

Empowerment of women: the global perspective
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I congratulate the World Maritime University on its 25th Jubilee and also commend the university for commemorating this important anniversary by focusing on the empowerment of professional women in the maritime sector.

Like the High Commissioner yesterday, I have personally had very little contact with the maritime sector. Listening to the discussions yesterday, however, I understand that many of the issues in this sector are similar to those in other sectors. I thank you for the opportunity to make a presentation on some aspects of the global work of the United Nations on empowerment of women across different sectors which I hope will be useful for the discussion on empowerment of women in this specific sector.

Global achievements on the empowerment of women

Empowerment of women is critical for the achievement of all the goals related to equality, human rights, development and peace and security established by the United Nations over the past six decades. At the World Summit in 2005, Heads of State and Government stated that “progress for women is progress for all”. One of the eight Millennium Development Goals established in 2000 is focused on gender equality and empowerment of women, with targets on education, employment and political decision-making. Gender equality is, however, also important for the achievement of all other Millennium Development Goals.

Since the establishment of the United Nations in 1946 there have been many significant achievements on gender equality and empowerment of women. The Decade for Women (1976-1985) and four world conferences on women organized by the United Nations, between 1975 and 1995, contributed significantly to raising awareness and commitment to gender equality.

A clear global policy framework is in place – the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action adopted in consensus by all Member States of the United Nations in 1995. A human-rights treaty on gender equality – the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) - has been in place for over 25 years and is now ratified by 185 states, almost all the Member States of the United Nations.

Progress in the implementation of these two important frameworks at national level is monitored by two international bodies – the policy framework by the Commission on the Status of Women, an inter-governmental body of experts representing their countries which meets each year, and the Convention by a Committee of 23 independent experts which reviews reports by States parties submitted every four years.

An important breakthrough was the establishment of the strategy of “gender mainstreaming” in Beijing in 1995. This strategy requires that Governments, the United Nations, and

all other institutions in both the public and private sectors, including universities, take into consideration the gender perspectives in all aspects of their work and make efforts to remove discrimination and inequality. It is this strategy that has led to attention to gender perspectives and the participation of women in sectors where there was little attention in the past, including the maritime sector.

While much has been achieved at the policy level on gender equality and empowerment of women, implementation has not been as systematic and effective as expected. A review in 2005 revealed a huge gap between the global policies and actions at national level. Member States have not lived up to their commitments, and the United Nations has failed to deliver the necessary support to Member States.

The consequences of the failure to address gender inequality are felt by women all around the world, for example through the continuing unequal access to education and employment; the serious under-representation in all areas of decision-making, and the unacceptable levels of violence against women which can be both disempowering and life threatening. For women in some countries the effects can be devastating, as illustrated by the lack of access to the basic requirements for survival, such as land, property and economic resources; the high levels of maternal mortality; the consequences of the HIV/AIDS pandemic which affects women and girls disproportionately because of their subordinate position, and the persistence of trafficking, a modern form of slavery and torture.

Framework for the empowerment of women:

A framework of four critical elements for the empowerment of women has been developed within the United Nations. These include development of *capabilities* ensuring access to essential *resources and opportunities*; provision of opportunities for *leadership and decision-making* roles; and ensuring *security and safety*. These four elements are intrinsically interlinked. Ensuring that they are in place requires a range of actions from a diverse group of actors, within the framework of a human rights approach.

Efforts to *develop capabilities* must begin at an early age and continue throughout the life-cycle. Governments play a key role in ensuring a general enabling environment which provides equal access to health and education for girls as well as boys. Equal access to all subjects and specialities, particularly to science and technology, including new information and communication technologies, is critical. The curricula, teaching materials and teacher training must be gender-sensitive to ensure that formal education actively contributes to the empowerment of girls and women. Ignorance of gender equality issues and inappropriate attitudes of teachers at all levels, including university level, can contribute to the disempowerment of girls and women. Once in the labour market, women need equal opportunities for on-the-job training, and retraining when necessary, to ensure they continue to have the relevant capabilities for their career development.

