

The Women Leaders Network: A Vision for the Future

by

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Your Excellency, Governor-General Jeffery, Honorable Minister Bishop and other honoured Ministers here, old friends, new friends and guests, thank you very much for having me here. My role is to bring you the past to the present, and to give you a bit of background about what the WLN is, where it came from, and where we hope it will go.

We've already had three very successful days here, and I'd really like to congratulate the organizers of the Asia Pacific women in technology meetings that we've had, as well as the excellent trade day yesterday. It has been a fantastic day; the energy is high and I know it's going to go higher.

So why are we here? There are a few quotes that, I think, sum up why we are here and what we are doing here. This is one of them. Because globalization and the effect of globalization upon women are really quite topical and Madame Nguyen, I was just thrilled to hear that Vietnam was incorporating the WLN in your plan for the WTO accession, so thank you very much. You have lifted us to a new level.

So this is one of my favorite quotes about women and why we are here:

If you say that globalization is hurting women, it is because you are not preparing her. I see the potential, how I can ride the crest of the wave and not submerge myself under it. I think a bigger world is a better world where women have a better chance.

Now we're getting increased recognition —just recently in the last 12 months the rest of the world is beginning to catch on. No offence to China or to India, but put in the context of the economic power of women, the economists stated earlier this year, forget China, India and the Internet —the economic power of women, the economic growth is driven by women. We heard this yesterday from Tim Harcourt about the economic growth in the Asia-Pacific region. This was followed by a World Bank report declaring that there is a business case for expanding women's economic opportunities. It's called 'smart economics'.

The WLN has an important role to play in ensuring that this great recognition is translated into action.

I'll give you a brief background on the WLN and where it came from. It was actually started by women in science and technology. These are women who met in Indonesia

—and I'm glad to see we have our old friend Ebu San here, who hasn't participated for many years but who was actually one of the founders of this group in Indonesia —who came together to recognize that there were young girls who were not really being mentored in technology. I'll go through this very quickly —this was followed by an experts' meeting and the National Commission on the Role of Filipino Women met with a strategy workshop. The idea and the concept of expanding women leaders in sciences and technology to make it multi-sectoral was actually born in the living room of Elena Lin in the Philippines, and we brought it forward from there.

So the instrumental supporters were —as part of its year of APEC activities in 1996 — the National Commission on the Role of Filipino Women, which hosted the inaugural meeting of WLN in October 1996, one month before the APEC Leaders Summit. This was supported with funding by CIDA (the Canadian International Development Agency) and UNICEF.

Our friends from the Philippines undertook a truly amazing and ambitious task as they rallied their various government departments, women leaders and NGOs at the very most senior levels. Planning meetings took place and the network was launched in October, one month before the leaders' summit.

We convened for the first time under the ambitious theme of *Gender, Trade and Investment Liberalization and Economic and Technical Cooperation for Sustained Growth and Equitable Development*. This rally's lengthy and cumbersome theme was taken directly from the pillars of the TILF [Trade and Investment Liberalization and Facilitation] and Agrotech Working Group, and was reflecting the need for gender integration at APEC at all levels. Chaired by Dr. Amelia Ang Kong who, at that time, was Undersecretary of the Philippine Department of Science and Technology, and Dr. Lim, President of Women for Women Philippines.

That first meeting consisted of 60 invited women representing 14 of the then 18 APEC economies. Hosted by the National Commission on the Role of Filipino Women for the multi economy organizing committee, the Network was able to present its call to action directly to President Ramos of the Philippines, who pledged to forward it to his fellow APEC leaders in 1996.

It's a little bit of a distorted and cloudy picture, but there we are, we are all fuzzy and it's more flattering. I think in the media that's called vanity photography. We were originally called the Network of Senior Women Leaders from APEC Economies because we were mirroring the language of APEC senior officials. But we sort of felt that sounded a bit like the blue hair set so we actually changed our name and shortened it.

Anyway, our purpose was to seek ways to develop strategies so that women's concerns would be heard, their aspirations considered and their involvement firmly established when decisions and policies are made within APEC. Specifically, this was to foster regional cooperation and to advance the status of women in Asia-Pacific and to formulate a framework for gender considerations to be included in development of

human resources and in pursuing sustained growth and equitable development within the region.

We chose to organize ourselves as a pool of experts to serve as partners whose expertise could be tapped into in identifying gender dimension within APEC. What we wanted to get the message across was, when working groups and committees were being formed within APEC, quite often they were very gender challenged—if you look at some of the older photographs there were literally no women in them. We wanted to ensure that the officials knew that there were certainly women within the region who had the expertise and who were capable of sitting on these committees and working groups. We wanted to orient the participants on APEC and its structures and how these could be maximized as possible points for policy intervention. In other words, we wanted to educate the women in the region about APEC.

