

HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL 56

Shattering Glass Ceilings: Recognizing Female Diplomats' Contributions within the UN System

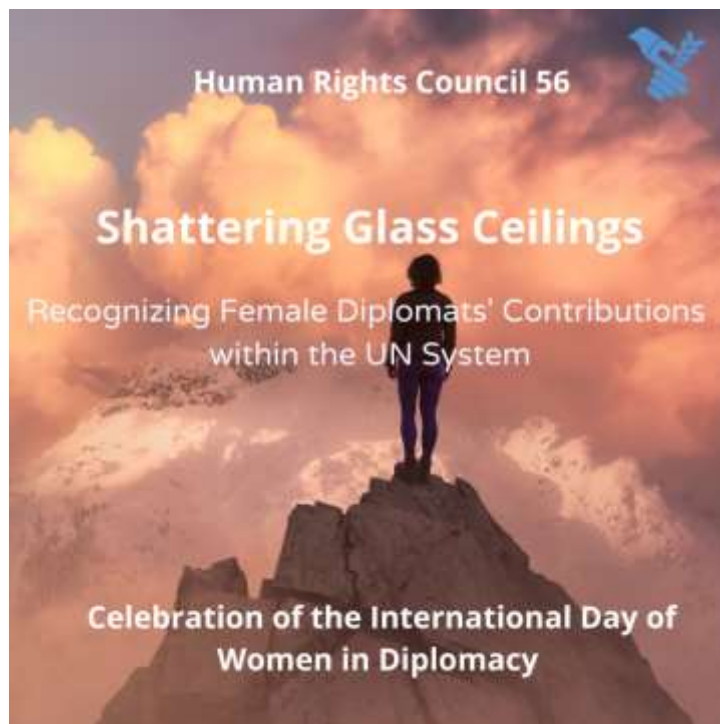
Celebration of the International Day of Women in Diplomacy

24 June 2024



Opening Remarks

Ms. Adriana Quiñones, Deputy Director of UN Women in Geneva, opened the ceremony dedicated to celebrating the remarkable achievements of women in the field of diplomacy. In June 2022, the General Assembly declared June 24 as the International Day of Women in Diplomacy, passing a resolution by consensus that emphasized the crucial role of women's equal participation at all decision-making levels in achieving sustainable development, peace and democracy.



Women impacted the world of diplomacy by challenging discriminatory social norms intended to limit their leadership and participation in a field traditionally dominated by men. Their leadership styles, expertise and priorities broadened the scope of issues under consideration and the quality of the outcomes. Women in Diplomacy continued to define international normative frameworks that integrated the needs and aspirations of women and girls in all their

diversity. Since the launch of the system-wide gender parity strategy in 2017, significant strides had been made towards building a gender-equal and more inclusive human system.

According to the UN Gender Parity Dashboard, **gender equality** had been achieved among senior leadership at both Under-Secretary-General and Assistant-Secretary-General levels for **the first time in the UN history in 2020**. Furthermore, parity had also been reached among heads and deputy heads of mission and resident co-managers. Evidence showed that women in diplomacy influenced decision-making processes with sustainable outcomes, including in peace processes. Still, there was so much to be done. Women remained underrepresented in positions of power, including in top diplomatic posts. Women made up only 26% of Permanent Representatives in Permanent Missions to UN New York, 35% to UN Geneva, and 33% to UN Vienna. It was high time to recognize and celebrate the ways in which women were breaking barriers, making a difference in the field of diplomacy, including multilateral.



