

Celebrating the 100th Anniversary of International Women's Day
Creating the Future – Women in Society, Economy & Government

Speech for IWD Celebration Dinner

Mrs Laura Hwang

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Our Guest-of-Honour, and Patron of SCWO, Mrs S. R. Nathan, Minister Mrs Lim Hwee Hua, Minister of State , Mrs Yu-Foo Yee Shoon, High Commissioners, Ambassadors, Parliamentarians, distinguished guests, esteemed colleagues from SCWO's member organisations, associates and friends, - a warm welcome.

It is indeed an honour and a pleasure to deliver the Opening Address tonight, as we celebrate the Global Centenary of International Women's Day.

The year was 1910; the place, Copenhagen. A group of women in pursuit of equal employment opportunities came together at an International Conference of Working Women and proposed the idea of marking the global calendar with a day dedicated to women. The inaugural International Women's Day was celebrated for the first time the following year, in 1911, in Austria, Denmark, Germany and Switzerland.

Along with every person present here tonight, I stand before you today as a woman who can vote, who can make her own decisions, who can support herself and realise her own hopes and aspirations. We are able to be all that we are because other women, in the past century, looked beyond what

was dictated by society at the time. We are who we are because those women stood up and spoke effectively enough for their voices to resonate throughout the world.

Today we are here to celebrate the milestones that have been achieved over the past century. What giant steps have been made in our journey. Women in Singapore are active in all spheres of life, social, economic and political. Many of you present here today have proven through your accomplishments that there is no limit to what women can do. You are the role models for others, for the empowerment of more leaders, and champions. Our success as a nation, as, indeed, the world we all live in, is how the world's greatest untapped resource is developed.

In April 2006, The Economist banner read ***“Forget China, India and the Internet: Economic growth is driven by women.”***

This bold statement well describes the economic power of women in the world economy. The article goes on to say that in the developed countries research shows that the increase in female employment has been the main driving force to GDP growth on a global scale, more so than either “new technology or new giants”

Our progress depends on the utilization of the best talent, ideas and innovation. Countries and companies have the skills and talent of their female human resource pool as an important asset. As leaders, managers, employees and employers, women are vital to global economic development.

Interestingly, there is also research that suggests a relationship between birth rates and attitudes towards gender equality. The birth rate trend is positive and the economic development higher, in countries where gender equality in the workplace is more prevalent- such as in the Nordic countries. This trend is accompanied by comprehensive work-family policies, indicating that policy development is key.

(Source:

http://www.oecdobserver.org/news/fullstory.php/aid/1664/Does_gender_equality_spur_growth_.html)

It is with this in mind that we re-launch the **Women's Register** - a two-pronged initiative: the first aims at providing an on-line platform for younger women to be connected to, and supported by, their more experienced counterparts in the community through a composite on-line mentoring programme. The second, our **BoardAgender** initiative, is targeted at promoting the importance of diversity at Board room levels, so that the economic and social benefits of having gender diversity at top levels of management, on public and private boards, are realised. I would like to record our gratitude to our Women's Register Advisor, Minister of State for MCYS, Mrs Yu-Foo Yee Shoon for her unflinching encouragement and support, from the very inception of this initiative.

For SCWO, we also count among our achievements, the adoption of a number of our recommendations regarding better enforcement of maintenance orders. Amendments to the Women's Charter, passed by Parliament last month we hope will pave the way to better prospects for ex-spouses, and their children, to re-build their lives

The pages of the future are still blank and it is up to us to fill them with pages of achievements to equal those of the last 100 years!

Please join me now, in a toast to celebrate “The Next 100 and Beyond”!

[toast]

May I take an extra minute to introduce the archival video that SCWO has commissioned. “**We are 100**” chronicles the last 100 years, to record the amazing progress made by women in Singapore over the past century. You will hear the voices of our members, their children and grand children, across SCWO’s 51 member organisations as they pay tribute to the past and look to the future. I am certain that you will find it to be both empowering and inspiring.

I wish you all a wonderful and enjoyable evening!