



#### "We need diversity... ...and that therefore we need women

Kathleen Ferrier

Dear Bright HK friends,

"A women's world, the reachable Utopia?" On this very special day, I want to share with you some thoughts, personal thoughts, that came into my mind reflecting on this provocative title.

Thoughts that emerge, when I look back at my life and ask myself, what I have learned so far, from the experiences in different places where I have lived, Suriname, the Netherlands, Chile, Brazil, different circumstances in which I have worked, favelas in at it, honestly, I cannot believe Brazil, y poblaciones in Chile,

with migrant communities in turmoil, first the Euro crisis, and Europe and experiences as a Member of Parliament in the Netherlands, for instance as the special representative on migration for the OSCE (Organization for Security and Cooperation en Europe...), the parliamentary assembly, meeting with Angela Merkel and Hillary Clinton, discussing with them their ideas on 'a women' s world' and how they see the role of leaders in our world female today.

Our world today... if I look what I see... looking at Europe, in

now, far worse, the so called refugee crisis, that makes clear the overall impotence of Europa and the lack of leadership. For me that is symbolized in Donald Tusk impotently sending out a EU SOS to economical refugees "don' t come this way, stay away from us..."

I see a Europe that is deeply divided because it seems to have lost what from the very first beginning, united it most: shared values that stand for respect and human dignity- a EU that now is on the brink of falling apart, if Brexit happens.

# "Equality between men and women remains elusive in every country."

The Americas: South America, seems to have lost its hope and brilliance and in spite of strong female leaders, remains also divided as it is severely hit, by difficult economical times and political crises and above that also a terrible disease.

And North America... also deeply divided, with rising tensions, ethnical, political and social. And in this year when the North Americans are going to elect the most powerful person of the world, there is panic! Panic in the Republican Party where they seem to be sending in the clowns, while the Democrats hope to deliver the first female president of the USA, which of course is a good thing, but... she is a Clinton, so, some might say: nothing new! I come back to that later...

The Middle East, Syria, ISIS, I do not have to add anything about that drama. ...

Here in Asia, also growing tensions and divisions, refugee crises, the Rohingya. Here we see from nearby the rise of China but also the tensions it brings along, first and foremost in the South China Sea.

When I look at our world today I basically see a world where structures are falling apart, values are imploding and where political and other elites no longer seem to be capable of giving an answer to today's challenges.

I see a world in which the old way, the way we used to deal with challenges, does not work any longer.

The answers we give do not fit to today's questions.

For me it is clear: we need new structures, new visions, new ways of communicating, using new technologies and we need new leadership. We need it if we want to stay true to basic values that we as world community have formulated as our guiding principles and laid down in, for instance the universal declaration of Human Rights, precisely for times like this, when change is needed.

Today we celebrate IWD, a day that aims at achieving equality between men and women, a day in which we celebrate all that is achieved by women in so many different places and under different circumstances.

So let us have a look at where we stand as women.

First of all, talking about IWD, there is a lot of good news to celebrate today. Around the world, women are mobilizing for change and taking leadership positions in politics, business, their communities etc. However, equality between men and women remains elusive in every country. Only one in five parliamentarians globally is a women. At peace talks convened in the past decade, fewer than 10 percent of negotiators were women. Women's membership on corporate boards stands at just 4 percent. In some parts of the world, still today, a women's right to vote is not a given right, even where it is granted by the constitution.

And with that, it is my conviction, we lose a lot of potential, intellectual and economic potential. Every place, whether it is a board, a political party or a business, where there is diversity, has proved to be a better place. More financial gain, better policies . Diverse places are better places and then I mean diversity with respect to gender, ethnicity, age, ability.

If we know this, and we do, because it has been investigated and proved so often, why, then, is it so difficult to get more diversity?

I think there are basically two reasons: it is still far too often 'the old boys network': people tend not to engage people who are not like themselves. This happens most of the time even unconsciously. "We need the best", it is said, "man, woman, black, white or yellow, gay or straight, it doesn't matter, as long it it is the best person". But unfortunately we keep thinking that the best person is like ourselves.

Secondly we have to have women in place, well prepared women.