Welcoming Remarks

H.E. Omar Zniber, President of the UN Human Rights Council, stressed that the significant female presence in the UN Human Rights Room showed clearly that we were able to achieve - as soon as possible - gender equity and parity for diplomacy, for women and men in diplomacy, and particularly at the highest level, and all the levels, notably at the decision-making one. The President asked **what would be diplomacy without women**. The answer was quite simple. It would be less representative, less effective, and less creative. The inclusion of women was essential for modern diplomacy, ensuring it was balanced and capable of addressing the complex challenges faced. However, it must be acknowledged that the journey for women diplomats was not easy. Throughout their careers, they faced various difficulties, influenced by cultural, institutional, and individual factors. **Discrimination, biases, gender representation, lack of recognition, distribution of care**: the list was long, and certainly women attending the event had experienced such difficulties. **Eleanor Roosevelt, Marie Robinson, Marilyn T. Peeley, and Lisa Lashley** made significant contributions to diplomacy within the UN and beyond.

By momentarily taking off his hat as President of the HRC and wearing the hat of a proud Moroccan citizen engaged for gender parity and gender equality, engaged for women's rights, President Zniber paid tribute to a great lady who represented her country with the utmost respect at the United Nations, **Mrs. Halima Werzazi**. She was among the first Moroccan women to hold important diplomatic positions, such as the presidency of the Third Committee in UN New York. Her writings revealed a career marked by an unwavering commitment to human rights and a desire to contribute to an ecosystem aimed at the effective implementation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). She wrote a book on her own experience within the UN system; an exemplary lady who, at the age of over 90 years old, was still striving for women's rights both in her homeland and within the UN.

Ms. Tatiana Valovaya, Director-General of the United Nations Office at Geneva, while noting the persistent existence of glass ceilings, underscored that history taught us that we could break

it, as tangibly perceptible by the presence of so many female diplomats filling the Human Rights Room at UN Geneva on this celebration. Exactly 79 years ago this day, the Charter of the United Nations was signed by 850 participants, and only four were women. Thanks to them, equality between men and women was enshrined in the Charter, as well as the prohibition of discrimination based on sex for UN positions, which paved the way for **women's employment in multilateral institutions**. In 1951, the first woman who chaired a UN Committee came from Chile; two years later, the first female representative of India became the President of the UN General Assembly; in 1958, the first female Permanent Representative to the UN came from Sweden; in 1972, the first female Assistant-Secretary-General from Finland and the first female President of the UN Security Council from Guinea; and in 1996, the first female Deputy Secretary-General from Canada. These **pioneering women from all regions of the world** paved the way for us, women, today. However, we still had a long way to go. In 2024 in Geneva, only 35% of all the ambassadors were women. Only in 2017, a system-wide parity policy was introduced at the UN. As a result, already in 2024, there was parity between men and women with regard to UN leadership roles. At UN Geneva, at leadership levels, women were even slightly more represented. Many initiatives were born in Geneva such as International Gender Champions, the 'Not a Woman's Job?' and 'Women in Technology' exhibitions, to which an invitation to all was cordially extended.



Keynote Remarks

Ms. Rebeca Grynsan, Secretary-General of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, paid tribute to female giants like Eleanor Roosevelt whose relentless spirit ensured that women's voices were edged into the UDHR, and countless others who fought for the rights of their sisters at the very foundation of the multilateral system, ensuring that the first line of the UDHR 'all human beings are born free and equal' really meant what it meant. Many of those women who paved the way for us women at the multilateral level were present in the room and were a testament to all of us. Their work, their contributions, and their achievements deserved to be celebrated.

Parity had been achieved in senior leadership positions within the UN Secretariat, as well as almost parity at the level of UN heads and deputy heads in UN country offices, and efforts were underway also among the diplomatic community to achieve gender parity in diplomacy. In addition, since 2014, a number of countries had **officially declared 'a feminist foreign policy', a 'feminist diplomacy' or 'a feminist development assistance policy'**. However, this celebration also reminded that the path ahead was still long. The 50-50 goal of gender distribution throughout the entire UN system had not been reached, and outside the UN, only 20 per cent of all ambassadorial positions were held by women, even though Geneva scored slightly better, with 35 per cent. Gender equality had not been achieved yet. Women remained underrepresented in leadership roles. Women's empowerment went beyond government, as it was about women's values, our contributions, our perspectives.

