

4th NRN Regional Women Conference, Zurich, June 23, 2013

Women in a Changing World

Dr. Dr. h. c. Barbara Haering

Ladies and Gentlemen

Thank you for inviting me to your 4th Regional Women Conference. I feel deeply honoured to be among all of you this morning and I have already learned a lot while listening to your speeches and the impressive examples you gave. It is for me a great opportunity to share my experience, the lessons I learnt as well as the hopes I have regarding women all over the world and particularly in Nepal.

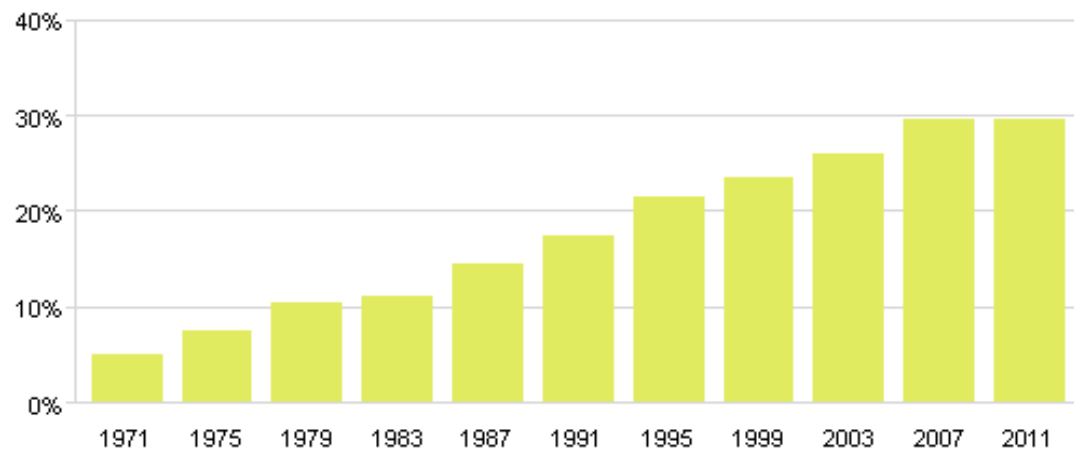
Women count for a slight majority of the global population. However, through out my life I have been active in fields where women are a minority.

Studies: I studied environmental sciences and regional planning at the Federal Institute of Technology because I was looking for high quality education and I hardly realized that we were only a few young women among a lot of young men. Today 58% of all students in Switzerland are women, but there still are huge differences, when it comes to particular fields of studies – we are overrepresented in humanities, arts, social sciences and medicine and vastly underrepresented in science and engineering. The same is the fact in Nepal where 35% of all students at Kathmandu University are women.

Politics: I soon became involved in student activities and step by step this commitment developed to become politics on the national and international level. But it was only when I was elected member of the national parliament some 20 years ago that I realized that at that time women still had less to say than men – even in my own party group. This was an eye-opener for me and I started organising the female members of my party group in the national parliament of Switzerland and later on also in the Parliamentary Assembly of NATO. Successfully we supported each other in campaigns and with particular expertise. Today the proportion of women in the national parliament of Switzerland is nearly 30% and a couple of years ago we even had a female majority in our national Government. Regarding the parliamentary representation of women, Nepal is actually ahead of us: The last parliament of Nepal had a female proportion of 33% – and your home country even has a quota to assure women's representation in parliament.

