

CONFERENCE REPORT

The Leadership of Women in a World of Conflict



Moderator

Stavroula Logothettis

Acting Executive Producer at TRT World

Speakers

Monique Villa

CEO of the Thomson Reuters Foundation

Diana Buttu

Human Rights Lawyer

Sakena Yacoobi

CEO of the Afghan Institute of Learning

Anita Alban

Former Minister of Environment of Ecuador

© TRT WORLD RESEARCH CENTRE
ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

PUBLISHER

TRT WORLD RESEARCH CENTRE
DECEMBER 2018

PREPARED BY

MERVE KÖKER

TRT WORLD İSTANBUL

AHMET ADNAN SAYGUN STREET NO:83 34347
ULUS, BEŞİKTAŞ
İSTANBUL / TURKEY

TRT WORLD LONDON

PORTLAND HOUSE
4 GREAT PORTLAND STREET NO:4
LONDON / UNITED KINGDOM

TRT WORLD WASHINGTON D.C.

1819 L STREET NW SUITE 700 20036
WASHINGTON DC / USA

www.trtworld.com

CONFERENCE REPORT

The Leadership of Women in a World of Conflict

This is a report on a public session titled “**The Leadership of Women in a World of Conflict**”, held as part of the TRT World Forum 2018. The views, themes and discussion points expressed in this conference report are those of participants and speakers present at the TRT World Forum 2018, and do not reflect the official view of TRT World Research Centre.

Day 1

Session 4

The Leadership of Women in a World of Conflict

Stavroula Logothettis
Moderator

Monique Villa
CEO of the Thomson Reuters Foundation

Sakena Yacoobi
CEO of the Afghan Institute of Learning

Diana Buttu
Human Rights Lawyer

Anita Alban
Former Minister of Environment of Ecuador



- 1** *What are the practices that disadvantage women from pursuing leadership roles?*
- 2** *Is patriarchy a source of the conflictual make-up of world politics today?*
- 3** *How can society create an environment that can lead to women's individual and collective empowerment?*
- 4** *How have culture and ideologies been used as an excuse to justify the use of systematic violence against women? Alternatively, how have they been used to empower women?*
- 5** *What is the role of cultural relativism in empowering women?*

Summary

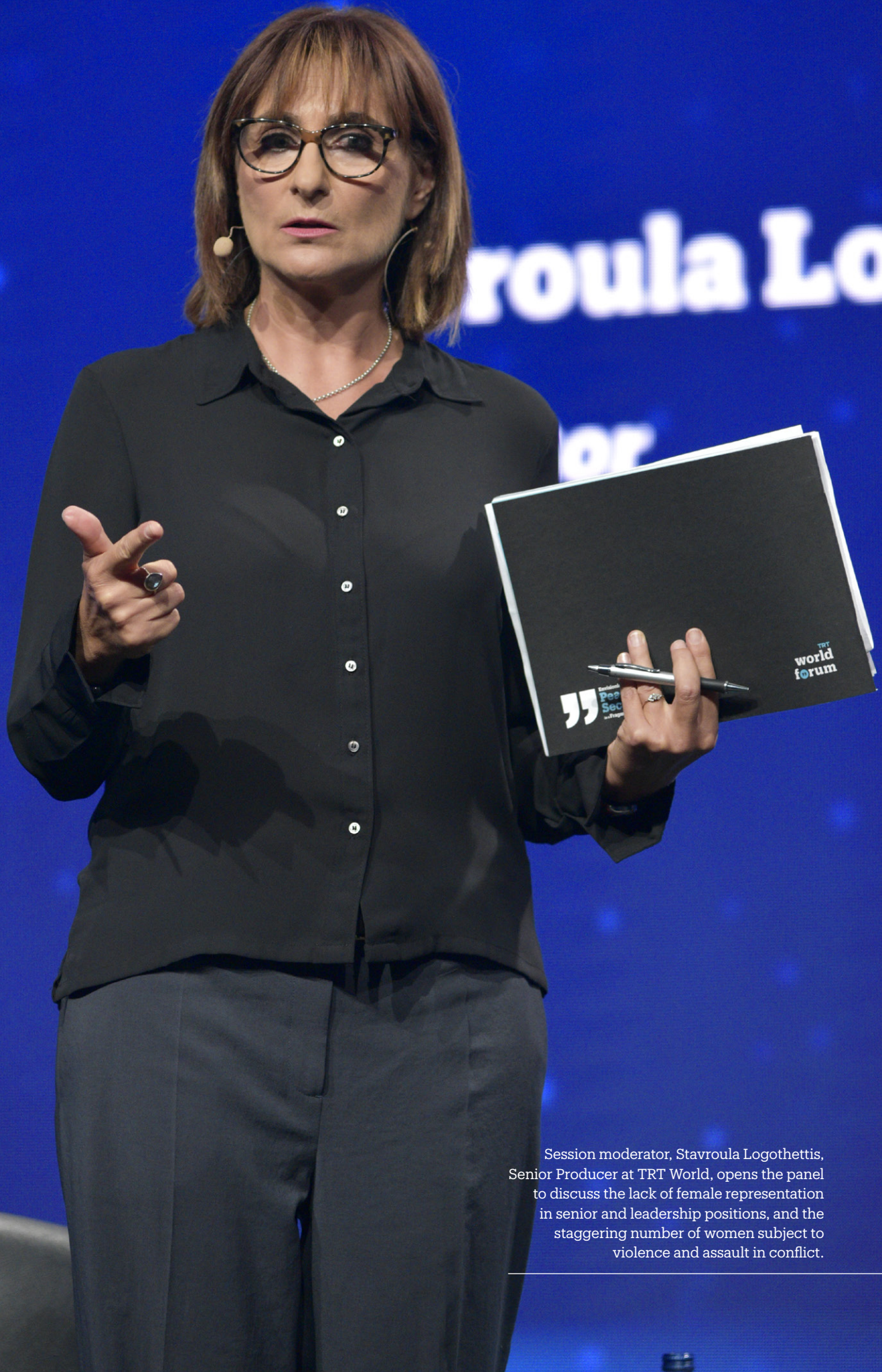
Session moderator Stavroula Logothettis began by describing the status of women around the world and the lack of female representation. She stressed the centrality of women to economic development, an active civil society and good governance. According to the United Nations, only two countries around the world have 50 percent or more women in parliament, namely Rwanda (61%) and Bolivia (53%). According to a study of 234 major corporations which collectively account for almost 2000 of the world's most recognisable brands, only 14 had a female as their CEO.

