engagement in public life addresses issues with broader social implications for family life, education and health; their participation fosters greater credibility of institutions and leads to heightened democratic outcomes.

Women's participation in the formal economy or lack thereof is also a business issue and their talents and intuition remain one of the most underutilized business resources. I am pleased to note that business leaders and governments increasingly agree that tackling barriers to equality is a necessity. Business leaders are addressing gender parity in companies as a matter of fairness and equality and are becoming more aware of the rationale for diversity in their management boards; the presence of women is leading to informed corporate decision-making and business innovation. When it comes to leadership positions, companies with women in executive management committees have been shown to perform better.

Let me refer to the conclusions of the ILO–Gallup Report, which highlights some of the obdurate obstacles to women's participation in economic activities. These include the need for a balance between work and family, the shortage of affordable care facilities, unequal pay, persistent unfair treatment and harassment at work, lack of equal opportunities and redress mechanisms, discrimination and, in many regions, cultural and social norms.

While many countries are closing this gap, globally only 54 per cent of working-age women, as compared to 81 per cent of men, are taking part in the formal economy. Women make up a sizeable portion of discouraged jobseekers and their unemployment rates are, on average, 2 per cent higher than those of men. Their average representation on boards is only 14 per cent and in only five countries – Iceland, Norway, France, Latvia and Finland – have women crossed the 30 per cent threshold.

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The wage gap is persistent. Globally, women's average earnings are slightly less than half those of men. Countries that have performed well include Norway, Slovenia and Sweden. Mozambique, Tanzania and Rwanda are some of the top performers in Africa and these efforts should be replicated on a larger scale. In some countries, we still have restrictive legislation that hampers women's access to financial services, their ability to inherit assets and their access to land and non-land assets, including the basic potential to open a bank account. Stereotyping in business and societal judgements also hamper the ability of female entrepreneurs at both the corporate level and that of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs).

We should not underestimate the fact that women have to work additional hours; when they enter the labour force, they retain primary responsibility for unpaid work such as care-giving and household chores. They are paying the penalty of motherhood and that of double shifts, i.e., both professional work and parenting. Thus, it is important that we learn from existing and innovative policies like those of the Nordic countries in order to facilitate women's integration into the workforce. These could include financial arrangements to take care of children or elders at home, family benefits and subsidies, parental leave, career breaks, sabbatical leaves, remote work possibilities, reduced working time and flexible hours. In the long term, these measures will surely lead to societal and economic returns.

There is a direct link between education and human capital development. Investing in girls' education and not restricting them to limited areas of study will also facilitate their emancipation and encouraging them to pursue studies in the fields of science, mathematics, engineering, architecture and other specialized fields will improve their career prospects. Perhaps stronger and more affirmative action with a broad range of fiscal and social policy instruments should be envisaged in order to enable smoother participation of women in work. More importantly – and more familiar to all of you here – is the need for public-private cooperation, including the spirit of tripartism that can help to find consensus in bridging gender gaps.

I conclude by recalling that, as the Director-General noted in his Report on the Future of Work Initiative, the founders of the ILO sought social justice when they began their deliberations 98 years ago. This desire for social justice is even more pronounced as we see the nexus and interconnectedness between social, economic, and political developments. Perceptions of unfairness need to be vanquished and I am confident that the deliberations in the context of the Centenary Initiative will spearhead the values-led agenda and initiatives of the ILO. As representatives of governments, employers and workers, it behoves us all to bring to fruition, through appropriate policies and actions, the crucial goals of eliminating gender gaps and facilitating women's participation in work.

**The President**  
*(Original Spanish)*

We now turn to Her Excellency Ms Bidhya Devi Bhandari, President of the Federal Democratic Republic of Nepal.

**Ms Bhandari**  
President of the Federal Democratic  
Republic of Nepal

At the outset, I thank Mr. Ryder for his invitation as well as the excellent arrangements made for this important event.

In my capacity as the first woman President of the Federal Democratic Republic of Nepal, I feel deeply honoured to represent Nepal and the Nepali people at this summit, and, as I stand before this august gathering to share the historic political achievements brought

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about by the relentless struggles and sacrifices of the Nepali people, I feel my entire nation has been honoured.

We note the international community's keen interest in our progress from conflict to a peaceful political transition, and in our endeavours to move away from conservatism and outmoded social structures. Our journey towards social transformation is ongoing.

I have brought with me warm greetings and best wishes from the Government and hard-working people of Nepal, known as the land of Gautama Buddha and Mount Everest.

I wish to express my appreciation for the special contribution made by the ILO towards promoting a decent, equitable and socially just world of work. As the ILO approaches its 100th anniversary in 2019, I commend it for making Women at Work one of its centenary initiatives.

My sincere appreciation goes to the entire ILO membership for electing Nepal to the Governing Body during the current ILC session.

