
IRMA ERTMAN

KEYNOTE SPEECH

“FROM CINDERELLA TO CYBERELLA - HOW TO IMPLEMENT WOMEN'S RIGHTS”

Madame President, Madame Chair, dear Zonta Sisters,

thank you for this opportunity to be here in Bonn and address you today and thank you, our Governors and German Zonta Sisters, for a wonderful and important programme.

Many things, many themes that I will take up in my presentation have been said already yesterday and especially in the workshops, but that proves that we Zontians are innovative women, we know our strengths and weaknesses.

1. What do we mean when we talk of women's rights?

We talk much of gender equality, quality of life, lifestyles and happiness - what is it?

I have looked at some surveys and statistics that have been published lately:

- A lifestyle/happiness survey from last November states that the Danes are the happiest people in the world.
- A gender equality index, also from last November, indicates that Norway is nr 1 in an index of 130 countries.
- A salary barometer from the Nordic countries, end of last year, shows that the gap between men and women has grown last year. In Finland, the difference in salary between highly-educated men and women can be as much as 10 000 euros/annum. That reminds me of a poster a few years back: A sweet little girl and boy sitting together very nicely - and the text saying: 'Prepare your daughter for the labour market - give her less pocket money than to your son.'

What do we do with this information? Is it a simplification or too limited a view to look at the salary or happiness statistics only or should we target at some other points as well when we talk of gender equality and want to implement women's rights?

A Council of Europe task force on social cohesion has listed 6 elements of social cohesion framework in today's Europe that should be taken into consideration when we evaluate our societies. They are employment and labour; social protection; education and training; health and social care; housing, planning and environment; and finally, activation and integration in society, in other words empowerment. Gender equality is also closely linked to many human rights issues, for instance trafficking.

None of these things are unknown to us; all of them were mentioned in our workshops yesterday and I am convinced that all our clubs have had something to do at least with some of these sectors, because they are all very essential elements in our everyday life, but also in the life of women all over the world.

2. What does it take to implement women's rights, to realize them?

In my mind, the key word is **ADVOCACY** - we have to know what is happening in the world, in our surroundings and elsewhere; we have to take a real interest in the situation of women.

Zonta is not only about having fun together (even if that is allowed!); by accepting the membership we have accepted a responsibility of furthering the position of women worldwide.

My first thesis is, therefore, to activate Service/Status of Women Committees and their contact persons in each club! Not all can follow everything: This Committee should distribute information in every District and activate the membership to see needs. - In Finland we have a few good examples of projects initiated by women: 'Let's read together' campaign of Zonta D 20 for the immigrant women; and 'Women's Bank' (not a Zonta project, thou), a fund that gives for instance micro loans to women in developing countries.

Zonta International is a non-political organization, but that does not mean that we should not follow what is happening in our societies or in the world at large: There are many things that we in European countries should reflect upon now:

- Do all of our governments have Gender Equality Plans? We should demand that these action plans aim at gender mainstreaming, bridging gender-based pay gaps, promoting women's careers, alleviating labour market segregation by gender, increasing gender awareness at schools, reconciling work and family life etc.

- Are we aware of all the international conventions protecting women? There are more than the CEDAW, even if it is the most important one. Do we make use of them? Do we, as ZI, participate, in every country, in producing the regularly required reports on the implementation of these conventions? Or do we produce 'shadow reports' to the international organizations in our capacity as a Non-Governmental Organization (NGO)?

- There is a new Council of Europe Convention on Trafficking - do we follow the ratification process, the implementation of the Convention in our respective countries? Or the connection to for instance prostitution or need for new legislation?

- How about the EU: Are we aware that there is a new planned directive on common rules on divorce proceedings that will cause some problems at least in those countries that have long ago abolished the need of proof of guilt in divorce matters?