Deliberating on the aforementioned issues, Monique Villa, CEO of Thomson Reuters Foundation, re-iterated that equality between men and women is an ongoing, if not slow, process. She stated that out of the 189 countries around the world, only 22 countries legally give women equal rights.

From her side, Dr Sakena Yacoobi, CEO of the Afghan Institute of Learning, highlighted three main issues that contribute to the disempowerment of women. Firstly, that women do not sufficiently support each other. Secondly, women suffer from lack of education and thirdly, there are cultural stereotypes surrounding women's perceived inability to do jobs traditionally associated with men. Dr Yacoobi stressed that unless the above issues are addressed, the status of women will not improve. She added that women have high potential and capacity and should be given equal opportunities. Most importantly, she described women's empowerment as essential to the development of societies. A woman who works and is able to contribute to her household will help fight poverty, thereby mitigating potential for conflict and other social upheavals. An empowered woman can also contribute to her children's education, which is essential in creating productive and literate societies.

Diana Buttu, human rights lawyer and former spokesperson for the Palestine Liberation Organisation, explained that the main problem is that the world is dominated by patriarchy. She highlighted the role of Palestinian women as being at the forefront of leading the struggle against the Israeli occupation. She also stressed that much societal potential is lost due to the side-lining of women.

Anita Alban, Former Minister of Environment of Ecuador, highlighted that issues surrounding women's rights will stop being a topic of dispute when gender disparities are diminished. She also pointed to the vast differences between rural and urban areas and how this can affect the provision, quality and access of education for women.



Session moderator, Stavroula Logothettis, Senior Producer at TRT World, opens the panel to discuss the lack of female representation in senior and leadership positions, and the staggering number of women subject to violence and assault in conflict.

Introduction



Historically, women have faced gender-based violence and discrimination for a variety of reasons. They have experienced major obstacles including restrictions in education, the work place and in their own homes. Today, in a world marked by rampant conflict, there is an urgent need for increased female empowerment and leadership. Despite the widespread restrictions imposed upon women from actively participating and engaging in leadership roles, the value of their contributions is apparent.