Recalling her first-hand high-level negotiation experience, Rebeca's team working on **the Black Sea Grain Initiative was characterized by gender parity**, with many leading roles for women. She highlighted how women in negotiations managed to preserve dialogue and close gaps without losing the focus on the goals and not reacting to provocations. The objective of the negotiations was such a priority precisely because women were aware that their policies had differentiated gender implications, such as in this case food insecurity for women and girls, often linked to the lack of representation of women in diplomatic, political, and military spheres that decided how wars had to be conducted. For women, peace held a different meaning, being not at all an abstract concept, but rather a concept embodying empathy, compassion, and shared humanity. These were human qualities, not specifically women's qualities, but women's were more akin to them because of their experiences. Women were not vulnerable, as the violation of their rights was the cause of their vulnerability. In the very spirit of the **UNSC Women, Peace and Security Agenda**, sustainable peace and security could not be achieved without the equal and meaningful participation of all women at all stages. This Agenda further encompassed prevention, protection, participation, and relief and recovery. Women were not merely seeking a seat at the table. Women were rather aiming to reshape the table itself, to build a world where peace was not just an abstract idea, but a living reality for all.

H.E. Dennis Francis, President of the United Nations General Assembly, stressed that gender equality in diplomacy was a reflection of our societies at large, a mirror of our progress or the lack thereof in building a world truly inclusive and respectful of the rights of women and girls. Throughout history, women diplomats had broken barriers and made invaluable contributions to multilateralism. The UDHR would not be truly universal if **Hansa Mehta** had not insisted its opening line be changed from 'all men' to 'all human beings are born free and equal'. Wouldn't it even had seen the light of day, if **Eleanor Roosevelt** had not used her credibility, at a time of geopolitical tensions, to steer the drafting process to its successful completion. Where would we be today if **Begum Shaista Ikramulla** had not championed the inclusion of article 16 on equal right to marriage, or if **Minerva Bernardino** and **Isabel de Vidal** had not advocated for the inclusion of the non-discrimination clause based on sex in the UN Charter.

The contributions and accomplishments of women who had embodied and elevated the ideals of equality are too long to list. It was high time that the world supported and encouraged their unhindered progress. When women had a seat at the table, peace lasted longer. When parliaments had more women in their ranks, they were more likely to ratify environmental treaties and adopt policies to tackle climate change. It was no accident that the Paris Agreement stood tall today thanks to the unique optimism of Christiana Figueres, who as Executive Director of **UNFCCC shed light on gender dimensions** in leading tough negotiations to proud conclusions, as one of the many women leaders driving ambitious climate action from the grassroots to the highest echelons of power. At the UNHQ in New York, only one in four Permanent Representatives were women, and in the UN General Assembly women were co-leading key negotiations, including for the **Summit of the Future** in September 2024 and its most anticipated outcomes, namely a Pact for the Future, the Global Digital Compact and the Declaration on Future Generations.

In truth, the international community must move beyond the mere citing of statistics towards concrete actions, for a world where gender equality and women's leadership in diplomacy were universally accepted and implemented for the benefit and to the advantage of all humanity. For

this, the international community must **pull gender inequality out of its tenacious roots**, by challenging gendered stereotypes, ending workplace harassment, redistributing unpaid care work, and making the gender pay gap a vestige of the past. Men had to get off the sidelines and actively engage in this common pursuit. Men played an essential role in breaking toxic stereotypes and modelling behaviour for boys and adolescents, thus normalizing the rightful equality of women and girls. The advancement of gender equality and diplomacy must start at home. As the 30th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action was approaching, the international community should **live up to its promise, to achieve equal rights for women and girls everywhere, without exceptions, everywhere.**