- A Council of Europe convention-to-be on prevention on violence against women (VAW) mandate discussion is going on. There seems to be a wide opinion gap on the scope of the convention: Shall it be narrow comprising only the domestic or partnership violence proper or a wide one including in addition for instance forced marriages and female genital mutilation? Whose interest is it to limit the scope? VAW is a human rights crime! INGO (International NGOs) role in this discussion is very important and Karin Nordmeyer represents the ZI in the Council of Europe INGO Conference. She and her team have drawn up a statement on this mandate and all Zonta clubs should be aware of it! -In due time we Zontians should also follow the ratification process of this convention in each member state - it will certainly raise controversial opinions.

- Do we know enough of the life of, for instance, our Moslem sisters or women of European minorities who often experience multiple discrimination in their daily life by being women and representatives of minorities or immigrants? (sharia; Pakistan abolishes women's rights; should ZI react? in Europe: the famous marriage annulment judgment of the Court in Lille, France (on the basis of the wife not being a virgin) ;trafficking -> forced marriages)

My second thesis is that we should demand law amendments in our countries when needed and follow the implementation of conventions and directives. This is the only way to increase our own credibility and visibility as well.

3. How to go about it? What tools do we have?

- Network! Men have had active networks for hundreds of years (monasteries, masons, rotaries, lions...) - we women, incl. ZI, should do the same, i.e. use the existing networks and further extend them. Network with other women's organizations: Some of you certainly participated in the excursion to the Dutch Defense Forces in the Hague during the Convention:

We met female officers, the so-called Genderforce in Rotterdam. Their reaction to our visit was very positive: It was the first request for a visit by another women's organization.

- Make use of studies. Recently I read an article in a French newspaper on a French woman, an advocate, author and feminist, Gisèle Halimi and her study of the legislations concerning women in all the EU countries: 'L'Européenne la plus favorisée'. She is going to produce a manual on the best laws/practices and I would like to mention that on the VAW matters the best is Spain! Make use of such studies!

- Empowerment through using the international organizations to bring forth our views: Karin and INGOs at the Council of Europe; Janet Shapiro at the UN; learn to know what is going on, use this knowledge in your clubs and districts to make a difference! At this moment, one of the most important matters is what Prof. Hilhorst took up in Rotterdam: UN Security Council Res. 1820 (2008) and 1325 (2000) 'Women, Peace and Security' - women's human rights have to be respected in conflicts and they have to have a say in conflict resolution as well; mass rapes etc are war crimes, ergo, the Genocide Convention may be applied, international trials/International Criminal Court may be appealed to.

My third thesis is to activate your UN Committees!

- Our relationship to young women: How do we bring them up; to what branches of education do we encourage them? In 2008, in Finland 51 % of all PhDs were women, but only 23 % of university professors; in Europe at large, only 13 % of university professors are women - SO, dear ladies, if we expect gender equality on this arena to come about, to develop by itself, it will - in about 2400 at this pace!

- So obviously, in addition to ourselves, we need to educate teachers who can guide both boys and girls to the subject matters they are interested in and capable of, notwithstanding their sex.

- Mentoring: Why do we women always ask ourselves whether we are capable to something when we are proposed a position? Let us support each other and especially the young women!

- I would also like to say a few words about gender quotas: I think Norway started this a few decades ago and the usual quota is 40 - 60. There is even today a lot of resistance to this idea, but the quotas have proved to be a good tool to teach people to think that both genders have to be taken into account and be present in committees, working groups etc. AND why do we content ourselves with 40 - 60, shouldn't it be 50 - 50?!

- Finally, special attention to women's position in any society should be given during the economic recession.

My question to you would be, that since we have had several inter-district meetings in Europe (in Torino, Stuttgart, Lahti...) and Baltic meetings, should we maybe not activate 'a European committee'? It could reflect on matters important to us European Zontians (the project on the Helvi Sipilä Fund, for instance) and put forth our initiatives.

So, dear Zontians, **from Cinderella to Cyberella**

When we lose our shoe, do we sit at home and wait for a prince come riding on a white horse offering us the shoe? Or do we pick up the shoe ourselves, sit into our white (or other colour) car and ride to do the thing we wanted to do in the first place!

It's up to us, dear Zonta sisters, and everything starts at the grass roots level!