'The Leadership of Women in a World of Conflict' discussed the issues surrounding the gender-based violence and discrimination women have historically faced around the world. The panel explored the urgent need for increased female empowerment and leadership in a world marked by conflict, and the value of their contributions despite the widespread restrictions imposed upon women from actively participating in leadership roles. Successful female leaders from different sectors were brought together to discuss their contributions towards achieving a more peaceful and harmonious world, as well as to gauge their perspectives on how increased international cooperation can be achieved in the world today.

Moderator, Stavroula Logothettis, opened the panel by highlighting the under-representation of women's participation in decision-making positions despite women representing 50 percent of the world's population and their critical role in economic development. She briefly highlighted a variety of areas where women are subjected to gender disparities and discrimination across the world, including the lack of women in leadership and decision-making positions, as well as the high numbers of women facing violence domestically and in conflict zones.

Women in Leadership Positions

Over the past 30 years, women's participation in senior roles has increased significantly. However, gender disparities in positions of power are still a regular occurrence. The under-representation of women in positions of authority continues to be a problem globally. Equal representation is crucial in order to shift decades of entrenched discrimination against women, and encourage diversity and equality.

According to the UN, women represent 50 percent or more in parliament in only two countries: Rwanda has 61 percent and Bolivia has 53 percent. The US on the other hand lags behind most established democracies in female representation with just 20 percent in governmental positions, which has been declining since 2000.

Gender disparities are also apparent in business. According to one study, only 14 out of 234 major companies had a woman as their CEO. These companies account for almost 2000 of the world's most recognisable consumer brands, and nine of which have no women in executive positions.

Monique Villa, CEO of the Thomson Reuters Foundation, rejects the idea that women make better leaders due to assumed participatory approach to decision-making processes and their innate compassion in comparison to men. Illustrating her point, she invoked the examples of Margaret Thatcher, Theresa May, Indira Gandhi, Benazir Bhutto and Aung San Suu Kyi as female leaders who contradicted the assumption of women innately being more compassionate and less authoritarian. She added that female CEOs have not historically displayed radically alternative approaches to corporate leadership. For Villa, the development of society requires participation in the workforce, and not necessarily in leadership roles.

Sakena Yacoobi, CEO of the Afghan Institute of Learning, relates one of the strengths of women as successful leaders to their ability to negotiate and communicate effectively. Women succeed as mediators and negotiators because of qualities traditionally perceived as feminine and maternal. Good communication skills reflect on teamwork performance, and as a result, working as a team leader becomes more impactful where each team player's input is taken into consideration.



Anita Alban, Former Minister of Environment of Ecuador, stressed that education should not be limited to skills such as reading and writing, but should also include education in human interaction and relationships.

This multifaceted performance is derivative of how women are able to perform in multiple roles with different responsibilities. Traditionally, women have juggled the role of the homemaker and career woman. The multiplicity and overlapping of roles often provoke conflict and stress, illustrating more complex coping styles. It is this combination of skills that enables women to bring justice and equality through discussions with the community to overcome challenges and qualify as successful leaders. Yacoobi reflected on her country, Afghanistan, and the perseverance of women during conflict, displaying their participation in the workforce as well as in the home.

It is important to understand that women work in different ways. Buttu points to the underlying factor of successful female leadership not because of innate compassionate traits, but the ethic of placing more importance on people rather than structures. Women as leaders tend to lead by consensus and in an effective and inclusive manner, rather than by a top-down approach.

Women have stood at the forefront of uprisings and protests, struggling against undemocratic practices and injustices. In the case of Palestine, women have played an active part in the resistance against the Israeli occupation. Buttu shared a powerful example of how Palestinian women would collectively claim Palestinian boys as their sons in order to prevent their arrest by Israeli security forces. She explained that multiple women would come and pull that child away from the soldier. The fact that all of these women can come together is an indication of women working together collectively as a society and as a community.

According to Buttu, the patriarchal system denies women's ability to "break the glass ceiling" and rise to positions of leadership. 60 percent of university entrants in Palestine are women, however they occupy only 20 percent of the workforce. Women's brainpower is not being utilised and their capacities are being overlooked.

It is this combination of skills that enables women to bring justice and equality through discussions with the community to overcome challenges and qualify as successful leaders.