Distinguished Panellists

H.E. Mayra Mariela Maldonado Alvarez, Permanent Representative of Bolivia to UN Geneva and Gender Focal Point for the Human Rights Council, stressed that with all the crises the world was facing, women are key in achieving the goals set and much needed, not just as the leaders, but also in all the positions. In other international organizations, there were some **initiatives on gender rotation**, to ensure that the proportion of women representation is taken into account, including in terms of regional rotation, in a way to get more women represented. The clear leadership of the head of an international organization played a key role, such as the strategy developed by the UN Secretary-General in 2017 gave an important **impetus to women's leadership**, what we were already witnessing in Geneva. But more engagement as needed, more initiatives and plans going in this direction. Women were not alone in this fight, as men's engagement was also key. The feminist foreign policy had been developing a lot in the last years, not just because of women's representation, but also because it was beneficial to women and girls everywhere as it gave a gender perspective to issues such as security, cooperation, development, trade, climate justice, migration, and other human rights. Women must fight to be represented at all levels, also in the foreign service, through their diversity such as indigenous and peasant women. Measures must tackle structural problems along with the unjust world order economy, against which a **cultural change was imperative**, along with a change in the cultural minds of women, to remove historical barriers that women faced on a daily basis at home, at work, and in communities.

Ms. Pamela Koch-Hammond, Executive Director of the International Trade Centre (ITC), highlighted that it was a well-established truism that trade policy was not gender neutral. Even with no intent to discriminate, due to the systemic inequalities, the application of trade policy - in spite of its neutral appearance - created further obstacles to women's economic empowerment.

Facts and figures spoke for themselves. Over 2 billion people worldwide did not have the same economic rights as others, including about 4 billion women. **88% of countries still restricted women's economic empowerment** in some ways. 40% of countries had at least one legal impediment to women owning property, which amounted to almost half of the world's population. 72 out of 193 countries - 1.1 billion women - had restrictions on their right to own or open a bank account. The **digital divide between men and women**, in particular between

developed and developing countries, was concerning as it was estimated that 90% of jobs now had a digital component - one may wonder about the consequences of women's lack of access to digital operations. To address this, it was crucial to have active and empirical data that identified the problem and raised the level of discourse. The **SheTrades Outlook**, launched by the ITC a few years ago, was composed of 55 indicators across six policy areas to track how laws and policies affected women's participation. 57 countries had already voluntarily adopted it - including the G7 - as a baseline tool for self-assessment. All countries were encouraged to adopt this self-assessment tool, which was not a measurement tool for external approbation, but a tool for understanding the state of the art on women's economic empowerment.

Furthermore, she pointed out the paramount importance of **tangible, practical measures embedded into legislative and policy instruments**. 'If it's not legal, it's not a right. It's simple.' The imperative: creating change going beyond rhetoric. A whole set of women's economic rights needed to be translated into a reality. First, the **right to own property**, which could be fixed by legislating. Second, the **right to own a bank account** - 37% of women still did not have the right to have a bank account. Third, the **right to start and own a business**, which required specific earmarked policies to address the systemic and historical bias and discrimination against women's actors. In this connection, the ITC jointly with UN Women launched the **Gender-Responsive Public Procurement Campaign**. Public procurement amounted to a \$13 trillion market controlled by governments, in which women had less than 1 per cent. Governments should put in place a mechanism to create a cargo - 10, 20, 30 per cent - allowing access to a very tangible measure of economic empowerment. Fourth, certain **rights had to be embedded in the school systems**, such as teaching girls how to open an account - 'girls don't need to be married to open an account! - how to access digital frameworks, what having economic empowerment meant, and changing the narratives.

In closing, women just didn't want to be at the table. Referring to Rebeca's metaphor, women wanted to be in the design of the diet, the selection of ingredients, and the preparation of the food. Then women would set the table so that women didn't end up being in the lowest chair and knew what the table looked like before starting.

Ms. Nala Al-Nashif, United Nations Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights, paid special tribute to all those pioneering women who left an incredible mark on the UDHR. In December 2023, the Office of the High Commissioner concluded a year-long commemoration of the UDHR, a global reflection on the universality of all rights and a reminder of the shared values uniting us all. It was also a great opportunity to recommit to the principles laid down in the UDHR and to recall the separate but converging contributions of many players across the world, notably the women, the giants on whose shoulders we stand on, all those women who left an indelible mark on the UDHR. This was truly one of the most impressive achievements of multilateralism.

