

Speech: #HerPotentialOurFuture: Gender Equality, Fragility and Conflict Affected States

Whenever and wherever a politician makes a speech, it is courteous and prudent for her to begin by telling her hosts how delighted she is to be there.

The truth, of course, is that politics has its ups and downs and that some situations are more delightful than others.

But being here in DC today, among so many impressive people, is beyond delightful. It is inspirational.

You see, to anyone, whether they be a political representative or member of the public, this place is the highest ground.

And it teaches great lessons, for those prepared to learn. The lessons of liberty.

This is where the idea of government of the people, by the people, for the people, took root.

What we see around us is a great city. It is place that belongs to the ages. A home to democracy.

The American people – like my fellow countrymen and women back home – have held to this great tradition of democracy. Despite disagreements, despite fiercely contested elections and despite referendums our people have abided by the result. The greatest act of patriotism in the last two years in the UK was not the 17.4 million who voted to leave the EU, as I did, but it was the vast majority of those who voted remain, accepted the result. That is what patriotism is. And that is why our nations are strong.

It is the unity of us, of “we the people”.

Eight hundred years ago it inspired the foundations of a great nation.

And two hundred years ago it created a new one.

It’s one of the many reasons why I love the United States of America. That is hardly the most courageous thing that I could say to you, but it’s absolutely true.

I love America as an idea and I love it as a physical reality.

At its core the principle that liberty is for all of us and its denial diminishes all of us.

So I can think of no better setting for a speech about women

Because women's rights are human rights.

Because we cannot achieve meaningful progress when half the population cannot reach their full potential.

Because International Women's day is about the fortunes of all of us.

The belief that human beings have an inherent value and must be free to live a full and happy life is part of the very fabric of America. It's there in your legal texts and it's there in your blood. It is the guiding principle of your Constitution and the birth right of every American.

And I know that Americans want every part of the world to embrace that same philosophy.

That really matters, because where America leads others follow.

Being a country which others look to for an example may sometimes feel like a burden. Certainly, it is a responsibility. But leadership always is.

You are born with potential, you must be free to reach that potential. The government's job is simple – to protect and enable human potential.

To ensure that courage, vision, ambition and determination are allowed to flourish.

And just look at how successful it is. America has a proud tradition of civil rights leaders who touched hearts at home and moved minds abroad.

Many of those leaders have been women.

Rosa Parks drew on deep reserves of courage and refused to give up her seat on that Montgomery bus. She worked tirelessly as an activist.

Maud Wood Park encouraged many great women to join the suffrage movement and began the Schlesinger Library in Harvard.

Susan B. Anthony was equally as devoted to women's rights as she was committed to seeing an end to slavery.

Melinda Gates has shown how effective philanthropy can be, both in helping the most vulnerable people on Earth and in bringing more women into jobs in technology.

We in the UK have spent the last year- the centenary of women's suffrage in Britain- celebrating our heroines.

100 years ago, women in the UK were unable to run for office, or vote, or even be present in the public gallery in the House of Commons.

They would gather in the attic of and peer through the ventilation shafts where they could view the proceedings below that affected their lives.

Often they would hear men voicing the widely held concerns that if women were given the vote it would be the end of everything, the downfall of the family, society, and the nation.

But those women knew, even then, that the opposite was true, that without their rights being secured, and their lives being fulfilled, family, society and nation could never really thrive.

Those incredible women who fought and suffered and endured.

To secure that right and paved the way for others.

Their rallying cry: Courage calls to courage everywhere.

And as you here in the District celebrate a record number of female members of Congress, we should all learn the lessons of our predecessors who supported each other across the seas to help make progress. They saw it as their duty to secure the rights of other women, and they knew their own fortunes were inextricably intertwined with theirs.

As legislators, as advocates, as human rights defenders we should undertake to work together, support each other's efforts, and to have each other's back.

And as we look ahead to the daunting efforts required to achieve gender equality around the world, and deliver the Global Goals, we would do well to reflect on what both our nations have helped achieve for our own citizens and the world over.

Both our countries have a strong record of using aid to help women and girls. And I pay tribute to the leadership of Mark Green and the work of USAID in this area.

Last year in the UK we launched a new National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security. And here in The US you passed a Women, Peace and Security Act in 2017.

I welcome America's prioritisation of Women's Economic Empowerment through the Women's Global Development and Prosperity initiative, which aims to help 50 million women in the developing world advance economically by 2025.