Access to critical resource and opportunities is necessary to ensure that women are able to effectively utilize their capabilities for the benefit of themselves, their families and communities and for society in general. Securing capabilities through education is not sufficient in itself. Women must access resources and opportunities through, for example, employment, research positions and potential to be part of academic or professional associations. Although women in many countries now dominate certain academic fields at under-graduate level, and may even out-number men in achieving doctoral degrees, this does not always translate into employment or research positions and academic careers. Equal access to economic resources and opportunities is also of particular importance for the empowerment of women.

The empowerment of women requires *opportunities for leadership and decision-making*. This is one of the areas where very little progress has been made over the past decades, despite much rhetoric. Figures recently released in a "Map of Women in Politics 2008", published jointly by my Division and the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), reveal that women make up only 17.9 per cent of parliamentarians world-wide (as of 1 January 2008) and the target of 30 per cent set for 1995 has been met by only 20 countries. Women make up 16.1 per cent of women holding Ministerial posts world-wide. There are no reliable statistics for women's participation in any other area of decision-making, including in the maritime sector. The evidence that is available, however, indicates a similarly poor situation for women in leadership and decision-making positions in economic institutions, academia, media, trade unions and many other important institutions.

Ensuring *security and safety* for women and girls is critical for their empowerment. This requires urgent attention to violence against women, a pervasive form of discrimination and human rights abuse prevalent in both developed and developing countries. Violence, and the threat of violence, occurs in homes, schools, sports arenas, workplaces, and in other community settings, including on transportation systems. It is disempowering and constrains women's use of their capabilities and the resources and opportunities potentially available to them.

The work of the United Nations on the empowerment of women

I would like to share with you briefly some areas of work of the United Nations which aim to strengthen the empowerment of women.

Violence against women:

Let me start with one of the most critical areas – the eradication of violence against women. An in-depth study of the United Nations Secretary-General in 2006 indicated the many forms this violence takes, including new and evolving forms, and the General Assembly has called for intensified action to eradicate it. The Secretary-General recently launched a campaign on violence against women through which he will endeavour to rally world leaders, engage men more actively, and show greater United Nations leadership, in order to bring about change at national level.

Educational institutions and workplaces, for example, must take active steps to identify the risks for women and develop strategies to eliminate these. Educational facilities should find ways to incorporate training on violence against women in the curricula which focuses on the general problem and its specific manifestations in the sector on which the training is focused.

The labour market:

Through the ILO and other organizations, the United Nations is focusing on the discrimination in the labour market which needs to be addressed, such as persistent wage gaps and continued horizontal and vertical segregation of the labour force. In most countries, women and men tend to follow different career paths and are concentrated in different sector areas. Men continue to dominate decision-making levels.

Many strategies have been developed to address these forms of discrimination and inequality. On the government side, development of policies, legislation and regulations have been important. However, the persistence of the discrimination and inequality, despite the policy and legislative efforts, points to the need for inputs at another level, requiring the active involvement of

employers, employees and staff associations. The institutional environment and work culture, while seemingly “gender-neutral”, can, in reality, work against women in many subtle ways.

Stereotypes on the capabilities and roles of women and men which constitute obstacles to the advancement of women in the labour market need to be identified and addressed. Informal mentoring systems and networks among men, which exclude women, can be a serious disadvantage for women. Among other things, it may lead to reduced access to information and to training and re-training opportunities, and in the long-run to opportunities for leadership and access to decision-making.

To ensure the empowerment of women through the labour market, employers need to identify the main risks and problems – including sexual and professional harassment - and to develop a strategy to address these. It is important to establish clear targets and to set benchmarks against which progress can be achieved.