Eleanor Roosevelt played a prominent role in the Drafting Committee and was an outspoken human rights champion, gifted with both the political and cultural knowledge to be able to enshrine those rights in the UDHR, and many others. For instance, Minerva Bernardino from the **Dominican Republic** - who was already a leader of the feminist movement in Latin America - pushed for including the statement on equality between men and women in the preamble of the UN Charter. Hansa Mehta of **India** instilled significant change in the formulation of articles, most notably by replacing the well-known phrase 'all men are born free and equal' with 'all human beings are born free and equal' - a self-evidence for us today, but at that time, it was a struggle.

Obviously, the enduring legacy was the dedication to the idea that equality of sexes was non-negotiable for her at the time. In her capacity as delegate to the UN Third Committee, Begum Shaista Ikramulla of **Pakistan** worked deeply from the perspective of her own religious, political, and social beliefs. She pushed for the articles on freedom and equality, particularly championing the inclusion of article 16 on equal right to marriage, seeing it as a way to fight against child marriage and forced marriage. Drafted at the times when colonial empires were collapsing, these female representatives coming from newly independent countries had experienced - in many cases - inequality as women, as citizens and as activists, which explained why the reference to non-discrimination based on sex was inserted in the UDHR.

Despite progress, the real, tangible inroads remain elusive on many fronts. 2024 rankings showed that women occupied just 44 per cent of positions in international and regional bodies and mechanisms related to justice, international law and human rights. For this reason, OHCHR launched a campaign in June 2023 on **women's participation in public and political life**, highlighting the role of women, women's leadership and conflict resolution, as women's participation was conducive to more durable and more successful outcomes. As perfectly exemplified in Pamela's and Rebeca's statements, women's participation brought an intrinsic added value to decision-making not only for women themselves in terms of their own right to participate, but also because it deprived the world of their contributions. The **CEDAW Committee** was elaborating General Recommendation No. 40 on equal and inclusive representation of women in decision-making systems with a new approach to governance based on parity and inclusivity. It had to be acknowledged that gender-based discrimination and stereotypes were significant obstacles. The conservative narratives that perpetuated those stereotypes had to be addressed, for instance challenging the narrative according to which women's role should be limited to the private sphere, family, and procreation, not because they chose to, but because it was seen as appropriate. **Multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination** had to be recognized, namely **compounded discrimination** based on age, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity, and ethnicity. All of that, associated with human rights activism, created more obstacles, and the prevalence of gender-based violence especially against women female rights defenders and women holding public decision-making positions, as they challenged traditional norms. The international community must push back on all of that, and all attempts to attack, silence, criminalize women's rights to defend their rights to participate.

More awareness-raising and **more concrete measures are needed**, both temporary and permanent, such as quotas for women in public and political life, tackling underlying discriminatory structures, because mindset and culture were key. Today, we had a live demonstration of the power of role models. The greater the variety of models, the more empowerment to choose. Achievements, resilience, and leadership were honoured and recognized. This opportunity should be grasped to recommit to working across all divides, for justice, peace, and human rights for everyone, everywhere.

Ms. Doreen Mottani-Martin, Secretary-General of the International Telecommunications Union (ITU), remarked that women had been playing an increasingly prominent role in International Geneva, one of the world's most important hubs for diplomacy, including tech diplomacy. To date, **nearly half of UN entities in Geneva were led by women**, with several new women leaders since the beginning of the decade, from WMO to IOM, WTO, UNAIDS, ITC, and her

organization, the ITU, thereby marking a visible and tangible progress. She recalled her early career days when being a woman in charge she felt very lonely, sidelined at times, or couldn't get her voice heard. But times were changing, including in the tech world. In 2023, a **woman chaired the ITU Radio Communication Assembly**, for the first time in history, leading debates on some of the most critical technologies of our times. This was an inspiration for women in diplomacy everywhere.