At the end of the meeting the Network presented our call to action to President Ramos, and essentially I can summarize by saying that our call to action was to recognize and integrate gender as a cross-cutting theme within APEC, to develop a partnership with the Network to identify mechanisms to achieve this objective, and to recognize the Network as a flexible consultative forum and a strategic partner toward the achievement of the APEC vision, goals and action agendas.

What made this meeting and the call to action particularly successful is that the original concept for the Network had support at the very highest levels of government. The NCRFW is the women's machinery in the Philippines and, hence, had the support of their government. The Government of Canada signified its commitment and support by supplying most of the funding, not just to establish the WLN, but also to guarantee its existence and success in the inaugural meeting and the following four years—in total a five-year commitment that involved more than \$1 million.

In addition, the NCRFW assured the success of this meeting by educating participants about APEC, the APEC process and the particular language that is used within APEC policy making. Heavily involved within this were the APEC Senior Officials, as well as the APEC Secretary. The founding group worked with these officials into the very early hours of the morning to ensure that the wording of their declaration was correct and complied with all APEC protocols.

Moving on to 1997, which was Canada's year of Asia Pacific, we were now called the Women Leaders of APEC. Our theme was the economic impact of women in the APEC region. Through the work of a multi-sectoral organizing committee chaired by Susan Davies, the Director of CIDA for Southeast Asia, there was a close collaboration again with our senior government officials throughout the entire year and at the highest levels.

The first time WLN was invited to work with the ministers responsible for SMEs [small- and medium-sized enterprises], the WLN was co-chaired by Dr. Huguette Labelle, who was at that time the president of the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), Dr. Lorna Marsden, who was President and Vice Chair of York University and

myself, representing the private sector. We brought into our mandate not just to have women from the private sector, the public sector, civil society and academia —we ensured that Indigenous women, rural women and women with special needs were fully integrated and included in our program.

We were 200 women invited representing 16 of the then 18 APEC economies. We were only restricted by the size of the hotel —the SME Ministers Meeting was going on at the same time and there was a huge SME business conference —hotel accommodation was very tight, so that was the only thing that restricted us to 200 people. We now had government and corporate sponsors; we had four government ministers addressing us. We even had an anti-APEC protest group that broke into the hotel. So we felt like we had finally arrived. We had huge media coverage, and many late nights and early mornings. This is what the drafting committee would have looked like in those days — not very sophisticated, but at 4 o'clock in the morning, Heather Gibb and myself trying to work out these recommendations followed by the famous cow walk in the morning (I'm sorry these are so cloudy).

But there we are, the 200 of us and how we all came together. Our declaration was from action to implementation; this was presented to then Minister of Industry Canada, the Honourable John Manley, at a special lunch on Parliament Hill in a very historic room in Parliament where Canadian women were for the first time recognized as persons, and after that could hold public office in Canada.

That WLN declaration built on the 1996 call to action, and focused on several overarching recommendations, with specific attention to SMEs, academia and science and technology. As I said before, for the first time we were actually invited to work closely with the SME Minister.

[Referring to presentation] You can see that there were absolutely no women in the room —just me giving the recommendations. However I am pleased to say that it was the Minister from Japan who was the first to congratulate us.

Moving on, since 1997 WLN has been very successfully hosted by every APEC economy —Malaysia, New Zealand, Brunei, China, Mexico, Thailand, Chile, Korea, Vietnam, and now in Australia. All of these memories are so important for all of us —as these young girls sang this morning —for keeping the dream alive.

In the future we already know that in 2008 Peru will be hosting, followed by Singapore in 2009 and Japan in 2010. This gives us a huge opportunity to plan forward. We know that there are going to be three other hosts, who they are going to be and how we can work with them.

So what is the WLN? It really includes a multi-sectoral approach. We have a high-level commitment to ensuring that the issues of women are included at all levels of APEC decision making. We have commitments from host economies, which obviously are extremely important, and I can't thank Australia enough for your commitment to this meeting. We have support from the APEC Secretariat out of Singapore, we have

continual commitment from WLN participants, and we have tried to adopt what was an APEC structure where we have the past Chair, current Chair and future Chair work together to find some type of continuity.

What have some of our achievements been?

I'm very proud of these.