So what is a well prepared woman? 1. Well educated of course. That is where it starts. I was invited by Cherie Blair to teach seminars at the Asian University for Women in Chittagong, Bangladesh, a few weeks ago. That is a most amazing place where highly motivated, talented young women from the poorest parts of 16 different Asian countries come together and are educated and trained to become the leaders of their countries and their continent.



## We urgently need new views

It starts with education, but that is not enough. What our world needs today are leaders who think differently, who act differently and and who have the courage and the power to be different.

Our world has already seen many female leaders, in the past, the Amazones, sufragettes, of course the iron lady, Margaret Thatcher, and notably here in Asia, many female leaders. Megawati Putri, PM of the largest Muslim country in the world but also Indira Gandhi, the remarkable Benazir Bhutto, Sheikh Hasina, the actual PM of Bangladesh. President Park of South Korea, and now all eyes are on Aung San Suu Kyi in Myanmar and the newly elected president of Taiwan. And then of course there are Michelle Bachelet, Dilma Roussef, and we have had Cristina de KIrchner, and we might get Hillary Clinton, the first women to be the most powerful person in the world.....

What will that mean? Will the world become a better place because the president of the US is a woman?

Not automatically, being a women is not enough, she will have to proof that she is really fearless, that she dares to do the job as a women, with new visions and able to do things differently, because that it what we need today.

She can learn a lot from Barack Obama.

Back in 2008, many asked if the world would become a better place now that a black man had made it to the White House.

Seeing racial tensions growing in his country over the last years, one might doubt it.

But I think that his presidency has made a difference. Barack Obama dared to show the world where he comes from. One specific moment I consider very



"We need women and girls for formulating the answers to today's questions"

powerful in that respect. After the horrible Charleston Church massacre in June last year, he went to that church and there he started to sing Amazing Grace.

At that moment he was the most powerful man in the world, fearlessly showing who he is, where he comes from and what he stands for. That made him recognizable, "one of us" for the black population in the US, and beyond, but it also made him "one of us", for a larger group, because of his authenticity.

This is exactly what we need: people who dare to be different, but who we can also trust, because we recognize their authenticity. Angela Merkel, whether you agree with her or not, is showing the same fearlessness: 'this is what I stand for. It may cause problems in my party, in my country, in my continent, but this is me. '

So there is an enormous responsibility on Hillary Clinton if she will become the first female POTUS. She will have to proof that she is fearless enough to do the job as a women, do it differently.

5 Fearlessness and being different that is what we need ..... and isn't that

exactly what makes Donald Trump an interesting candidate for so many people? (But then there is this other aspect, well preparedness knowing what you are talking about, and there he is lacking.)

However, in my life I have seen that women are better at daring to be different and fearless. As a member of iERG, UN related organization for accountability and information on women's, adolescent's and children's health, I have seen that when women get a chance to take the lead, things really change for the better, because, since they are responsible for their children, they are pragmatic.

It is what I saw in Christine Lagarde when she said that, in order to get the proposed reforms of the IMF through US congress, she was ready to belly dance....' I forget my pride and status, I do what is necessary to solve the problem.'

A women's world, is that the reachable utopia, we ask ourselves today. The question before the reachability should perhaps be if it is an Utopia, if it is desirable and if, indeed, a women's world would be a better p'

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### "Because is 2015..." The callenge of our times

I do not know.

But what I do know, is that we urgently need new views and structures and that therefore we need diversity, we need women.

As we celebrate IWD today, 2016, equality between men and women is not enough.

We need women and girls for formulating the answers to today's questions.

Justin Trudeau made it so clear at the presentation of his government last year. When he was asked why he had such a diverse group of people and why he had made such a point of having at least as many women as men in his government he simply said 4 words: "Because it is 2015".

A women's world the desirable utopia? The reachable Utopia? I do not know, but what I do know is that we have no option but to recognize that we need diversity and that therefore we need women.

And that we still have a long way to go.





# **PARTICIPANTS**

Name	Title & Organization
1. Rachel Cartland	Administrative Officer in Hong Kong Government 1972 – 2006 (34 years). She was the second women working for the Government; Director Hong Kong Foresight Centre 2008 – 2010; Owner Cartland Consulting Ltd.
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