Also welcome is the requirement of USAID to target half its spending to SMEs on activities that support women-owned or managed enterprises.

There have been excellent domestic efforts in America too, including the Promoting Women in Entrepreneurship Act and the recent call on Congress to enact legislation for paid family leave.

Meanwhile the UK has been getting women into better jobs through our flagship Work and Opportunities for Women programme and the Private Enterprise Programme in Ethiopia. We are supporting women owned businesses to participate in international trade through the SheTrades Commonwealth programme.

We have committed to spend at least half our aid budget in fragile and conflict-affected states, and we have in recent years a new focus and strategy on preventing all forms of violence against women and girls, including sexual violence in conflict. Through our What Works to Prevent Violence Programme, we have demonstrated that violence is preventable, even in extremely challenging settings. Our interventions in countries from Afghanistan, to Pakistan, to the DRC reported reductions in violence – up to 50% in just a few years.

Domestically, the UK has introduced the gender pay gap reporting – we are the first country in the world to require all businesses with 250 or more employees to publish their pay gap – with metrics now adopted by Bloomberg in their Gender Equality Index – and a new, broader focus on women’s economic empowerment, not just for those women who are in office or work in an office, but for those women who are cleaning offices too. Marginalised women, older more financially fragile women, women with multiple caring responsibilities, – the invisible women who keep our nations going.

Like you with the women on boards initiative, and today we are announcing new investment vehicles to boost opportunities for women entrepreneurs to attract investment capital – something you have a great track record in over here.

The UK and the USA have collaborated in this space through the G20 Women’s Entrepreneurs Finance Initiative, known as WE-FI and the G7’s 2X. Collectively these two programmes are expected to mobilise at least \$3 billion of private capital to advance gender equality.

CDC – the UK’s financial institution – is the first Development Finance Institution to have a gender strategy. It has worked with OPIC and other DFIs on the Gender Finance Collaborative and made a welcome commitment to step up support for The BoardRoom Africa – a partnership organisation that aims to double female representation from 14 per cent to 28 per cent in Africa’s boardrooms by 2028.

We are also working to ensure all girls around the world get at least 12 years of education, including those most marginalised, especially girls with disabilities.

But there is much more to do.

And it is the women and girls who need us to deliver for them that motivate me to keep going.

I’m grateful for all of you being here today. I wonder what made you get involved in your respective organisations and this agenda?

What made you want to help? To change things, to make the world a better place?

Were you angry at the injustice?

At girls being denied an education – 63 million as I speak to you today?

Angry that one in three women in the world have experienced physical or sexual violence?

Or that in some conflict zones, that rises to almost all women?

Or that 12 year olds are being forced to marry? Or that young teenagers are expected to become mothers and many are dying in the process?

Angry because still in 15 countries women still need permission from a man to work?

Angry that many who do work often take home less money for the same work?

And that millions of girls around the world, and thousands in our nations are at risk from FGM?

Or that 200 million women with disabilities live below the poverty line?

Or maybe you are angry at how you have been treated

Some of you might be concerned

That the global gender pay gap is widening for the first time in decades.

Or that unless we all help ensure every woman is in control of her own body, how many children she has and when, all our efforts on economic empowerment will be for nothing.

Or maybe you are frustrated at all that talent and potential wasted?

The McKinsey Global Institute estimates that equality in the job market would add an extra 28 trillion dollars to global GDP by 2025.

But what can't be measured is the lost ideas, the dreams never realised, the businesses never built, and the opportunities missed.

And some of you might be hopeful, I know I am.

When we include women great things happen. When women play an active role in peace negotiations they are one third more likely to last.

When we serve in services or in the armed forces, these organisations become so much more operationally effective.

Whatever your motivation for being here today and for caring about women's rights and equality, I want to thank you.

Because every human endeavor depends upon that.

And success depends on our two nations, our aid funds, our expertise, our mobilisation of private capital and all we have to offer to create opportunities and enable freedom for all.

The United Kingdom and the USA are friends and allies in this cause.

When our two countries stand together and work together, to protect and enable human potential not only for our own people, but for ALL people.

History shows us that we can do great and enduring things.

In the United States, the women's suffrage movement adopted tactics such as peaceful protest and parades. It was the same in the UK. And other nations followed.

Recently we have collaborated on tackling HIV and championing gender equality to take its rightful place at the heart of the Sustainable Development Goals.