- I think the first was actually launching (I think that was the greatest achievement) with the full support of senior leaders.
- We've been able to create awareness among women throughout the APEC region in the last eleven years; we've had eleven meetings (this is our 12th).
- We were responsible for the recommendations that led to the first two women ministers' meetings on women's affairs in APEC in 1998 in the Philippines and in 2002 in Mexico.
- We were responsible for something called AGGI, the Ad hoc Group on Gender Integration, which then was used to study the effect of gender in APEC, and that went on to create the Gender Focal Point Network, which then undertook gender training through all of the various APEC forums.
- We were able to help the Digital Economy Forum for Women come to life, and we've been supporting that for the last four or five years, and again its successful meeting this year.
- We've had some more achievements being recognized as best practices at the OECD.
- We've had access to ministers in the Asia Pacific
- We've had the participation and education of more than 4,500 women. In 1999, Canada and New Zealand co-hosted the first ever Indigenous Women Exporters in Business seminar. That year we also reported to the ministers responsible for trade, and truly it was an historic meeting where for the very first time in any forum in the world, indigenous women were recognized for their specific and unique contributions to the economy.
- We were responsible for the creation of the micro-enterprise sub working group of the SME Working Group, and this year we are pleased to announce that my colleague Francine Whiteduck and I are actually working on a new type of model for micro-enterprise development, which actually came out of ideas that have been developing through the WLN for the last 11 years.

But we still have our work to do.

- We want to continue to grow, to continue to agree on a vision.
- We need to develop more continuity so the host economy doesn't have to start from the beginning each year.

- We need to mentor the next generation —these fantastic young women we saw this morning.
- We need to attract and retain women at the highest level within WLN.
- We need to improve our coordination —we've got our plan for our Secretariat running now so we just have to get the Secretariat up and running.
- We'd like to secure some core funding. The unique thing about the WLN is that we have existed at the pleasure of the host economy every year since 1996, but we're not an official part of APEC. That's a good thing at times and not a good thing at other times. It's a good thing because we are not restricted by all of the conventions of APEC, but sometimes it's a bad thing because we are not able to get core funding. We have actually had to exist with assistance from private sponsors, sectors and the host economy every year. In some respects this makes us vulnerable, but it also makes us stronger because the people who are supporting it obviously believe in it very much.
- We need to create our central archive rather than depending on my memory, which is fading dramatically, to keep the dream alive. I think that we really need to continue to shake up APEC.

My vision is:

- to build on our past achievements
- to get our Secretariat firmly established this year
- to maintain our database and archives, and to breathe life into all sectors
- to set some actionable goals this year
- to develop some teams that continue to work throughout the year and will help our future hosts
- to welcome that next generation, and
- to keep the dream alive.

So I ask you during this WLN meeting to come with your vision: what would you like WLN to be? Come with your ideas: what can we do, what can we all do together? Come with a commitment —don't just leave here Thursday morning or Wednesday evening having had a wonderful time in this fantastic paradise of Port Douglas. Keep the dream alive; we are not a conference that comes together every year. We want to have the continuity to ensure that the recommendations that we've made in the past and the recommendations that are going to come out of this Network meeting are moved forward. And if they're not, why not? We want to know why; we want accountability. So come with your energy: what can we do, and what can we do here together?

We do live in some more troubled times. I think when I look back to 1996 the world seemed to be a lot more peaceful than it is now, and we do seem to have a little more

trouble in the world today. But women have an important role to play. It is more important than ever that WLN sticks together and is successful. The WLN is all of us.

Over the next few days we'll experience the outstanding hospitality of our gracious Australian hosts. We'll work together and we'll celebrate with our old friends and our newer friends. We may disagree, but we will finally approve our statement and recommendations that will go forward to ministers. But most of all we shall remember friendships and recognize each other. To Diane Abruzzi and Karolee Wolcott from Australia, who have been with us since the early days in 1997, and our other special friends who are no longer with us: Zenaida Gordon from the Philippines who left us many years ago but who truly was the mother of us all, and the wonderful Judy Hawkins from New Zealand, who, sadly, passed away a couple of months ago. Her twinkling eye is missed so sadly.

And I'm thrilled to announce that Patricia Foley Hinnen and the International Alliance of Women will be establishing a women's bank in Judy's name, which will be launched at WLN in Peru in 2008. Anyone wishing to contribute, please contact Patricia or Maxine Westaway during this meeting. Thank you, Patricia for keeping Judy alive for us –she would have loved it. After all, as I said, WLN is all of us.

So I'd like to close with another quote:

They [women] don't have to suffer as much since they can integrate and join forces with other women, build support, build networks, and eventually build themselves up.

When I read the following about the issue of inequality, which relates centrally to the disputes over globalization, the sharing of crucial concerns, the sharing of the potential from globalization between rich and poor and between different groups within the country, I believe that this is what WLN is all about.