

PERMANENT MISSION
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STATEMENT BY

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on the occasion of the sixty-sixth session of the General Assembly

Third Committee
agenda item "Advancement of Women"

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President, Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen...

Butterfly effect

Are you familiar with the butterfly effect? Basically, it explains how something small can change it all. According to the laws of chaos, dynamics, a butterfly flapping its wings can start a hurricane. But then again, it could also prevent it. Being an eternal optimist, I like to focus on the latter. How can something small change it all for the better?

Last summer, a friend of mine forwarded me an e-mail: "Will you be our woman in New York?" read the subject line. I turned out to be a job announcement from the Netherlands' Women's Council, who were looking for the next UN Assembly. It had always been my dream to address the General Assembly of the United Nations. so I wrote back in an interview and here I am.

Women's voices

Over the past months, I have met with friends and women. Elderly women, girls, doctors, politicians, lawyers, housewives, tailoress, migrant women, rural women, business women, name it.

I asked all of these women two simple questions:

-what do you think is the biggest issue for women these days?

And, most importantly:

-what could be a solution to solve that issue?

They mentioned a myriad of issues, including equality, women in positions of power, child care, financial literacy, sexual and reproductive health and rights, LGBTT rights, access to education and life long learning, instability, diversity, wage parity. Some women were worried about the lack of equality among women, others about the increasing sexualisation of society. Some talked about lack of rolemodels in politics, business and media, others about the need for gender specific statistical data. One thing they all agreed on: it's still a man's world. "Women are part of society" as one of them put it.

Women's participation

And they're right. Women perform 66 percent of the world's work, produce 50 percent of the food but earn 10 percent of the income and own 1 percent of the property. In other words: there's still a lot to be done! Take my country, the Netherlands. Two years ago, we ranked 9th in the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap report, but now, we rank 17, right after Mexico. Our current administration has 3 female ministers, a mere 11% of our business are female, and only 8.1% of all corporate boardroom seats are held by women.

Quite a shame, really. Cause there is a direct link between increased female participation and economic growth: it is estimated that if women's paid employment rates were raised to the same level as men's, America's GDP would be 9 percent higher, the euro zone's would be 13 percent higher, and Japan's would be 16 percent.

Diversity works

It's a fact: diverse works classes with an equal amount of male and female students achieve better results. Companies with women on their boards and in senior management perform better. Not surprising, in a world where women account for 85% of all consumer purchases. Diversity and inclusion are the key to a win-win situation: more equal participation and success. Who wouldn't sign up for that? Take football for example. Would there be any coach that would keep talented, motivated, skilled players on the bench, while having the even less-qualified strikers on the field? I don't think so. But like our famous farmer, football player, John Gielgud once said: you only see it when you get it.

New challenges, new opportunities

We are at a crossroads in history. The economy is causing a lot of tension, the economy is calling for change. Our current state of affairs is changing; much faster than offers a unique opportunity to look for new solutions. Solutions in which everyone, no matter their race, gender, class or beliefs, can fully realize and put their talents to the best of their potential! None on the bench!

The wind of change is blowing through North Africa and the Middle East. Shows us change can start small and have big consequences, especially once it's accelerated by social media, like Twitter. It has a domino effect. So what is happening? Flyer, fly away, flapping its wings, winging own? Who's doing the revolution? Who's flying for a revolution; a drastic change in our attitudes, policies and actions to improve the position of women worldwide.

Shared agenda

The she-revolution starts with a shared agenda, endorsed by governments, business, civil society and women's networks. An agenda for change co-created and carried out by multiple stakeholders, male and female, local, national and global level. From public to private, formal to informal, big to small. An alternative sustainable road towards inclusive corporate leadership. Involving women's participation, women's organisations play an important role in the translation and implementation of this shared agenda. Fighting interests, snatching the agenda and making sure women's voices are heard, every day around the world.

Role of governments

According to the UN Women, governments are still key contributors to the advancement of women. They could and should catalyse the she-revolution by adopting a broad diversity agenda, which includes policy measures such as a legal framework to make sure women get equal pay and enjoy equal rights both in the workplace, in the political realm and in their private lives. Through most decision makers' firms (surprisingly mostly men) don't agree, quota prove to be a successful tool in increasing the representation of women in politics as well as the corporate world.

Our allies

But governments can not and should not operate alone. The she-revolution needs more allies. Public-private partnerships are needed to create sustainable solutions for women, such as diversity procurement, equality and empowerment, work-life balance, mobility, child care, safe working environment and opportunities for training and education. The World Economic Forum, supported by the UN Global Compact and UN Women, provide an excellent set of tools for companies to become more inclusive.

The power of networks

There are many practical solutions to improve the position of professional women worldwide, such as a diverse networking net, even between two women, whenever there's a board room seat available. Cannot find suitable candidates? Ask a woman already in a position of power to share her network. Promote women in your network, involve women-owned businesses in your network, invite them to your events, encourage them to take active steps to increase women's participation.

The best ally of change

The most importantly, we need to remember the butterfly effect that shows us change can start with something small. It could be as simple as letting a woman a helping hand. Vote for a woman, ask women to speak at your next event, donate your time, money, expertise to a women's organisation, promote women where ever they are visible. Maybe you are that butterfly, helping just like my friend who forwarded me the job announcement that eventually brought me here.

We've come a long way since the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women was adopted in 1979 in Mexico City. My grandmother never had a chance to finish school. My mother did, and inspired me to do me too. But still there will still be many women who do not have that opportunity, who don't have equal access nor equal opportunities. Their voices deserve to be heard!

So what's left for you to do is when you read this from your inbox, take a few moments to think what YOU can do to be that butterfly flapping its wings for women. I think about it, tweet about it, blog about it, of all: just do it... "Never doubt that a small group of committed citizens can change the world" said Margaret Mead. I say: Viva la sra. de la toro!

Kirsten van den Hul, Women's Rights Advisor of the Netherlands

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Was ist die soziale Mischung? Sie ist die Mischung von verschiedenen sozialen Gruppen, die unterschiedliche soziale und kulturelle Hintergründe haben.