The world could not afford to slow down its efforts towards gender equality, not when less than a quarter of all Ministers of Information and Communication Technologies were women. Not when **women held just one in eight C-suite roles in STEM**, and not when women accounted for **20% of AI workers globally**. Women still accounted for a disproportionate and growing share of the global offline population. However, these statistics embodied the hopes, aspirations, and rights of women and the future of our digital world. When the UN Secretary-General, Antonio Guterres, visited the ITU in June 2024, he was reminded that during one of his predecessor's visits **71 years earlier, only two women were present in the audience**.

The recent 2024 Global Gender Gap Report by WEF found that **the anticipated year for closing the gender gap is 2158, 134 years from now**, almost three decades after the Beijing Declaration and Platform set an internationally agreed target to balance political participation and power sharing between women and men, meaning that we were still five generations out from full gender equality. It was time for action, time for change, and time to celebrate those women who came before us and all those who day in and day out forged diplomatic solutions for our most pressing global challenges, including digital challenges in Geneva and beyond.

Ms. Catalina Devandas, Representative of the Director-General of IOM, emphasised that while celebrating the achievements of women in shaping global diplomacy, we were being reminded about the work ahead of us to ensure gender equality in all spheres of international relationships. The role of women in diplomacy was not about representation only. It was about catalysing transformative change in dialogue, governance, and inclusivity. Looking around the Human Rights Room, it emerged a remarkable presence of women leaders who had paved the way for progress in all fields – from environment and climate action, through humanitarian and development efforts, trade, disarmament, peace and security, and of course to human rights. Their work in UN Geneva, with their counterparts in New York, and with their capitals, was making a difference and setting the example for future generations of diplomats and leaders. Women were not a vulnerable group, but half of the world's population. Despite progress, the 2024 Report on Women and Multilateralism showed that only **four women had led the General Assembly** and that **since 1945, only 13% of all elected leaders of the multilateral organizations had been women**.

Last year, IOM achieved a significant milestone with the election of our first-ever women Director-General. Since then, IOM was moving forward on its **commitment to achieving gender parity across all levels** of the organization. The IOM's imperative was to have workforce reflecting the diverse populations it served, ensuring that all voices were heard. In line with the Global Compact on Migration, OIM embarked on a new strategic plan that placed equality, diversity, and inclusion at its core and launched a comprehensive gender equality policy aimed at integrating gender and human rights-responsive approaches into all its operations and policies. With those tools, IOM wanted to underscore that gender equality required looking at the multifaceted barriers that

excluded women from marginalized communities, including ethnic minorities and indigenous backgrounds, from decision-making roles in international space and institutions.

Accessing the multilateral sphere was challenging for women across regions and cultures. Despite all evidence demonstrating the importance and effectiveness of women's meaningful participation in diplomacy, we were seeing a **reversal of hard-earned gains in women's rights** and inclusion. Power dynamics, economic disparities, limited access to family-friendly care services, and entrenched gender norms, as mentioned, were too often hindering female participation in global affairs. OIM was acutely aware of the unique challenges faced by **migrant women**, including an heightened risk of gender-based violence and human trafficking during their migration journeys. Their experiences and perspectives were indispensable in shaping responsive and effective migration policies that upheld human rights and dignity for all. Their perspectives were also indispensable to reshape the table, to reshape the world, as Rebecca stated. As women leaders in diplomacy, it was our role to make these challenges visible, truly giving women a voice in the programs we developed and in the way we operated. It was our common responsibility to find solutions for the millions of people who were displaced from their homes and communities, and to safeguard and uphold their human rights.

