

Address by H.E. Ambassador Geraldine Byrne Nason to the Opening Session Commission on the Status of Women

Speech

11 March 2019

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H.E. Ambassador Geraldine Byrne Nason,

Chair of the Commission on the Status of Women

at the Opening of the Sixty-Third Session of the Commission

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United Nations General Assembly Hall

Heads of State or Government,

Mr Secretary General,

Madam President of the Economic and Social Council,

Madam President of the General Assembly,

Madam President of the Security Council,

Ministers, Excellencies,

Dear friends and sisters –

The 11-year-old daughter of one of my colleagues recently told her that she wanted to be President. Not President of Ireland, but President of the World.

Now there's a job that's hasn't yet been invented.

But who's to say it won't exist in 2063, for example?

Imagine if that first President of the world is a woman who comes to power by leading with integrity, with empathy, fairness. Imagine a world led by that woman. I am ready to imagine that future.

If not, I don't know why I am up here today.

The first 63 years of the Commission on the Status of Women have been momentous.

In 1947 at the aptly named Lake Success the first Commission decided "*to raise the status of women, ...to equality with men in all fields of human enterprise,*"

In 1995 in Beijing we agreed that women's rights are human rights.

That Beijing moment held such giddy hope. And yet we have been disappointed.

Seamus Heaney the Irish Nobel laureate spoke of moments when hope and history rhyme. Beijing felt like that. We thought that it was the high water mark, that there would be no going back on that hope. As we prepare for the 25th anniversary of the Beijing Platform and the 10th anniversary of UN Women, we need to seriously pick up our pace.

Today less than 7% of HoSGs are women, and only one in four parliamentarians globally is a woman. In this UN of 193 MS, only 46 governments decided that a woman should be their Permanent Representative. Right now, there are 130 million girls out of school. It is estimated that it will take 217 years to reach parity between men and women in pay and employment opportunities. Numbers matter.

So what went wrong??

The truth is, that collectively we haven't yet succeeded in making sure that women are, wherever decisions are being made.

We haven't recognized that you can't just "add women and stir".

Achieving gender balance, empowering women and girls takes time - *yes*- but above all it takes conviction and political courage.

Why? Because gender empowerment is about one group of people handing over power, or at least agreeing to share power, with another group. And we all know how hard that is.

The job of empowering women and girls is not for wimps. What we are trying to achieve is that men have their rights and nothing more, and that women have their rights and nothing less. Sounds like an

impossible task if we look over the last 25 years since our Beijing giddiness and hope, maybe, but as Nelson Mandela liked to say, it's always impossible until it gets done.

That is what the theme of this year's CSW is all about. Getting the job done.

We are tasked to achieve a new global understanding of how social protection, access to public services and sustainable infrastructure can help to empower women and girls and achieve gender equality.

These are vital bread and butter, day to day real issues that matter to women, *everywhere, every day*.

Our deliberations will be about maternity protections, pensions, safe roads, the public transport that takes women where they want to go, the schools that equip girls with the skills they need to succeed in the workplace, women's access to vital healthcare, and the fair distribution of unpaid care and domestic work between men and women.

Frankly, it's hard to imagine an agenda that strikes closer to the heart of what makes the difference to that young girl staying in school after puberty because a safe toilet has been added to school buildings, or between a woman applying for that job or promotion, if only the childcare can be sorted.

Thousands of women drop out of careers because maternity protections don't support becoming a mother and staying in the work force.

Those issues are all enablers or barriers, whichever way you choose to look at them. Getting those policies right can liberate and empower millions of women and girls. Social security can act as a safety net and as a trampoline. We all need each of those at some stage on our life course. Women more than men.

By considering this theme for the first time ever, this year at CSW we have an opportunity to break new ground and a real chance to agree new normative standards. We are the only international body that can do this.

But social protection and access to public services are not an end in themselves. They are also about freeing women up to participate and lead – in politics, in peace agreements, in the workplace -freeing women up to fulfil their own potential.

We are impatient to get this right, and now. When men are oppressed we tend to speak of tragedy, of abrogation of rights. But when women are oppressed, we use terms like tradition or cultural norms.

Let's call a spade a spade.

I spent time with the CSW Youth Forum on Saturday. Young people from over 90 countries. They know how to call a spade a spade. And are inspirational. They developed their own conclusions they call CSW Common Minimum Standards. Please read them - please heed them. Yesterday I met with NGO CSW Forum. They are equally impatient with all of us across all of these issues. To quote them "We won't be quiet".

Which brings me back to the business of this house.

At a time when many voices question the value of multilateralism, my view is that we urgently need more women at the top table of global politics, of multilateralism. Thank you Secretary General for making great strides in-house in the UN. Now we all need to act.

Once again, it's not enough just to add women and stir.

We know that women suffer most when multilateralism fails. War, displacement, climate change, hunger: these are the devastating consequences of a failure of multilateralism.

But what if we turn that equation on its head. Look to the distinctive solutions and approaches that women offer to the challenges facing multilateralism.

We have hard evidence to show that peace processes are more robust and last longer when women are at the negotiating table.

I can't think of a job that requires more resilience than being a woman, being a wife or being a mother- and some of us do all three -all the time! And then have day jobs too!

Resilience is in women's DNA, and the world needs that female resilience more than ever.

Women across the world are leading the way in efforts to build resilience and adapt to the impacts of climate change. Women across the globe pick up the pieces when families are forcibly displaced or struggle to recover from conflict.

That Woman World President begins to look more and more like a real job, doesn't it?

What distinguishes multilateralism from day to day politics is that it is cooperative, it is collaborative.

It is about listening, and *really understanding*, the other's point of view.

It is the *patient work of seeking solutions*, to seemingly intractable problems.

Simply put,

It sounds like a woman's job to me.

I ask you all to work together for the success of CSW 63.

Let's take our unique opportunity to improve the lives of women and girls, so that when that Woman President of the World comes into office, she will have legions of educated women and girls freed up from unpaid domestic work, from part time jobs and from childcare responsibilities, freed up and ready to support her!

We in this room are the privileged ones – let's not squander that privilege in re hashing old rivalries or ideological arguments, most of which women didn't develop in the first place. Let's look ahead with great hope to building together as we mark 25 years since Beijing.

In conclusion, I leave you with a line from a poem by the Irish poet, Eavan Boland, to remind us all why we are here:

"Our future will become the past of other women".

Thank you.