The role that trade unions play in maintaining harmonious industrial relations and peace ultimately contributes to the economic development and prosperity of society at large, and we acknowledge their role in our national advancement.

The ILO Decent Work Agenda constitutes a key pillar of a fair globalization in which everyone becomes a winner. This goal can be achieved if every State accords due regard to the dignity and value of work. In order to make work more dignified, we need to create an environment for sharing best practices and promoting innovative ideas.

In 2015, world leaders adopted the ambitious 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. We note with satisfaction that all pillars of the Decent Work Agenda have been duly integrated into the 2030 Agenda, and that the Decent Work Agenda rightly identifies gender equality as both an objective and a means of achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

Compared with the situation a few decades ago, women are now better educated and trained, have better access to labour markets, are represented in increasing numbers in parliaments, and have taken up more leadership roles in governments and enterprises. However, the goal of full gender equality has yet to be achieved. Societies cannot long survive on the shaky foundation of discrimination and inequality. Discrimination against women must come to an end, and we must all make a meaningful effort.

Despite decades of efforts, the implementation of international commitments remains weak, and women's progress in the world of work has been slow and inhibited. We continue to languish in our utilization of women's potential. We must internalize the reality that, without political, economic, social and cultural empowerment of women, the establishment of an equal, just and peaceful society is inconceivable.

As I speak of women in the world of work, I am deeply touched by the cry of vulnerable migrant women workers and their abuse and exploitation. The continued existence of some of the worst forms of labour and of modern day slavery, in the form of human trafficking and the trafficking of women and girls, is an affront to human civilization. It must not be allowed to continue.

In the course of my political journey as student leader, women's activist and trade unionist, I have closely confronted many obstacles. I have myself experienced how arduous and challenging it is for a woman to achieve a position of political leadership in a patriarchal

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society. However, so far I have never experienced defeat in my political journey. The message to take from this is that, with strong commitment and unwavering effort, women can pass the most difficult political tests.

I am happy to share with you that in spite of the constraints imposed by a weak economy and the challenges of a prolonged transition, Nepal has made significant strides towards achieving gender equality, both in the world of work and in the socio-economic and political spheres.

Those achievements did not come about by coincidence. A long history of struggle has brought us to the place where we stand today. We have moved from a society in which such evil practices as suttee, child marriage, polyandry, dowry, social exclusion and deprivation prevailed. Many generations of women, daughters and sisters have shed blood and struggled to secure those rights, and a number of them have attained martyrdom in the process.

I feel it important to recall the indomitable courage and sacrifice shown by Yogmaya Neupane, who, in the adverse social milieu of 1941, drowned herself, together with 67 women followers, in the Arun River in eastern Nepal in protest against misrule and socio-cultural evils. She was a pioneer in Nepali women's struggle for their rights. Nepal's journey of political and social transformation is full of such tales of sacrifice by women from all walks of life. I pay high tribute to all those women leaders.

After almost seven decades of persistent struggles, on 20 September 2015, the Nepali people saw the promulgation of the new Constitution they had written for themselves, through their elected representatives. The new Constitution is founded on the ideals of creating an egalitarian society based on the principle of proportional inclusion, with the aim of ensuring equality and social justice and eliminating discrimination and oppression in all its manifestations. Comparatively speaking, the rights guaranteed by the new Constitution are of a superior standard. The Constitution contains provisions specific to women, such as rights of protection against exploitation and violence, right of equal lineage, and protection through positive discrimination in education, health, employment and social security. There is no restriction on the choice of employment or profession on the basis of gender. Women have equal entitlement to enter and compete for positions in all public services, including those in civil and military service and in other security agencies. The number of women peacekeepers from Nepal in various peace operations under the United Nations is increasing. Gender discrimination in wages and remuneration is strictly prohibited. Moreover, employing women in hazardous work is outlawed.

In order to further empower women, a law pertaining to positive discrimination is being implemented in government and public sector jobs. One third of civil service posts are reserved for women. This has resulted in a significant increase in women's involvement in administrative decision-making and has opened avenues for a gradual rise of women into leadership positions. Guided by this forward-looking approach, the principle of inclusive representation has been adopted in order to ensure women's representation in political positions, and this is certainly more than mere rhetoric.

I feel proud to state that today the Head of State and the Speaker of Parliament in Nepal are women. Before her mandatory retirement last week, the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court was also a woman. There is already one third representation of women in our Parliament. The Constitution stipulates that the elections for President and Vice-President be held in a manner that ensures representation of the different genders and the various ethnic communities. In both houses of Parliament, either the Speaker or the Deputy Speaker has to be a woman.

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I would like to cite an example in this regard. Following the people's movement of 2006, I had the privilege to present a resolution to the restored Parliament proposing mandatory one third representation of women in all state entities. I believe that a long journey begins with a small step.