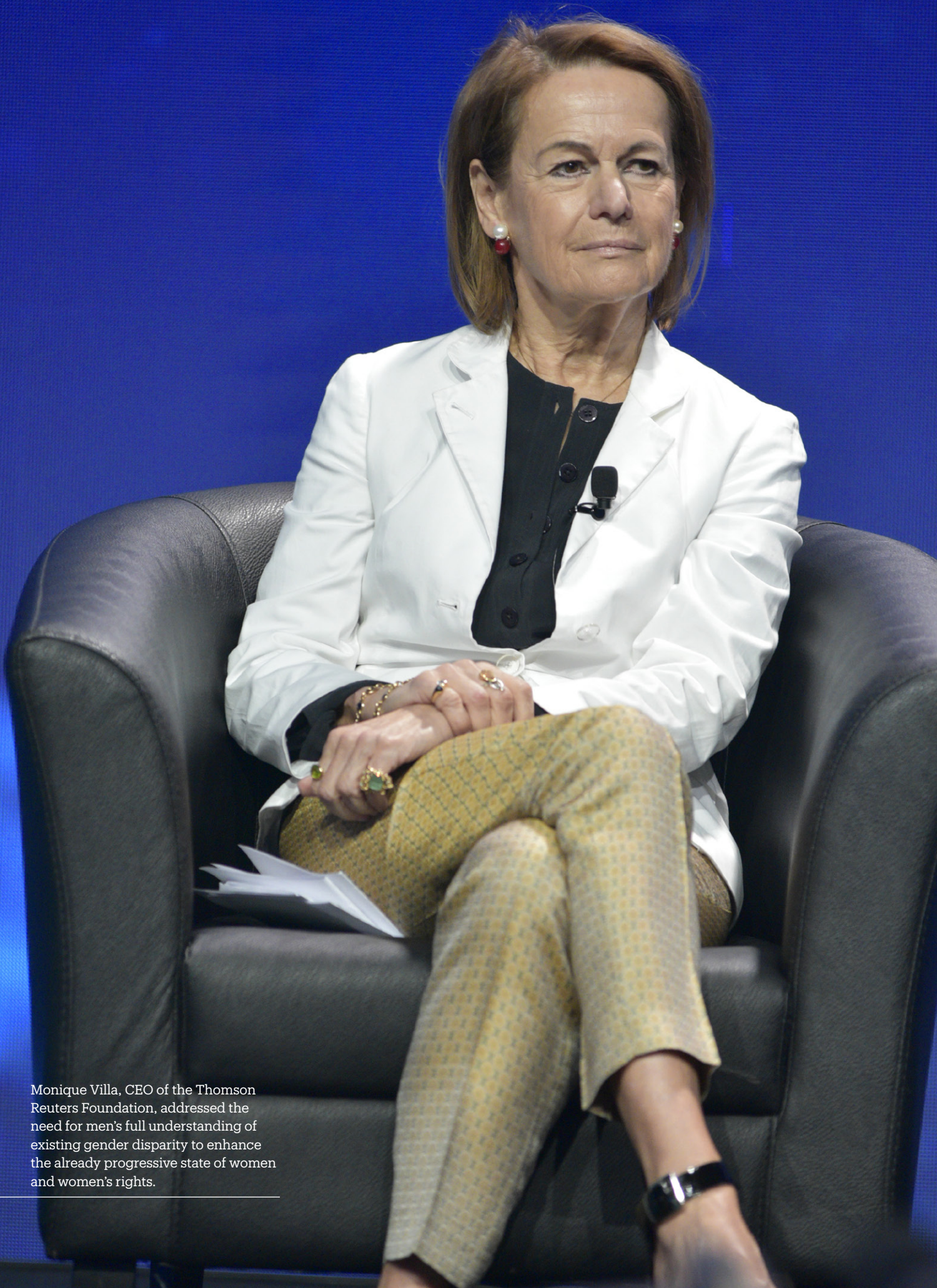
Violence against Women

Violence against women is a global problem that denies women and girls their fundamental human rights and the same opportunities afforded to men. The United Nations defines violence against women as “any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or mental harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life.” One in three women experience domestic violence or sexual assault in every country and from all social classes globally.

In the case of 46 countries, where there is no law against domestic violence, women’s average life expectancy is typically shorter than that of men. In war, both during and post-conflict, displacement may exacerbate existing violence between partners as well as non-partner sexual violence, and may also lead to new forms of violence against women. Buttu argued that patriarchy, and the continuation of patriarchal systems, are the reason that violence against women is still a pertinent issue. For example, in the US, female sexual assault victims are often questioned on the validity of their allegations, as witnessed in the case of Associate Justice of the Supreme Court, Brett Kavanaugh.

