

Fijian Servicewomen UK
Commemoration of International Women's Day
8th March 2021

Remarks by
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On behalf of the Members of the Commonwealth Telecommunications Organisation, (CTO), I wish to thank the Fijian Service Women of the United Kingdom for inviting me to be part of their commemoration of Commonwealth Day and International Women's Day. I am truly humbled to be part of this distinguished panel with such formidable women.

The theme for International Women's Day is "***Women in leadership: Achieving an equal future in a COVID-19 world***". I believe that the theme could have easily been Women in leadership: Achieving an equal future. Because our journey to achieving an equal future has been slow and arduous and the COVID-19 pandemic is but one of many challenges that will erode the gains women have painstakingly made in the last century. There is no doubt in my mind, that other challenges will emerge in the future and we have to find ways to maintain our trajectory.

In Genesis, the first book of the Bible, it says that God created mankind in his own image and likeness: male and female created he them. The sentence indicates a clear distinction between the male and the female but there is no hint of inequality, no suggestion of subjugation; no implication of inferiority and absolutely no supposition disrespect between the male and female.

But we live in a world where mostly men walk the corridors of power; they hold the leadership positions and they are at the forefront of nations and major organisations including the Military. The need for an International Women's Day is the testimony of a cry for the recognition

- that women have the intellectual capacity and competencies to be equally represented in leadership positions
- that women must also have the opportunity to hold leadership positions and they too must be able walk the corridors of power with their male counterparts **because each** gender has important traits that enrich families, organisations and societies.

McKinsey & Company published a Study in 2007 entitled Women Matter. This study demonstrated the link between the presence of women in corporate management teams and companies' organisational and financial performance.

Their 2008 Women Matter 2, Study with the Tagline *Female Leadership a competitive Edge for the Future*, states "Some leadership behaviours which are more frequently applied by women than men in management teams, prove to enhance corporate performance. Hence promoting gender diversity and leadership variety is of strategic importance for companies" and I add the Military.

Women have an important role to play in building a progressive Military organisation and Nations. I commend every woman and every Fijian servicewoman, on her choice to join the service. Each one of you is in a position to bring valuable traits, perspectives and approaches that are peculiar to women for truly effective Military.

The 2020 McKinsey and Company Report states that "Between 2015 and 2020, we made slow but steady progress in women's representation. (in Leadership positions) But a "broken rung"

at the first step up to manager continues to hold women back—and now the Covid-19 crisis is threatening to erase the gains of the past six years.”

What can we do?

Firstly I want focus on what individual women can do by sharing a bit about my personal journey to leadership positions in what used to be, when I joined in 2003, a male dominated telecommunications field.

I was the first female to be admitted to the Engineering department of the National Telecommunications Service provider in Trinidad and Tobago. and later I was charged with the responsibility overseeing the modernisation of the entire national network. The 3-year project was executed in 1-year, a feat that the technology provider declared was an industry first.

In 1999 I was recruited as the First Female Technical Manager of the Caribbean Association of National Telecommunications Organisations

I was appointed as the first female Secretary-General of the Caribbean Telecommunications Union (CTU) in 2003.

Last year I was appointed the as the Secretary-General of the Commonwealth Telecommunications Organisation – the first female Secretary General in their 120-year history.

I certainly do not consider myself to be brilliant so how did I find myself in leadership positions in male dominated organisation in a male dominated industry. Here are some lessons.

- Whatever you do, do not limit yourselves.
- Study, hone your craft, know your work well
- be honest in your dealings with others, do not support wrongdoing
- be humble but be confident in your abilities.
- Speak up for what is right and proper
- Remember your peculiar traits as a woman are as important as those of men and you have every right to sit at the tables where decisions are being taken that change the course organisations, countries and the world.
- Put your faith and trust in God

Secondly At the Organisational level, old mindsets have to be broken and I want to use the International Women’s Day 2021 campaign theme: #ChooseToChallenge. It is not necessarily an overt aggressive or forceful challenge. But

- let's all choose to challenge every notion that women are inferior –
- let's all choose to challenge any thought that women can be disrespected with impunity
- let's all choose to challenge the beliefs that women should be subjugated.

This is not what the creator intended.

- let's all choose to challenge, the existence of glass ceilings, broken rungs, glass cliffs, and old boys’ clubs

The last thing we all can do is generational. You will not see the effects immediately. It has to do with how men and women train-up and socialise their children. We need to inculcate the equality of the male and female our children’s collective consciousness.

I hope that these few words will help your understand the importance your participation in traditionally male dominated work environments and the contribution you must make to improving its performance. The Commonwealth Telecommunications Organisation is committed to using information and communication technologies for promoting gender equality and the rights of women and we at your service.

I would like again to commend, the Fijian Servicewomen UK, for this marvellous occasion. I have really been blessed by having been here and I wish you all every success as you seek to advance the cause of women in a very male dominated society.

I thank you