

BARBERSHOP @ WiSER

Keynote Address by H.E. Gunnar Bragi Sveinsson,

Minister for Foreign Affairs of Iceland

Honourable Minister, Excellencies, distinguished guests,

I am excited to participate in this meeting, and would like to express my gratitude for being invited. Gender equality and the empowerment of women are issues that I have prioritized during my time as the Foreign Minister of Iceland. Renewable energy issues are also of particular interest to me and us Icelanders, so it could not be more fitting for me to participate here today.

The WiSER initiative oozes positive energy. It strikes me as a no-nonsense, „let us get to action“ kind of initiative. Exactly the kind of action that the world needs, to reach the new Sustainable Development Goals.

Agenda 2030, of which the SDGs are the backbone, is ambitious. At the same time, we all know that it is not only about being ambitious and doing the right thing. It is about our very survival and taking necessary action before it becomes too late for our planet and the people that live on it. I am confident that together, we can overcome the challenges ahead of us. Man-made problems can of course be solved. But this will not happen without the participation of all, men and women. I am, therefore, happy that the new goals include gender aspects both as a cross-cutting issue and a stand-alone goal; namely SDG 5.

Excellencies,

It is well known that within many professional sectors, women are under-represented. This is true for the energy sector as well as related sectors. It is true for Iceland as well as Abu Dhabi, and probably every other country in the world. A fundamental reason for this is gender stereotyping, which is harmful for our

societies. It means that men and women may choose life paths not based on their own talent, but based on what society tells them to choose by direct or indirect messaging.

It is the policy of my government to fight against such harmful stereotyping, and that goal is embedded into our national legislation on gender equality. We have every reason to keep fighting, as we still have significant challenges in Iceland on this front. Although Iceland ranks high on gender equality in the international context, we still have a job to do – for example in closing the gender wage gap.

Excellencies,

My belief is that to get past persistent inequalities between men and women, and to unleash the full potential of women, we need to get everyone in society on board. Gender equality is the responsibility of men, just as women, but I feel that too often men refrain from discussing it. That is why Iceland, together with Suriname, last year organized a conference called the Barbershop Conference at the United Nations in New York. The purpose of the original conference was to create a space where men were invited to talk to each other about their own role in advancing gender equality, their privileges and behaviour; and how to get past gender stereotyping. The conference was a success and we would like to take the concept further, to get more men on board.

The question I ask myself today is: How can men contribute to gender equality and the empowerment of women within the energy sector and sustainable development? While there is ample evidence that women are disproportionately affected by both climate change and energy poverty to name examples; what we really need to focus on is how to translate that knowledge

into action and make the necessary changes. Sometimes it is about rules and legislation. Sometimes it is about changing attitudes and behaviour.

I want to argue that regarding energy issues, it may prove more tricky to address gender patterns when it comes to provision of energy, than access to it. I, therefore, want to divert the attention to women's access to finance, technology, leadership positions, networking – and the power that comes with all of this. As men currently are privileged concerning everything I just mentioned, it goes without saying that we will have to play our part in realizing gender equality and women's full access. Needless to say, these are smart economics and will definitely contribute to economic progress, but more importantly it is simply the right of women to enjoy equal rights and opportunities.

In that sense, energy needs to be wiser and the WiSER initiative seems to contribute to just that!

In closing, I would like to draw your attention to the He4She initiative of UN WOMEN which our government has committed itself to promote among Icelandic males. The whole idea is for men to commit themselves to contribute to gender equality. The simple way of so doing is to visit the webpage heforshe.org and sign up. I encourage all male participants in the room to do so and everyone to promote the He4She initiative.

Again, I thank for the opportunity to participate here today.