It was well-known that inclusive humanitarian responses benefited significantly from the active **participation of women, who are often at the forefront of humanitarian responses**. Their insights were crucial in designing and implementing effective relief efforts and would lead to more comprehensive interventions to address the needs of diverse communities. It was also well-known that equal participation of women was essential for advancing peace and security. Women brought unique perspectives and solutions to conflict resolution and peace-building efforts. Their involvement ensured that peace processes were inclusive, sustainable, and reflective of the needs of all people. To enjoy these benefits, there was a need to create **truly inclusive diplomatic environments**, which involve, among others, recognizing the intersectional challenges faced by women, whose experiences are shaped by factors like race, ethnicity, age, disability, and socioeconomic background. Together, we shall continue to champion policies and initiatives that empower women to thrive, and further deploy efforts to protect those in the most difficult situations, including women in the movement.

Ms. Amina J. Mohammed, Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations, declared that World Day for Women in Diplomacy was not just a celebration, but also emphasized the importance of including women in peace processes, negotiations and international governance. The year 2024 marked a halfway point for the 2024 Agenda for Sustainable Development, with goal 5 on gender equality at its core. The importance of SDG 5 encompassing women's political participation had never been clearer, not only because women were **significantly underrepresented in decision-making**, but also because the future of democracy and the achievement of peaceful societies depended upon it.

The **highest political offices were predominantly held by men**. Women were serving as heads of state or government in only 26 countries. At ministerial level, foreign affairs portfolios were overwhelmingly held by men, with women holding only 22 per cent of these portfolios. One of the root causes of this situation was the lack of political will to transition from entrenched patriarchal systems, reinforced by outdated social norms, to inclusive decision-making. Yet, there was hope with powerful examples of progress. The election of the first female President in Mexico in 200 years was a landmark event joining the 22 female heads of state or government. And Rwanda's

remarkable achievement as the first country in the world to achieve 61 per cent of female representatives in Parliament.

Our common goals would be **unreachable by leaving half of humanity behind**. Research showed that when women were involved in peace processes, the likelihood of reaching a sustainable agreement increased and the outcomes were more durable and inclusive. Policies encouraging women's participation in political decision-making processes were crucial. Looking ahead to the 2024 Summit of the Future and the 30th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration in 2025, there was a once-in-a-generation opportunity to reaffirm our unwavering commitment to inclusive and equitable diplomacy. The international community should chart a bold course for the future, one ensuring that the voices of women and girls were central to all discussions and decisions to pave the way for a more inclusive and sustainable world, by leaving no one behind.

Ms. Amina Bouayach, Chairperson of the National Human Rights Council of Morocco, shared some reflections on women's often overlooked contributions to diplomacy. Studies showed that when women were part of peace negotiations, agreements were less likely to fail and more likely to last. Their personal experience made them strong human rights defenders and effective diplomats. Women played a significant role in drafting the UDHR, whose experiences of discrimination and violence were encapsulated in a document that promoted equality, dignity, and justice for all. This could also explain why **women were at the forefront** of fighting online harassment and crisis intervention. Women had witnessed firsthand how violence in politics harmed their rights and societal sustainability. Many women in politics and activism had left public life because of it. Their advocacy was freed by their own experiences, pushing for safer online spaces and stronger protections against harassment and privacy interventions.

Particularly today, it was vital to recognize how women's leadership in diplomacy could help overcome the challenges facing human rights. **Women brought to the table new perspectives** and diverse solutions. Their experiences with discrimination and their resilience enabled them to propose rich approaches that promoted multilateralism and multi-dimensionality. The latter included a wide range of factors such as social justice, economic justice, and civil justice. By empowering women in leadership, we would strengthen the entire society. For instance, **quality quotas** showed how representativeness could make a positive change in the way we studied women's rights, such as representation in leadership roles.

Ms. Marilyn Rees, Secretary-General of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF), explained that she had been coming to the UN Geneva premises talking about human rights for almost 30 years, and it didn't look at all like this 30 years ago. Now there were women everywhere! We needed to say thank you to all women who **struggle hard to keep these spaces open** because women knew how hard it was to try to occupy and stay in those spaces. It was really needed to recognize that progress was not linear. Women must not forget why they fought so long and so hard to occupy such spaces, and this because women wanted to put an end to inequality and achieve genuine participation to bring real and fundamental changes in the way in which communities and institutions worked.