Proportionally inclusive representation of women has been guaranteed down to the local level. The recently held first phase of elections to local government bodies helped significantly to enhance women's political representation. The second phase of the elections, to be held two weeks from now, will culminate in full realization of the mandatory constitutional requirement for at least 40 per cent women's representation in those elected bodies. Under the new arrangements, women will occupy an equal number of leadership positions in local bodies.

An independent National Women's Commission has been established, with power to monitor compliance with women-related constitutional and legal provisions and with Nepal's international obligations under the instruments to which we are a party.

In accordance with the Constitution, future elections to the State Assemblies and the Federal Parliament will cover our entire national political spectrum, reflecting the mosaic of our social and gender diversity. The model of political representation of women that we have adopted could well provide a pattern for other countries.

Nepal is a party to seven of the eight core ILO Conventions, and its Constitution has integrated the fundamental principles of the right to employment, labour and social security as well as the rights to form and join trade unions and engage in collective bargaining.

The National Employment Policy endorsed by the Government in 2015 has mainstreamed gender and social inclusion policy. The Government has introduced gender budgeting and has guaranteed financial resources for programmes aimed at promoting gender equality. The President's "Women's Upliftment Programmes" are being implemented in several districts, which demonstrates that this agenda has received the highest political commitment and priority.

Our progress towards gender equality in the labour market is testified to by some recent statistics. Nepal has the highest female labour force participation rate in the South Asia region and ranks 17th globally in this regard. Twenty-two years ago, the participation of women in the labour force was close to 66 per cent, and this had increased to more than 80 per cent by 2015.

We have put in place the policies and legal framework needed to make the presence of women at work more decent, safe, gender-friendly and equitable. We have also gradually amended and reformed the existing laws and legal structure.

A further illustration of women's empowerment was the experimental provision aimed at increasing the ownership of land by women. At a time when only 8 per cent of women were landowners, the cabinet I belonged to adopted a policy of waiving the registration fee whenever land ownership was transferred to a woman. In a matter of a year, land ownership by women increased to 26 per cent.

Nepal's achievements in the framework of the gender-related millennium development goals have given us hope for a better future. Good progress has been recorded in all dimensions – literacy, school enrolment ratio, maternal health, maternal mortality rate, women's empowerment and political participation. I am happy to state that Nepal is ranked first for girls' enrolment in secondary education in comparative global terms.

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Our effort to address women's empowerment issues in a more holistic manner has created a dynamic space for women's participation in economic activities. We are seeing a discernible rise in entrepreneurship under the initiative and leadership of women. The adoption of gender-friendly policies and practical actions has resulted in enhanced women's participation in the economic structure both as entrepreneurs and as workers.

Despite several areas of progress, we have more to do if we wish to make the economic structure and labour market equitable for women. Challenges exist on multiple fronts. Unpaid household work by women is still not counted as part of the economy. The skills training and quality education that can create added value in the market have yet to be spread across the country and social structure. This must be transformed by addressing structural factors and creating more enabling opportunities specific to women.

The empowerment of women is more than a moral obligation. It is a key driver in sustainable development and socio-economic transformation. We need to transform gender stereotypes in society as well as the workplace, and to address structural inequality. Mere laws cannot address all the social evils and bad practices. A behavioural change is needed, implemented in an integrated manner through education and awareness.

The revolution in information technology has made it possible for a large number of women to access the world labour market. To utilize the internet as a tool of empowerment, we must strengthen our digital connectivity and ensure universal access.

Landlocked and least developed countries, among them Nepal, face specific constraints and concerns. The international community must play a constructive role to integrate the women of these countries into production value chains.

Before I conclude, I would like to emphasize women's powers of creation, nurturing and development. These are the foundation of creativity, culture and solidarity. To enhance the status of women – socially, economically and politically – we need to intensify our efforts within households, within the nation, and beyond.

I call upon all individuals in the world, women and men alike, to redouble their efforts to achieve equality in their households, in society, in the workplace, in national life, and in the world at large.

In closing, I wish to reiterate my thankfulness to the ILO for the thoughtful decision to hold this Summit on the important agenda of women at work, and for inviting three women Heads of State, including myself, to address it. I am confident that the outcome of the Summit will help promote the cause of women at work all over the world.

**The President**  
*(Original Spanish)*

On my own behalf and that of the 106th Session of the Conference, I would like to extend my sincere thanks to all three Presidents for travelling to this beautiful city of Geneva in order to attend the Conference. The fact that three Heads of State have agreed to travel so far in order to attend the annual general assembly of our Organization is a tribute to, and a great honour for, the ILO. I am certain that their remarks will remain engraved on the hearts and minds of all of us here today. These three distinguished ladies – who have reached the pinnacle of political life in their respective countries – have sounded a clarion call in this Assembly Hall this afternoon: equality in the world of work is indeed an achievable goal.

*(The special sitting rose at 4:35 p.m.)*