

Welcome Remarks
Women4Mediterranean Conference
10th October 2018

Your Excellency, Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa, President of the Republic of Portugal

Your Excellency, Nasser Kamel, Secretary General, Union for the Mediterranean

Excellencies

Distinguished guests

Dear friends

I am truly honoured to be with such a distinguished group of participants, for this important conference.

I would like to thank my dear friend and colleague His Excellency, the President of the Republic of Portugal, President Marcelo for hosting this conference in his beautiful country.

Let me commend, His Excellency Nasser Kamel, Secretary General of the Union for the Mediterranean, for bringing us together.

My appreciation also goes to the President of the Champalimaud Centre for the Unknown.

Over the years, the Women4Mediterranean Conference has created an enriching and respectful space, to explore, to promote, to share, and to actively pursue the empowerment of women in the Mediterranean Region.

As we celebrate the tenth anniversary since the launch of the Union for the Mediterranean, I believe that there is much to be proud of.

It is with satisfaction that I note that the partnerships that this Union has created and strengthened during this decade, among our 43 countries and beyond, have developed into meaningful friendships.

Moreover, I am also pleased to note that our Union is creating a shared sense of ownership, to address the many challenges and also grasp the opportunities that are present in our region.

One instance is, this conference which is giving visibility to the valuable contribution being made by the girls and women, within our diverse communities and countries of the Mediterranean.

However, I believe that we must admit, that the valuable contribution of girls and women is still too often ignored or minimised, due to the gender inequalities, which still predominate our region.

Women must not only be collaborators.

Women must equally share positions of leadership, to ensure that a positive, sustainable and long-lasting change is effectively achieved in our region.

The inclusion, the participation, and the empowerment of our girls and women cannot be a simple footnote on the Mediterranean agenda.

Gender equality must be one of the primary goals on our agenda.

In order to achieve this goal, I believe our authorities and civil society activists must be encouraged and supported, to overcome the cultural and social barriers that still impede so many women and girls from their full participation within our Mediterranean societies.

Let me draw your attention to the 'Women's Empowerment in the Mediterranean Region Report', commissioned by the European Committee of the Regions, last year.

The report states that differences in opportunities between women and men cannot only be explained by gaps in educational attainment.

Rather, it is the socio-cultural norms regarding women, and their place in the family and their communities, which results in discrimination within the workplace and society.

Addressing social, cultural, and economic barriers for women is an essential component, to successfully implement the resolutions of the Ministerial Conference on Strengthening the Role of Women in Society.

The outcomes of this conference make it clear that our countries must do more, to include women in public life and positions of decision-making; to improve the economic inclusion of women; to effectively combat all forms of gender-based violence; and to eliminate harmful sexist stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination.

All of these goals require a fundamental shift in the way our societies perceive and encourage the contributions of girls and women.

I am convinced that the diversity of our Mediterranean cultures is a strength, but it also means that we must work harder, to agree on specific fundamental values, which we should share in common.

Dear friends,

I believe that these values, are founded, first-and-foremost, on the protection of human dignity, by upholding universal human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Gender equality is a human rights issue.

In the words of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which will be 70 years old this year, “everyone is born free and equal.”

It is high time that we put the Universal Declaration of Human Rights fully into practice.

Moreover, the equality of women is a vital pre-condition, to achieve sustainable development.

Achieving the equality of women is also a commitment, which all of our countries have made, in 2015, when we all adopted the United Nations' Agenda 2030 and its seventeen Sustainable Development Goals.

In particular, SDG Number 5 commits us to do our utmost, to end all forms of discrimination against women and girls everywhere, and to eliminate the many causes of discrimination that are still denying women their rights.

In this context, as laid out in the declaration of the Ministerial Conference, there is an urgent need for our authorities to implement comprehensive gender equality laws, which are in line with the mandate of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Moreover, as stated in the outcomes of the same Ministerial Conference, the countries of the Mediterranean must address, and I quote “the multi-layered structural inequalities” which persist within our societies.

It is these inequalities and injustices which continue to hold us back, and which, if not addressed, will hold back our future generations, preventing them from living in a peaceful and prosperous world, free from inequalities, prejudice and discrimination.

I augur that this conference will continue to build on previous endeavors and be an effective catalyst for action.