It is important to be able to clearly distinguish between general problems experienced by both women and men in the workplace, and those that are clearly related to gender inequality. Yesterday some of the problems identified – such as inter-generational issues (or the problems young professionals in decision-making positions may face with older staff members), and issues when personnel at lower levels have greater knowledge of technical details than newly appointed decision-makers, are not necessarily gender equality issues. If these situations present more difficulties for women than men, it is important to know in what ways, why, and how to address these issues and any other gender-specific difficulties women face.

Sharing of domestic responsibilities:

The United Nations is currently focusing on one issue raised yesterday – the issue of work-life balance. Several speakers pointed to difficulties faced in maintaining a professional career while having the sole or prime responsibility for child care and family life. The lack of attention to work-life balance in many workplaces is a significant disadvantage for women. In many cases the only attention given to this issue is to the perceived “risk factor” that employing women is seen to entail – based on the perception of women have the sole responsibility for child-care and other caring activities (for example elder-care and care of persons with disability or sick family members). A significant change is required in this area. For centuries women’s double work in the home and in the labour market has made possible both men’s role in the labour market and economic development at community and national level. If the full cost of this reproductive work was to be covered by the economy it would have significant implications. Some researchers call this unpaid and unrecognized work an additional “reproductive tax” that women alone pay, with significant costs to themselves. Some activists even call for a “wage” for women who carry out this work. At the very least, the shared responsibility of women and men for this work should be recognized and efforts made in the labour market to accommodate this shared responsibility. Men as well as women should push for change in this area.

The Beijing Platform for Action recognized the constraint that unequal sharing of responsibilities for domestic work involved for women, noting that it affected their access to education and training, employment and their opportunities to participate in public life. It also noted that this unfair burden of work had health implications for women. In 2009, the Commission on the Status of Women will consider, for the first time, “The equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men, including care-giving in the context of HIV/AIDS” as its priority theme. This will give rise to some very interesting and important discussions, and hopefully, to very concrete recommendations for action in this area.

Women in leadership roles:

Ensuring women's leadership roles and active participation in important decision-making processes requires moving beyond calculating the number of women in different bodies to assessing the opportunities for influence and impact on policies, planning processes and budget allocations. Ensuring potential to influence decision-making may require access to training, support to set up or access networks, and possibilities to participate in critical committees or caucuses. The Map of Women in Politics 2008 shows that women continue to be mainly given the so-called "soft" ministerial portfolios, such as education, family, health, social or community affairs, culture, youth and sports. It also shows that while there are more women than ever heading ministries for trade, employment, foreign affairs and justice, these areas continue to be dominated by men. Defence remains a male stronghold with only 0.6 per cent women holding this portfolio.

Lack of data on all areas other than political decision-making remains a problem. The United Nations will review the role of women in decision-making at the next session of the Commission on the Status of women in 2009. A study is being carried out to provide more information on areas such as trade unions, local government, academia and the media. This study does not, unfortunately, cover the maritime sector.

Economic decision-making:

One area requiring urgent attention is increasing women's participation in economic decision-making. Throughout Europe a growing number of companies are actively searching for women with the qualifications and talent to serve as directors. One of the reasons for this shift is the push for diversity of perceptions and approaches in economic decision-making, as a means to enhance economic performance.

The Higgs Report on corporate governance in UK emphasized that the need to broaden the pool of candidates for directorships has led to an increase of women on boards. A recent article in the New York Times on women's gains on corporate boards (22 March 2008) indicated that progress in this area is, however, constrained by the small number of women who have made it to the so-called "corner offices", as well as "a deep-rooted desire to preserve traditional male networks and the chemistry and comfort level that go with them."

One success story in this area is having positive implications for developments in other countries. Norway has put in place a law requiring companies to fill 40 per cent of corporate board seats with women, with the threat of penalties if companies do not comply. This was deemed necessary because in 1993 women held only 3 per cent of corporate board seats, and by 2002 this had only increased to 6 per cent. With this rate of growth it would have taken 100 years to reach 40 per cent. Five years after the initiation of the discussion, Norway has already almost met the 40 per cent requirement. The new law has been termed "the largest transfer of power to women since they got the vote".

