
*Keynote Speech by H.E. Marie-Louise Coleiro Preca, President of Malta, at the
“Closing Global Gender Gaps” Plenary Session of the Concordia Annual
Summit, 25 September 2018*

Distinguished guests,
Dear friends.

It is my pleasure to address the Plenary Session of the Concordia Annual Summit, on the margins of the United Nations’ General Assembly.

Let me begin by sharing with you some thoughts about the Girl2Leader Campaign, which was established, under my patronage, by the Women Political Leaders Forum.

The Girl2Leader campaign was launched in Brussels last year, on the 11th October, as part of our celebrations for the International Day of the Girl.

Since then, we have focused our attention on implementing practical strategies, to overcome the damaging forms of gender stereotyping that still, I am sorry to say, are preventing too many girls and young women from achieving their full potential.

We are also working together, to create an environment which encourages and supports young women to consider the possibility of a career in politics, and in other areas of leadership.

There are over 1.1 billion girls who form part of the global population. These girls are living through a particular period in the history of our world, which is seeing massive transformations in the social, economic, and political sectors of our respective countries.

Ensuring that they are active participants, to effectively engage within these sectors, can only be achieved by removing the obstacles that are preventing us, from achieving full gender equality.

There is currently no country in the world where men and women are truly treated equally. Significant gender inequality persists, especially in the workforce and in the political sector, of all our countries.

In fact, at the current rate of progress, according to indicators from the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Pay Gap Report, it will take an estimated 217 years to achieve full gender equality.

We cannot afford to wait such a long time, to fulfil the universal human rights and fundamental freedoms of our girls and women.

We cannot be complacent, in the face of indicators from the Inter-Parliamentary Union, which states that only 24% of parliamentary seats are held by women.

Moreover, according to data for 2018, only 20 women are currently holding the office of Head of State or Head of Government. This represents a mere 6.3% of the total number of international leaders.

As one of the women to hold such a position, I know, first hand, how difficult it can be to overcome the barriers that are created by patriarchal oppressions, and a system that is not created, or ready, to meet the needs and aspirations of women.

This is particularly worrying, because we all know that the social and economic empowerment of women does not end with women themselves.

The empowerment of women leads to the enrichment of all of our families, our communities, and our societies as a whole.

Furthermore, data from the World Economic Forum clearly shows that the key to closing the gender gap is to include the participation of more women in positions of leadership.

According to the World Economic Forum, diversity in leadership positions is a critical factor in closing the economic opportunity gap.

For this reason, the empowerment of our girls and young women, through initiatives like the Girl2Leader Campaign, is essential.

In this context, I believe that our activities must be led by the mandate of the United Nations' 2030 Agenda, and its Sustainable Development Goals, which have been endorsed by all of our countries.

Agenda 2030 is a roadmap that brings with it a system of values, which promote respect for human dignity, the pursuit of equity, effective access to democratic participation, and equitable opportunities for inclusive prosperity.

Sustainable Development Goal Number 5 specifically targets the need for gender equality, and for the empowerment of women and girls, as part of our united journey towards equality, equity, and justice for all.

Our girls and young women are essential stakeholders, in our journey towards positive change. We must set our girls on a path in which they receive proactive opportunities to thrive, and to reach their full potential.

This is the core message of the Girl2Leader Campaign, to enhance the participation, to promote the visibility, and to safeguard the inclusion of our girls and young women, across all levels of activity within society.

For this reason, we must continue to promote active processes of participation which recognise girls and young women as powerful social agents, in their own right.

This is also the aim behind several important initiatives, which I have started during my Presidency.

Through my Foundation, that is, the President's Foundation for the Wellbeing of Society, we have launched the first national platform for all the women-led organisations in the Maltese Islands.

This platform, called emPOWER, features the participation of a group that is led by young women with an interest in political life, and it has created important opportunities for networking and mentorship.

The President's Trust, also within my Presidency, is providing much-needed opportunities for young women to be empowered through access to education and employment. In particular, we are focused on supporting young women who are living in precarity, or facing added vulnerabilities.

This is why I believe that it is all of our responsibility, to raise our daughters to think of themselves as leaders and innovative thinkers, with a unique contribution to make in the world.

Over the summer months, as part of the Girl2Leader Campaign, a young woman joined my Office. I was impressed by her dedication to learn and by her readiness to work. She shadowed me in my official duties, and worked, as a valued team player, alongside the various entities of the Presidency.

This is the commitment, to lead by example and to share our strengths, that we need to nurture in our girls and young women.

This is what it means, to be a woman who leads.

It is this quality of relationship-building, in service to the holistic wellbeing of our societies, is one of the greatest contributions we can make, as women, on behalf of our girls and young women.

As the President of an island-nation, in the heart of the Euro-Mediterranean Region, I believe that the powerful message of the Girl2Leader Campaign should be shared with as many people as possible.

We must take this platform, and use it to promote active strategies for gender equality, especially in regions of the world where it is needed the most.

Our countries, our regions, and our whole world, need to see more inspiring examples of female leadership, and a commitment, by our authorities, to achieve inclusive participation.

Let me quote the words of one such inspiring female leader, Zainab Salbi.

Salbi is an Iraqi activist, and the founder of Women for Women International, a humanitarian organisation that provides support to female survivors of war and violent conflict.

Salbi says that, "Like life, peace begins with women. We are the first to forge lines of alliance, dialogue, and collaboration, across the challenges that divide us."

The world needs such alliances, dialogue, and collaboration, which is only possible through the precious participation of all our women and girls, alongside our men and boys.

In this way, we shall be taking an effective measures to achieve long-lasting peace and inclusive prosperity for our world.

In this way, we shall be creating the kind of future that we will be proud to hand down to our future generations.

Thank you for your attention, and I look forward to your support, to keep evolving the objectives of the Girl2Leader Campaign, and to make a real difference in the lives of all of our girls and young women.