

Women in multilateralism: contributions to consensus building

Introductory words by Satu Suikkari-Kleven

- It is a great honor for me to participate in the Estoril Political Forum and to act as a Chair of this panel on behalf of the Association of Women Ambassadors accredited to Portugal. I'm grateful for this invitation and for the excellent cooperation that we at AWA have enjoyed with the Institute during the past year. Like all my colleagues, I was truly impressed and inspired by the active participation of you, the students in the International Women's Day conference that we jointly organized with the IEL at the Católica in March. I look forward to your active participation in the Q and A part of this panel as well.
- You have now had almost two days of excellent presentations and discussions on various aspects of democracy and the threats against it. You have heard about the dangers of toxic polarization, the rise of authoritarian tendencies and about the need to rebuild democratic consensus in different parts of the world.
- In this panel, we will take the discussion to the multilateral level. The multilateral system, which has been the key to achieve development, peace and security in the world, is also facing serious threats. We are seeing blatant disregard for the UN Charter, increasing geopolitical tension and efforts to undermine previous achievements on women's rights, arms control and other key areas. This happens at a time when the world is in dire need of a functioning multilateral system, since the problems that we are faced with are global by nature. We need to get better at building consensus on effective ways to tackle global crises like the climate change and the various armed conflicts around the world. But we should not accept consensus only for the sake of consensus. We can't be satisfied with the lowest common denominator, a non-ambitions consensus. We need to aim high. We need to aim at ambitious consensus to take the world forward.
- In this panel, we will first focus on the indisputable benefits of diversity in consensus building in multilateral institutions. Consensus requires that it is formulated, or at least accepted by all members of a group and not just the majority or a select group of representatives. The world of international politics has historically been a male-dominated sphere in which only few women have had access to a seat at the decision-making table. The glass ceiling has been smashed numerous times, but even today, we are far from

equal representation of different genders when we look at top positions in multilateral institutions.

- Our speakers will address the question of why it is so important to have women equally represented in the decision-making bodies. They will discuss the reasons why decisions simply are better when both women and men take part in the process. A great example is the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which would look very different and much weaker if women from different parts of the world had not taken a strong stand in its drafting.
- Second, we will hear about concrete situations where consensus reached at the multilateral level has been incredibly important for strengthening human rights at the national level. We will hear about conflict and post-conflict situations. These examples will show the power of multilateralism and its treaties, conventions and declarations – the rules-based international order.
- I now have the great pleasure to introduce our panel. First, we have two inspiring professors that you know very well. They will bring in a discussion on the conceptual level. Professor Livia Franco will provide an overview of the role of women in international relations and the ways in which women make a difference in international institutions. Second, Professor Monica Días will focus on UNSCR 1325 on women, peace and security, reflecting on the empowerment aspect of the resolution, with a special focus on enhancing the role of education.
- Then, we will hear the contributions of two excellent practitioners, both former Assistant Secretaries-General of the United Nations, who will bring their experiences from the UN. First, former deputy executive director of UNFPA, Ms. Laura Londén will bring in her expert insight from UNFPA, focusing on the impressive impact of international instruments on women's rights in post-conflict situations. Finally, former SRSG Marta Santos País will brief us about her vast UN experience, focusing on women's participation in UN leadership and the ways in which UN instruments have brought about concrete changes to children's and women's lives at country level.
- I would now like to call to the podium :
- Associate Professor **Livia Franco**, Senior Researcher at the Institute of Political Studies, with PhD in Political Science. Active internationally at think tank of European Council on Foreign Policy, universities in the US and the Netherlands. Author of several books – congratulations for the newest one that just came out. Frequent media commentator, Expresso podcast on Ukraine.

- Associate Professor **Monica Días**, Vice-Director of Institute of Political Studies, Head of the PhD programme and leader of research line on Peace and Civil Society. Strong areas of expertise human rights, democracy, international institutions, conflict resolution. Also active internationally, lecturing in Germany and the US. Has also acted as an adviser to the Portuguese Parliament.
- Former UN Assistant Secretary-General **Laura Londén**, and former Deputy Executive Director of UNFPA, with a 30-year career promoting human rights and equality. Strong leadership background from development, refugee, humanitarian, emergency and peace operations. Currently member of board of advisers of Carnegie Council's Artificial Intelligence and Equality Initiative.
- Former UN Assistant Secretary-General **Marta Santos País**, the first Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General on Violence against Children. Vast experience in advancing human rights in the world and shaping the multilateral agenda. Special focus areas children's rights, fight against the death penalty, international criminal law and Holocaust remembrance.