The success on corporate boards in Norway has raised the expectations among women in Europe. The Spanish parliament has also passed legislation calling for 40 per cent board participation by women by 2015, without the enforcement measures established in Norway. A planned initiative in Holland will commit companies to meet targets for getting women into senior executive positions which would enable them to be candidates for boards. In Britain where progress has been steadier, a Female FTSE 100 Index, compiled by the Cranfield School of Management shows 123 women holding 11 per cent of the seats on FTSE 100 boards, with 20 per cent of new FTSE 100 director

appointments going to women in 2007. These kinds of initiatives require action from both governments and individual corporations.

Science and technology:

Access to science and technology can play a critical role in the empowerment of women in many sectors. A recent UNESCO report illustrated that gender disparities in science and technology are significant in secondary and tertiary level education, even though there has been progress in recent decades. Similarly, even though women have made inroads in employment in different areas of science and technology, there are serious remaining inequalities in relation to pay, promotion, and specialization. Not surprisingly, women are also under-represented in scientific and technological research, particularly at top levels, although the statistics available on women's representation in this and other areas of science and technology leave much to be desired.

With the rapid development of science and technology, the human resources at national level are critical to ensuring that countries can remain competitive and at the cutting edge of development. Women are a significant and under-utilized pool of talent and a resource base in relation to science and technology. There must be a significantly increased investment in women in this area, as a matter of human rights, but also for greater efficiency and effectiveness. The economic cost of leaving out women and girls in science and technology education and training, in employment opportunities, in research and development activities, and in critical decision-making processes, should be explicitly calculated in both the short and long term.

Ensuring that science and technology can be used to benefit women requires attention to policies and strategies as well as to the institutions which regulate and support development of science and technology to ensure that critical decisions on resource allocation and investments, including in relation to capacity-building and access to opportunities, take gender perspectives into consideration.

Conclusions

Let me conclude by commending the work of the WMU and at the same time posing some challenges to the university to build on the achievements already made.

I begin by congratulating the university on the achievement of 30 percent intake of women students and commend the fact that, as the WMU President indicated yesterday, the resources required for this have been raised and committed by the WMU itself. It was also heartening that the achievements on female enrolment were made without affirmative action (although it is important to recognize that affirmative action is still needed in many areas and remains a legitimate strategy for women's empowerment). As the WMU President also informed us, the rationale for seeking female enrolment was not primarily or solely to benefit women, but a necessity for the sector. In this context it is indeed very positive that the strategy has paid off for women, for the university, for the sector, and also for men. Not only have women excelled academically but they have contributed positively to the social environment of the university (as they also do in their workplaces). Both women and men benefit from this.

These achievements should be documented and more broadly disseminated, including by video if possible. Media should be encouraged to disseminate positive role models and success stories. Comprehensive data on enrolments, graduation, employment, and access of graduates to decision-making positions could be compiled. A panel discussion could be organized at the next Commission on the Status of Women in New York in 2009, particularly highlighting the achievements in terms of the participation of women graduates in decision-making positions.

The value of female role models and mentoring programmes for ensuring women's active participation in sectors traditionally dominated by men has been increasingly recognized. This has also been mentioned at this conference as an important strategy. The WMU could develop a strong network among its women graduates which can document their progress, provide support as needed, and encourage them to become mentors and role models for other young women in the maritime sector.

Finally, let me commend WMU on the format of the conference, which allows us to hear the women graduates themselves discuss their current work in the sector, including as decision-makers, and also provides the opportunity to discuss more generally the means to empower women in the sector.

I congratulate all the women graduates and current students here today and wish you success in your careers. I also commend the male students present for their interest in this issue. Gender equality and empowerment of women will only be possible if women and men work together for its achievement. I hope that the discussions at this conference have convinced you that gender equality and empowerment of women in the maritime sector, and in all areas of society, has benefits for men as well as women and that you will take the learnings from the conference with you into your workplaces

Thank you.