



**Speech of Ambassador Angelina Eichhorst,  
Head of the Delegation of the European Union to Lebanon**

**"Diversity and Governance Network around the Mediterranean Sea"**

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*CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY*

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you for allowing me to say a few words on this 15<sup>th</sup> International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women (officially since 1999 but already since 1981 marked as a special day to raise awareness more broadly). It is also the day after the day an influential leader in this region addressed an audience discussing ‘women and justice’ by saying that ‘women are not equal to men’ and that ‘feminists do not understand motherhood and it is the day that I would like to salute you, all men and women, who strive constantly to increase the equality between women and men in the Mediterranean region and to disseminate the culture of gender-equality and equality in general.

I will not repeat the challenges – you are too aware – you had already a full day of discussions yesterday - and I will also not focus on violence per se, even though we should not forget that this year marks the entry into force of the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention), which represents a very important instrument to effectively combat violence against women at national and European levels.

We should also remember that the world will soon mark the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action, and the 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on the contribution of women to peace and security. Some of you may have attended Beijing, I have not physically but did so mentally.... yes, and if there had been twitter at the time...

In those years of the nineties - we did a lot of work within the European Union – and we still do - thankfully - on gender equality for the Mediterranean and globally. I had also a few years before witnessed from very near the fierce discussions at the ICPD in Cairo. After Cairo and Beijing many important summits and meetings were held where time and again real battles would be fought with a strong resolve not to unravel any of the commitments made in Cairo and Beijing, a battle that is fought until this very day, unfortunately.

In 2015 the European Commission will also formulate a new agenda for development for the coming years. Please help us in this effort. Gender equality and women's empowerment, the elimination of all forms of violence against all women and girls, the elimination of all harmful practices are a precondition for poverty eradication and sustainable development. The European Union supports

gender equality as both a stand-alone goal and its mainstreaming in the post-2015 framework for poverty reduction and sustainable development.

And, from today until Human Rights Day on December 10, all EU Delegations around the world will join the call for action of the '16-days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence' international campaign of the UN Secretary General and will raise awareness on the issue – hence the orange colour.

Since we all agree here why diversity matters, why gender equality matters, and what needs to be done, I thought I should rather share with you a personal story. I rarely do so, but I have been addressing so many audiences on the topic of diversity, equality, human rights where we agreed on so many actions, that we too often forget to ask ourselves the key question: *when did we for the last time stood up and spoke out or acted in favour of gender equality*. What do we do at home, in our workspace, in the streets, in our private and public spheres to show that all men and women should be treated equally?

And here is my story: I grew up in a family with a strong working-ethos, meaning: if you want to achieve something you have to work for it, and you do this with full regard for the needs and wishes of your surroundings (you don't ego-trip), and this gives you and your surroundings, trust and confidence, so eventually your satisfaction and happiness will help you lead a successful life. Of course life is not that simple, but this was the idea in a nutshell, and there was a bit of Steve Jobs' 'stay hungry, stay foolish' attitude. So when we discussed society and politics at the dining table, from a young age, my mother, who never had the chance to enjoy higher education although she had the highest marks in primary and secondary, but her four brothers – who all had lower marks - were allowed, even pushed to study,

and she had to basically make sure that the busy household kept functioning, my mother, would always, at any point in time, and she does until today, softly, gently but firmly bring forward examples of successful, inspiring women in the public sphere and she would always maintain that in any voting round – for any election – she would vote for a woman. *Dear friends, when have you last voted for a woman?*

The topic of ‘voting for a woman’ has kept me very busy throughout my professional life. As you know I am not a politician, I am a diplomat, but I see it as part of my responsibility in my service and abroad, that I share my conviction that women need to be part of the decision-making process. It is not enough to say that there are many lawyers, doctors, bankers who are women. What is important is to work on getting women politicians, parliamentarians (currently at 7% in the region I was told), ministers, mayors (only 3.6 % of the mayors in Lebanon are women), speakers and presidents.

This can be done with more women climbing the public sector mountain until its very top, pushing through the *glass ceiling*. In Lebanon, women represent 53% of the population. But in the public sector, only 13 % of the top management are women. There is enough evidence that by bringing more women to decision-making positions, in both the public and the private sector, this will lead to improved and effective governance. Ideally, a civil service should reflect the society that it serves. It is the basis for fostering a society which does not tolerate discrimination against any group or individual. The civil service should have a lighthouse function in the sense that it should be a model for gender equality and an inspiration for the private sector. Therefore in 2012 the European Commission proposed legislation with the aim of attaining a 40% objective of the under-represented sex in non-executive board-member positions in publicly listed

companies, with the exception of SMEs. In 2012, 85% of non-executive board members and 91.1% of executive board members were men. Today women make up 17.8% and 10% respectively, so there is a positive trend. Yet there is still a long way to go to reach that very necessary mix to make our services more equal and more beneficial to all. It is daily work, hard work, and I am glad you are all part of that workforce.

I wish you very productive discussions, here and at your dining table with the people who need your inspiration and courage to move on and take action.

Thank you.