

IWD Dinner Message 2016

Speech of Malathi Das, President, SCWO, at the SCWO International Women's Day Dinner on 18 March 2016, Shangri-la Hotel

Our Guest of Honour, Patron of SCWO, Mrs Mary Tan, Parliamentarians, your Excellencies, Ambassadors and High Commissioners, Ms Julia Ruskin of Citibank, Singapore Women's Hall of Fame past and present honourees, our generous sponsors and supporters, members of SCWO, friends.

I hope you enjoyed the Taiko drums performance that opened this evening as much as I did.

It has been said that if a woman does not keep pace with her male companions, it does not mean she is not keeping up, it is only because she hears a different drummer.

When we picked our theme for International Women's Day this year "Marching to our Own Beat", the United Nations theme for International Women's Day "Planet 50-50 in 2030, Step it Up for Gender Equality" had not been declared. Yet, both these themes share a common thread of stepping up and stepping out. We chose our theme to acknowledge March as the de facto International Women's month, but also in recognition of the fact that women have always had to step to a different music which we hear, however measured or far away.

In Singapore, we are fortunate in comparison to many of our sisters in the rest of the world, to have the luxury of options: in our life choices and partners, in our careers and family life, in our decisions, in our independence. So, it is my hope that women in Singapore will not have to wait another 14 years to achieve gender fairness.

This year, we once again honour a new group of women as inductees into the Singapore Women's Hall of Fame and I thank Citibank for its support in this project for a 3rd year running. I am especially pleased that we count amongst our honourees a group of women representing diverse cultures, interests and achievements including our first women Supreme Court judges who were appointed shortly after I entered the profession and who continue to serve as an inspiration to women lawyers like myself by their rightfully deserved place at the apex of a still fairly male-dominated profession. Our other honourees include our first woman career diplomat, 2 renowned food ambassadors, 6 trailblazing sportswomen and athletes, an orthopaedic surgeon and medical aid worker, a renowned community leader and fund-raiser, and our pioneer champion of women's rights, who was also first President of the Singapore Council of Women. I thank the Selection Panel headed by Professor Tommy Koh for another year's hard work at the difficult process of selecting the final cut.

As the national co-ordinating council of women's organisations in Singapore, we are proud this year, to have achieved the 60 mark with our total number of member organisations. Where women's organisations had previously emerged organically as advancing certain interests, it is heartening to note they continue to serve a pivotal role in pushing forward the Planet 50-50 agenda whether it is through advocacy groups, business and entrepreneur groups, community and service groups, faith-based groups or professional and sports groups. Maintaining the momentum is an imperative that SCWO hopes to help sustain. We are grateful for your support and recognition.

We are also grateful to our partners in government, the corporate sector as well as the media and the community. This respectful cooperation helps us to keep in step with developments on various fronts and provide a cohesive force that advances our collective purposes and our goals.

We are especially pleased to have a constant stream of volunteers including men and student interns who come through our doors, and who help keep many of our programmes running with a lean permanent staff strength. Kudos must also go to our staff (purely coincidentally all-women!) who have an unsurpassed can-do spirit and have once again pulled off another successful IWD event without the help of any professional event planners.

As I reach the end of my term as SCWO President, I would like to thank my family, friends, colleagues, volunteers and supporters, my women's group the Zonta Club of Singapore and the SCWO Secretariat all who have helped and supported me in my role. (Or should I say, who have never said 'No' to me to my face!). I particularly wish to thank Mrs Laura Hwang and Mrs Wee Wan Joo, past Presidents of SCWO, my Vice-Presidents and Board Members and General Manager, Selina Gan for their friendship, guidance and support.

I wish to pay tribute to all of you (too many to name all individually) and all women present with this poem written by Polynesian poet, Maryanne Pale for her mother, as embodying the qualities of women I admire.

A Woman of Strength

**She rejoices in God with a grateful heart and a joyful spirit
She possesses the ability to genuinely say to another woman:
"I admire your qualities and attributes"
She is blessed with the gift of giving and a willingness to help others
She consoles others even though she too is hurting
She learns from her mistakes and acknowledges that she too is not perfect
She speaks with words of wisdom and not malice
From the mouths of destruction, her smile remains unshaken
She lifts her head and continues to walk in the midst of turmoil
She inspires other women to be the best they can be
With her life experiences, she touches the lives of a multitude
She remains determined to be the best person SHE can be
She smiles every time she says "I LOVE YOU"
She has the courage to take the fall for another
She is not too proud to say "I need you"
When her tears fall, she prays faithfully
When others turn their back on her, she still continues to pray faithfully
She is humble enough to admit when she is wrong
Through betrayal and talk, she remains secure in knowing who she is**

**She is loving enough to say “I forgive you”
She is at peace with herself without having the need to prove herself to anyone
She values her self-worth and reminds other women of theirs
She is not pretentious but instead she presents herself just as she is...
“A WOMAN OF STRENGTH!”**

Ladies (and Gentlemen), Happy International Women’s Month 2016! I wish you a pleasant evening.