



Joint Statement on International Women's Day 8 March 2021

[Soroptimist International](#) [International Alliance of Women](#) [Associated Country Women of the World](#)

1. On [International Women's Day](#), 8th March 2021, Sharon Fisher, President of Soroptimist International; Cheryl Hayles, President of International Alliance of Women; and Magdie de Kock, World President of Associated Country Women of the World, ask, "Are women making any progress in participation in leadership and decision-making?"
2. Twenty five years on from the [Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action](#) which identified the need for more women at the top, it is time to #ChoosetoChallenge what has been achieved, or rather, what has not been achieved. It is time to heed the platform's overdue call to increase women's "capacity to participate in decision-making and leadership with measures being taken to ensure women's access to and full participation in power structures and decision-making".
3. After Beijing, the heightened expectation is that more women would be elected as parliamentarians and legislators; more women would take their place as senior managers and board directors in private and public companies; more women would be recognized as community leaders and contributing to the development of their local economies; more women would be found at negotiating tables following conflicts. In addition, it was hoped that the contribution of women's organisations and participation through civil society, generally, would be acknowledged and accepted.
4. Where are we now, 25 years later? Research shows that in all these sectors women are still not equally represented; that men still hold the majority of leadership roles.
5. Although women make up approximately 50 per cent of the global population they do not share power or leadership equally with men anywhere in the world. There are currently 10 women serving as Heads of State with small numbers of women filling Government Ministerial posts or serving in Cabinets. The proportions of female representatives in national Parliaments are similarly low. Yet the media is reporting that women leaders can be very effective, showing that during the COVID-19 pandemic, they have protected their countries significantly, often better than many counterpart male leaders.

6. The United Nations Human Rights Council has pointed out that women and girls, as well as women's organisations and networks, are not equally represented in local, national, and global COVID-19 policy spaces and decision-making. The COVID-19 pandemic has brought the value of women's roles in society to the forefront, especially in the positive impact they have made throughout the health and care sectors. We believe efforts should be made to ensure women's full and meaningful participation, representation and leadership in all aspects of dealing with the virus, including [plans for recovery](#). A diversity of women's voices should be heard and represented in public discussions and media broadcasts.
7. Women and girls of all ages deserve a seat at the table in public life, leadership and decision-making. Women belong in all places where decisions are being made. To make that a reality, all states, the private sector, civil society, non-governmental organizations, and other stakeholders must work in collaboration. Men must also be included in these discussions.
8. Only when women and girls of all ages are able to fully and equally participate in public life, hold positions of leadership, and be recognised key players at all levels of decision-making, will the world we live in be one where everyone has equal opportunities, economies are more sustainable, and societies more inclusive and prosperous. Women enable a just, equitable and peaceful world.
9. Girls and young women like Malala Yousafzai and Greta Thunberg have proven that they are capable and want to be seen, heard and transform the world they have inherited from the previous generations. There is no need to wait for girls and young women to become adults before more women become visible.
10. Sharon, Cheryl and Magdie say, "These young women demonstrate clearly that they can lead campaigns, like Greta against climate change, and Malala for girl's education, and create change enabling a better and healthier future for other young women."
11. Young leaders such as these work directly with communities, influencing older leaders who are frequently male, and encouraging young women to take hold of their own lives. They are persuading governments around the world to change legislation so that discrimination against women and girls is 'put to flight' and gender equality becomes a reality. They provide excellent role models for younger women and girls alongside the women who lead their countries.
12. Young women looking to the future can take encouragement from the fact that their skills and qualities as leaders are being recognised and will provide the foundation for them to take their place as leaders now and in the future.
13. Rural women face the same challenges as their urban counterparts, but these challenges are compounded by diluted access to social resources. When looking at parliamentary representation, women from rural areas and communities are less likely to be involved; and when they are involved, they face often hazardous, long, and arduous journeys to central points of government.

14. It is imperative that we enable and empower today our future women leaders. We are recommending to the [sixty-fifth session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women](#) that *“New laws, regulations and social justice programmes should be developed and implemented to respond to women’s and girls’ under-participation and under-representation in leadership. Such laws, regulations and social justice programmes should include: guaranteeing equal pay; addressing harassment, violence and abuse of women faced online and offline; examining legal ideas of what constitutes a threat or threatening behaviour; and requiring additional protection measures to be developed, recognising that online presence is now part of participation in public life and discourse, and therefore online space should be protected and safe from abuse and harmful, sexist and discriminatory language.”*

For information on this statement, contact:

Soroptimist International: Beverly Bucur, ida@soroptimistinternational.org

International Alliance of Women: Cheryl Hayles, cherylhayles@sympatico.ca

Associated Country Women of the World: Nick Newland, nick@acww.org.uk