



Draft Speech Thannaletchimy Housset

Women and the Future of Work

Jinnah University for Women

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Dear Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you _____ for your kind introduction.

It is a great honour for me to be before you aspiring women today to talk about the future of work and how women hold the key to that future.

It is also my privilege to be in Karachi, a country of great significance for Pakistan and the world, a city of vibrant entrepreneurial spirit, a cultural and economic hub of the country and home to world-class women leaders like Benazir Bhutto.

Firstly, I would like to thank my gracious hosts at the Employers' Federation of Pakistan who have made it possible for me to be here today to deliver this address.

Special thanks also to my esteemed and distinguished friend, the honourable employer representative of Pakistan in the Governing Body of the ILO and President of the Employers' Federation of Pakistan, Mr Mayjda Aziz, for his kind invitation to be here today.

Special thanks also to Jinnah University for Women for having me amongst you today.

I speak here today on behalf of my organisation, the International Organisation of Employers, as a young aspiring female professional hoping to inspire you all to dream big. In today's world, it is possible for young women such as ourselves to have the best of both our professional and private lives.

Let me start with a personal anecdote. My grandmother, bless her soul, was a housewife in Singapore, charged with looking after 5 children. She had no education but was a brilliant woman, capable of inspiring her children to aim higher. My mother aimed and ended up being a teacher in Singapore. If you ask me what brought me here today before you, I would say that it's my mother and grandmother. Women before us have helped to clear the way and pave the path for us to achieve our dreams and go further. Without them, the opportunities that we would have access to today would have been impossible.

My mother believed that education is the key to a woman's achievement. And with changes in the world of work, the need for a qualified talent regardless of gender has now become crucial. We are lucky to be alive at a time like this, where talent is highly sought for and women are making headways in breaking the glass ceiling at the top of the corporate ladder.

Pakistan is no stranger to inspiring powerful women. Fatima Jinnah dedicated her life to the political movement that led to the creation of Pakistan. Benazir Bhutto made Pakistan proud by becoming the first female Prime Minister of any Muslim country.

She did it twice while countries such as the United States are still reluctant to accept a female president.

With a strong female talent pool in Pakistan, you are all well positioned to ride the new wave of industrial revolution that the world is facing today. Let me go through them in more detail.

The current global labour market is experiencing 3 strong trends notably:

1. Skills (both shortages and mismatches);
2. Demographic changes (both youth bulges and ageing populations); and
3. The rise of a diversity of work forms.

These trends highlight the need for global economies to better utilise the female talent in mitigating the challenges and seizing up the opportunities offered by the future of work.

Women make up half of the global population; ignoring them means losing half of the world's resources. To manage the challenges and optimize the opportunities of the future of work, women's economic empowerment is an integral part of the solution.

Around the world, women are outnumbering men in terms of participation in higher education (just look around yourselves) and they are more likely to have more highly developed soft skills. This talent pool represents important opportunities in helping to address the problems arising from ageing populations in advanced economies and youth bulges in developing countries.

While the female labour market participation is on the rise, they still remain under-represented in the workforce. Facilitating their access to the labour market can help to diminish the old-age dependency ratio, which is a constant concern for ageing societies.

In addition to addressing the countries with ageing populations, women also contribute to the youth bulge in developing countries as they bring with them academic and entrepreneurial skills, allowing them to become employers in their own right.

Even today, the burden for managing family responsibilities tend to fall more heavily on women. Research shows that many women prefer to work part-time and other flexible hours in order to better balance their work and family commitments. The rapidly evolving landscape for business has in fact led to the increase in the use of flexible forms of work by companies, which directly responds to this demand for flexible work by women. Optimizing this change in landscape will go miles in attracting women especially those with family responsibilities to re-enter the labour market.

Enterprise development, through facilitating the establishment and growth of SMEs, encouraging entrepreneurship and rewarding innovation can create formal employment opportunities for women, especially young ones such as ourselves.

Unlocking the potential in the labour market requires addressing the constrained employment prospects for women. The rise in a diversity of work forms provides opportunities for women to enter the workforce, and help the economy recoup lost output and utilise skills more effectively.

As policymakers seek short- and long-term solutions to the challenges of the changing world of work, expanding opportunities and fostering the talent of the previously untapped pool of female talent becomes all the more important. This will require the joint efforts of governments, employers, and workers to remove the cultural, economic and social barriers hindering women's participation in the labour market.

Within the IOE, we work closely with our member organisations such as the Employers' Federation of Pakistan, to play our role in contributing to the construction of effective policies to ensure the inclusion of women's talents, skills, experience and energies in the economy. As women, we also have a role to play. It is crucial that we are well equipped to contribute to our economies productively. Small steps such as receiving education, being open to learning at the job after graduation, being willing to start small and make mistakes can go a long way in harnessing our professional and employable skills.

As we grow older, we need to ensure that our society is still able to tap into productive human capital. This means ensuring that our children are able to fill in our shoes and aim higher. Educating our children can serve as stepping stones into harnessing future human capital. Rather than leaving the labour market to stay home to look after kids, making use of flexible working arrangements (such as teleworking or part-time working) can help to keep us connected to the labour market after starting a family. Serving as mentors to other young professionals in the later part of our careers can help to inspire and groom the future batch of leaders in our society.

If there's anything I would like for you to bring home with you today is this: don't just dream and let your dreams wither. The opportunity for you to realise your dreams as women professionals is here today. The future holds a lot of potential for female talent so don't wait to make use of those opportunities. CARPE DIEM means to seize the day so make an effort today to ensure that you are well-equipped to benefit from the changes to the labour market by being mobile, employable, talented and of course, being yourself (being a woman).

Thank you for your kind attention.