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WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT IN THE CHANGING WORLD OF WORK

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TO THE UNITED NATIONS**

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Mr. Chair, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

As a long-time advocate for gender equality and women's empowerment and member of the Gender Champions Network in New York, I welcome the opportunity to speak here today. Promoting women's empowerment and gender equality is a priority of Liechtenstein. Liechtenstein's first PR to the UN was a woman, and she was a true trailblazer not only back home but also here at the UN. She was one of only seven women PRs of her time. Today, still less than 20% of PRs to the UN in New York are women. Yet the continuous success of the annual sessions of this Commission, the many male PRs committed to gender equality and women's empowerment and in particular the Secretary-General's pledge to gender parity show that these issues are at the top of the agenda of many countries and the UN itself.

In 1999 Liechtenstein adopted the Gender Equality Act, which prohibited discrimination based on a person's gender in law. To implement it, the government introduced initiatives on a range of issues including on reducing gender stereotypes, encouraging women to strive for public office and on advocating for equal pay for work of equal value. The gender pay gap has continuously narrowed, and while women still earn 15% less than men on average, the gap for 20 to 24-year-olds is now at only 1.4%. Women represent 40% of cabinet ministers, yet overall they continue to be underrepresented in leadership and decision-making positions. Our recent elections have unfortunately led to a further decrease of women's political representation in parliament: only 12% of our parliamentarians are women, and the number of elected women is vastly disproportionate to the number of women candidates. Yet, these results have led to a long overdue and open discussion amongst our citizens on necessary measures to promote gender equality in all spheres of life. As a HeForShe, I wonder: Is it not counterintuitive that we consider it normal to give women the main responsibility in the upbringing of our children, our future, yet when it comes to political decision-making, they are largely excluded? It is a scientifically proven fact that women's participation in political decision-making leads to policies promoting gender equality, for example in the areas of parental leave and childcare¹. This in turn can reduce women's disproportionate share of unpaid care work and decrease the gender gap in labor force participation. Relevant data

¹ <http://www.ipu.org/pdf/publications/equality08-e.pdf>

suggests that full equality between men and women in the labor market would add up to USD 28 trillion to the annual global GDP by 2025 – much needed money to implement sustainable development policies. In other words: if we are serious about translating our commitments in the 2030 Agenda into action, we must increase the percentage of women in the labor force, in leadership positions and in decision-making processes.

Mr. Chair,

Women's economic empowerment starts with education. Girls need to have the same access to quality primary, secondary and tertiary education as boys to close the gender gap in labor force participation. UNICEF estimates that only about half of the world's countries have achieved gender parity in lower secondary education, compared to about 70% of countries with gender parity in primary education. Barriers to girls' enjoyment of education range from negative social norms, school fees and a lack of sanitation facilities to early pregnancies and disproportionate household obligations². Studies further show correlations between a girl's level of education and child, early and forced marriage: to quote but one number, girls with secondary schooling are six times less likely to marry as children compared to girls who have no or little education³. Denying a girl her right to education is denying her access to crucial skills and knowledge she needs to live an empowered life, economically and socially. By this we mean a life where she can make informed decisions on matters of her health, exercise control over her own body and is able to provide for herself and her family.

ILO data suggests that women who are economically empowered are less likely to be in forced labor. Moreover, there seems to be a direct correlation between low literacy levels of parents and a child's increased chance for being pushed into in forced labor⁴. And while child labor precludes children from going to school and developing their full potential, a lack of education also contributes to the general risk and vulnerability of a person to be trapped into modern forms of slavery. Given women's and girls' particular vulnerability to fall victim to human trafficking for forced labor, sexual exploitation and modern slavery, especially in times of conflict where sexual

² https://www.unicef.org/education/bege_70640.html

³ <http://www.girlsnotbrides.org/themes/education/>

⁴ http://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/newsroom/news/WCMS_243201/lang--en/index.htm

and gender-based violence are exacerbated, we need to take concrete steps to empower them. On Monday, the United Kingdom, Nigeria and Liechtenstein devoted a panel discussion to the gender dimension of modern slavery and measures we can take to eradicate this crime. Education is one starting point. Another approach, and one that Liechtenstein is actively pursuing, is to “follow the money”: forced labor is one of the most lucrative organized crime business models, generating an estimated USD 150 bio of illegal profits for the traffickers⁵. We are currently looking into how financial intelligence units can use their expertise to track down the financial flows created by human trafficking and how investigations can be made more effective.

I thank you.

⁵ Ibid.