However, the prevention and elimination of violence against women certainly seems to be moving in the right direction. The #MeToo movement is a current example of women raising their voices, giving the world a sense of the magnitude of the problem. #MeToo went viral in October 2017 as a hashtag used on social media in an attempt to demonstrate the widespread prevalence of sexual assault and harassment- particularly in the workplace.

In order for progress to take place in regards to women’s rights issues, it is important for men to listen and support women. As Villa noted, men possess most of the power, therefore, women will not attain their full rights without men’s understanding of the issues. According to Buttu, men need to be educated about violence against women and what is considered appropriate and inappropriate, the recent Kavanaugh affair being illustrative of this point.



Monique Villa, CEO of the Thomson Reuters Foundation, addressed the need for men's full understanding of existing gender disparity to enhance the already progressive state of women and women's rights.

Education as a Means to an End

Education is critical to the empowerment of women. This includes the education of men as well as that of women. In today's patriarchal social and political structures, women find it difficult to overcome the obstacles they face as a result of male dominance in all aspects of society.

The education of girls is an important pathway towards gender equality. This can be actualised through effective government policies, the strict implementation of laws and resolute social action. However, educating boys is ultimately the most effective way to facilitate and achieve gender equality.

Education can be a powerful transformative force, however, education itself must be transformed. To shift years of entrenched social and political structures towards achieving a more gender-just society, both boys and girls must be taught to assess the construction of gender in patriarchal societies. In addition to infusing education in general with egalitarian principles, girls must learn to recognise themselves as equal and resist discrimination and boys must learn to deconstruct patriarchal concepts of masculinity.

Today, more girls than ever are able to go to school. However, in developing countries, women have historically been prevented from equal access to education. Despite progress, women and girls continue to face obstacles to education. Other factors such as ethnicity, poverty, and disability have compounded this. Yacoobi criticised the assumption that, due to these historical barriers, women do not have the capacity or knowledge to take ownership over their own careers. Women must be encouraged to obtain the skills required for senior positions, and should be empowered to take the path towards becoming CEOs. Yacoobi referred to the thousands of women empowered through her efforts in Afghanistan where currently half of the female population has acquired the skillset to exceed in higher positions, should they be given the opportunity. Provided a supportive environment exists, women will become successful in their endeavours for the betterment of society as a whole.

Yacoobi provided an example from a workshop she hosted that included both Afghan men and women. The men in attendance initially called for a gender-segregated environment and




Sakena Yacoobi, CEO of the Afghan Institute of Learning (AIL), highlighted the importance of educating people who inhabit rural areas to shift traditional and superstitious norms, in order to bring attention to the issues that women continue to face.

refused to sit alongside their female colleagues. However, once the men became aware of the extraordinary potential of the women as facilitators, they quickly adjusted their position and came to a better understanding of the issues at hand. Yacoobi underlined the importance of the education of boys and men in order to achieve progress towards achieving women's rights.

Villa agreed that the education of boys helps young men and women overcome the challenges of violence, inequality and limits on education, as well as negative messages in the media, and aids their understanding of women's rights. Certain traditional notions can be overridden if men from local communities are educated that certain practices affect women negatively, for example, in countries where female genital mutilation is the norm.

In some parts of the world, the education of women is seen as a threat. Yacoobi regarded this perception as having resulted from superstitious practices and cultural norms. In these contexts, education must be conducted in line with the normative culture.

In most developing countries, 80 percent of the population live in rural areas where there are high rates of illiteracy. Yacoobi states that the mindset and perceptions of inhabitants of rural areas must be changed through the education of both genders. Education is not limited to academia, but an expansive concept on a human level.



Diana Buttu, Human Rights Lawyer, comments that despite the fact that the majority of enrolled university students are female, their intellectual capacity is not being utilised properly.

Conclusion

The inherent problems in viewing change and progress in terms of leadership roles for women in a world of conflict comes with various factors that must be taken into consideration. Although one may not be able to say for certain that a higher presence of women in political leadership would lead to less conflicts, it may be possible to identify other positive effects that could emerge as a result. Betty Reardon asserted that peace is not defined solely by the absence of war, but equally by the presence of social equality- an area which is largely considered to be given more precedence by female leaders. By investing in building the capacities of women, the international community can encourage more women to take on leadership roles. Only by creating more inclusive policies inviting the participation of women can the UN and international governments understand the vital role women play.