Frauenanteil im Nationalrat

Anteil der Frauen an allen Gewählten



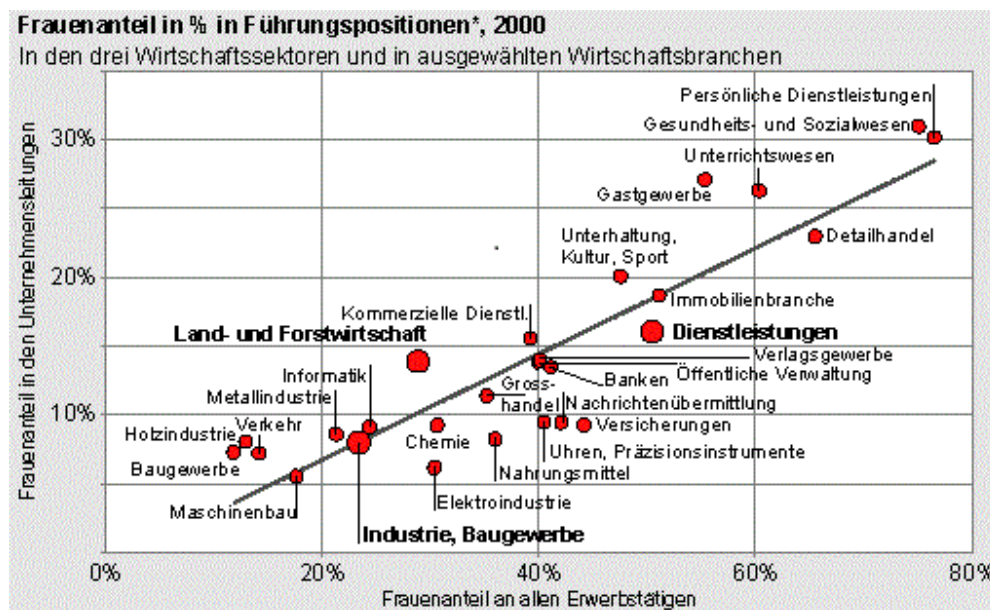
Quelle: Bundesamt für Statistik

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Security issues: The more I became involved in international politics and in international security politics the more I realized to what extent we depend on female resources if we want to achieve sustainable developments and particularly sustainable peace processes. Wars in our time are primarily intrastate conflicts – and also Nepal has gone through such a difficult period. Thus, civilians, particularly women and children, account for the vast majority of those affected by armed conflicts. It is no surprise that some 80% of world's refugees of today are women and children. Moreover, armed conflicts are a breeding ground for atrocities against women and other vulnerable groups of civilians such as children and elderly people. But although women get more and more involved in armed conflicts they usually are not represented in peace negotiations. The framework of peace negotiations has catered for people in official positions of power; whereas women involved in the pursuit of peace tend to work at the grass roots level. However, as analysis of the Dayton Peace Accords show, even provisions that are gender-neutral may create obstacles to achieving equality and non-discrimination in post-conflict situations. Gender neutral is gender blind! The participation of women and girls and the inclusion of gender perspectives in both formal and informal peace processes are therefore crucial in establishing sustainable peace. The main difference between women's and men's peace work that people with direct experience can agree upon is women's apparent ability to find common ground with women from other factions and groups and to work together for peace on the basis of that common ground. In other words: The price we pay for not using this resource is high. However, violence against women is not only an issue of armed conflicts. Violence against females between 15 and 44 years old causes more deaths and disability than cancer, malaria, traffic accidents, or even war. WHO reports that one in five women will be a victim of rape or attempted rape in her lifetime. Amnesty International estimates 33% of women worldwide being physically assaulted by an intimate male partner at some point of their lives. In other words, family violence is no private matter.

You are actively addressing these issues regarding women in Nepal and this is an extremely important step.

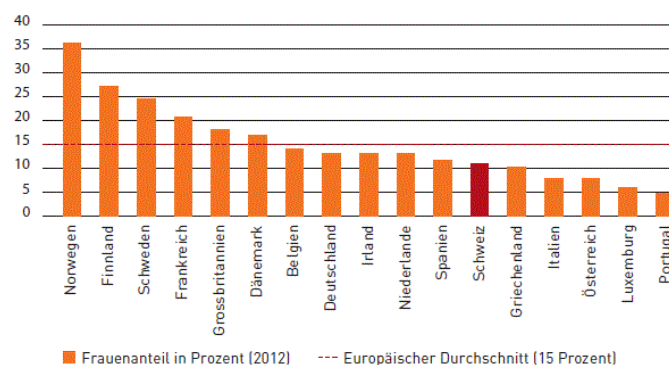
Business: My very first professional assignment was in Nepal. As a contractor of SDC I was asked to evaluate the impact of the new Lamosangu-Jiri-road on housing construction and market developments. Starting my professional career in Nepal led to long lasting relations – to your home country as well as to very dear Nepali friends. Today I'm running a private consultancy with some 30 co-workers active in the fields of applied research, evaluation and consulting – mainly for public administrations. But it's only when I compare our company to others that I become aware of the fact, that the high percentage of women among my co-workers on all levels of our company probably is no coincidence, but the result of an explicit strategy to provide working conditions that reconcile work and family responsibilities – for women, but just as well for men. Today 45% of women in Switzerland are working not only in their households and for their families but in professional jobs. However, there is a glass ceiling: Female representation on in higher management positions is still much lower - except for the domain of social and health care and it is only approximately 10% on boards of administration.



Grafik 2

► Im europäischen Durchschnitt sind 15,6 Prozent aller Verwaltungsratsmitglieder weiblich, in der Schweiz sind es 11,6 Prozent.

Frauenanteil in Verwaltungsräten europäischer Unternehmen



Quelle: Egon Zehnder International (2012), European Board Diversity Analysis 2012, eigene Darstellung.⁹

Ladies and Gentlemen, let me conclude with five lessons I learned on my journey through science, politics and business – and I do hope they will be of some help also for the paths that lie ahead of all of us.

- 1. Education is key!** The literacy rate of women is still lower than the literacy rate of men. Therefore, basic education is the most important step to self-reliance and self-esteem. However, we also have to foster girls and young women in higher education. Thereby, we particularly have to back girls and young women to go into science, technologies and engineering. The so-called MINT-professions are interesting and promising. However, up to now they are strongly male-dominated.
- 2. Women have to improve their networking.** Networking and mutually supporting each other are preconditions for success in a competitive world. Because of their straight careers men traditionally have stronger business ties than women. We have to compensate. Thereby, your conference is a perfect example.
- 3. Women have to claim partnership.** Working towards a well-balanced partnership in our private relations and marriages is a challenge for most of us – not only in Nepal, but also in Switzerland. Thereby, every couple has to find its' own balance – in view of equal opportunities, of a sustainable relationship – and as a good example for our children.
- 4. Violence against women is an every-day challenge – everywhere.** We have to start talking about sexual violence, if we want people and the society to become aware of this threat. Gender discrimination in private feeds gender discrimination in public. And: Gender discrimination in public reinforces gender violence in private.
- 5. Our united diversity will succeed.** Women and their lives are as diverse as the flowers of the world and as colourful as your saris. Building up a global female biosphere through ought the last decades has strongly supported our female human rights and our aspirations. Strong women anywhere are good for women everywhere! Thus, you are important to your home country and to the women of your home country – wherever you are and whatever you do! As NRN Regional Women Conference you are part of this endeavour.

Danjabad – and Namaskar!

June 23, 2013