We have joined forces in the global Call to Action to Protect Women and Girls in Emergencies, so that humanitarian aid will reach those who need it most.

And we are united in our determination to end the scourge of modern slavery, the victims of which are overwhelmingly female.

In the last 6 years together we have supported nearly 45 million girls to get an education. This included 2 million of the most marginalised girls in crisis and conflict-affected areas with USAID's support. And the UK, as part of our girls' education challenge, is supporting a further 1.5 million girls, including girls with disabilities and those who have left school due to pregnancy or stigma.

Together through Gavi, UK and US support has helped vaccinate over 500,000 girls in the world's poorest countries against HPV virus, the leading cause of cervical cancer.

And we are currently the leading two donors to the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, TB and Malaria, last year we helped 6 million pregnant women receive preventive treatment for malaria, and provided medicine for nearly 700 thousand HIV + mothers to prevent transmission to their babies.

We have supported millions of women to vote. Specifically, in DRC we have educated 2 million women about exercising their right to vote and trained 9,000 female election observers. In Pakistan, together with Japan, we have (supported 713,000 women to register to vote.

When we work together, we can achieve anything.

Without our support in these areas it is clear we will not achieve the global goals.

The global Women's movement needs America and it needs the UK.

For my Prime Minister and for your President this has to be a vital cause.

One of the biggest mistakes that a legislator can make is to assume that progress inevitably marches on.

But it won't. And it could get worse.

Technological innovation can make us richer and amplify our voices, but it also carries enormous risks, particularly for women and girls.

War and crises are major catalysts for extreme poverty and women and girls are often the most impacted.

Climate change has the potential to wipe out development gains, with women and girls being the most vulnerable in the event of such a catastrophe.

And there are political challenges too in both our democracies.

So, what can we do to keep making progress?

We need to consider each and every aspect of women's rights.

That means working to end violence against women and girls, enabling girls to access at least 12 years of quality education, empowering women economically, protecting women and girls in conflict and crises, and promoting sexual and reproductive health and rights.

We can work together to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals and true equal rights. That is the right thing to do and it is the smart thing to do.

The UK wants to broaden and deepen such partnerships. If organisations such as the DFIs, the World Bank, bilateral donors, NGOs and women's movements can collaborate and share resources and best practice, they will have a far greater impact.

This means creating new alliances for challenge and change.

At every moment and in every place, we need to do all we can to uphold the rights of women and girls.

Their right to be safe, to have choice, to organise.

This means reversing shrinkage in the civic space by supporting women's rights organisations and movements. Women – and especially those of us who already have a voice – must use our combined power to change and track progress.

And we need more men to help.

You've heard of MAGA

Now meet MACA

Men As Change Agents, a programme from the UK women's business council which sees male CEOs demonstrating leadership in this area.

MACA's dynamic membership know you don't have to be a victim of injustice, to want to fight it.

Lincoln wasn't a slave.

John F Kennedy had his civil rights.

Melinda and Bill Gates have never been denied basic services.

Yet they all stepped up because others did not have what they enjoyed.

Because it was both the right and the smart thing to do.

This agenda needs men to support it.

And it needs America.

Without American leadership, the life chances of women and girls around the world are diminished.

Without American leadership, the life chances of humanity itself are diminished.

Our partnership on this fundamental issue, is not sufficient

But it is necessary.

And so, on International Women's Day I urge both our great nations, the bastions of liberty not to retreat but to recommit to this agenda.

The lessons of liberty are clear.

Liberty is for all of us and its denial diminishes all of us.

And that it is our job is to protect and enable human potential.

When we work together, we can achieve anything.

Yesterday I met Ivanka Trump and asked that we work more closely on all these issues. I gave her a necklace made by a young woman being supported by the UKaid-funded Eden project in Myanmar.

The project helps rescue women and girls trafficked into the sex trade or being sold as brides in China, work to help them recover from immense ordeals, often supports them through pregnancies resulting from rape into motherhood and gives them skills and a trade and many of them chose to work in manufacturing and design. She had designed the motif of an arrow and there's a movement from dark to light. To the girl who created it , It represented her personal journey, moving forward, from despair to hope, but I think it is a symbol that can also represent the fight for women's equality.

I hope that in today's world there is a lot more light than there has been, but too many women – in the UK, the US and around the world- still find themselves without. We must move them through our leadership...

Whether they find themselves in the dead of night, or the twilight...

into the radiance they need...

to be all they can be.