

Minerva Foundation for British Columbia Women  
"Northern Lights – Learning to Lead" Conference  
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Speaking Notes  
(check against delivery)

### **Education – a Global Imperative for Women**

#### **Introduction**

I am pleased and honoured to have been invited to speak to you today about the central importance of education for all women. I would also like to take this opportunity to congratulate the Minerva Foundation, not only for this initiative which I understand is a new step, but also for the important contribution the Foundation is making to the lives and futures of the women of British Columbia.

A universal truth worth repeating is that none of us ever stop learning – and indeed in our globalizing world, it is imperative that we do not. The Finnish poet, Paavo Haavikko, has written a poem titled "Roads into the Distances". His opening line is "Every house has many builders and is never finished". This very well describes my concept of life-long learning – every part of our educational experience – formal or informal – is a building block which adds something to us – the house. La maison en français. Coincidence that the gender is feminine? Perhaps not.....

My remarks today will first draw on almost 10 years of work on human rights and women's equality issues at the UN on behalf of Canada, from 1992 to 2001.

I will also share a few relevant experiences from other foreign service assignments in Moscow, Washington DC and now as Canadian Ambassador to the Republic of Finland.

#### **The Human Right to Education**

Is education important for leadership? Of course it is. But it is just as important that education be available to those who are part of the team -- and indeed to all members of society, including and especially women and female children. The right to education is enshrined in Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Paragraph (1) of Article 26 states that "Everyone has the right to education." Para. (2) goes on to say that "Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. "

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights was first drafted by a Canadian, John Peters Humphrey, and adopted by the United Nations in 1948. [Other important drafters of the final text of the Declaration included René Cassin of France and Eleanor Roosevelt of the United States of America.]

It is the legal responsibility of Canadian governments at the national, provincial/territorial and municipal level, to make education accessible to all. This is central to growth as a person – intellectual development, creativity, career options, economic well-being and personal empowerment. It is imperative that women are given access to learning opportunities that enable them to acquire education, skills and professional experience. And share equally with men the responsibilities for leadership.

#### **Education from a global or international perspective**

Why does what happens internationally matter to you and I? Because actions taken at the international level have an impact on what ultimately happens in our countries, regions, communities, schools, homes.

This is sometimes more readily apparent in poorer or less fortunate countries than in our own. At the United Nations, women delegates from Africa, Asia, Latin America, Eastern Europe have often been the ones to insist on obtaining the strongest language and the strictest legal standards. Away from the negotiating room, over coffee or in the washroom, they say to us that these strong normative

frameworks at the international level help them achieve higher domestic standards in their own countries.

It was the good cooperation amongst delegates from all regions of the world which allowed us to achieve a strong focus on education for women and girls at the 4<sup>th</sup> UN World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995. The final conference document, the **Platform for Action**, outlines a renewed commitment by UN member countries to the education and training of women. It states in part that: "Equality of access to and attainment of educational qualifications is necessary if more women are to become agents of change."

### **The important role of women in Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs)**

At this point, in order that I don't give the impression that governments 'do it all' in international work, I want to say a few words about something that has become a very important factor. That is what is known in Western societies as "the Women's Movement." The role of NGOs, women's organizations and networks deserves special praise.

At my first world conference –on Human Rights in Vienna in 1993 -- it was the 8,000 NGO representatives -- many of them women -- who mobilized public opinion and lobbied government delegations to ensure that women's human rights were highlighted in the final document. At the following UN meetings, the numbers just kept increasing. By 1995 in Beijing, the parallel NGO meeting involved more than 30,000 women from around the world. They provided the political pressure – and the incentive – for government delegations to support change. The role of women's organizations is nowhere more evident at the international level than in the fields of education and of leadership.

I can add that young women leaders are strongly represented in these organizations, often drawn from grass-roots organizations such as community Women's Shelters, drop-in centres, youth, environmental and church groups. These NGO women leaders of all ages and from all backgrounds speak from compelling personal experience.

Dear leaders of the future, much remains to be done. A few weeks ago, UNICEF, the UN Children's agency, released its latest report with some shocking statistics. In this 21<sup>st</sup> Century, UNICEF tells us that 115 Million children have no access to education. In Africa alone there are 45 million children without access to even the most basic education.

### **A Canadian Perspective**

One measure of Canada's success as a country is how it has invested in its most important resource – its citizens. Canadians are judged -- and indeed judge themselves -- by the number of people graduating from high school and institutes of higher learning, by employment opportunities, economic well-being – factors which in today's knowledge-based societies flow directly from education. Canadian women are making a difference. Allow me to mention only a few prominent examples:

– Her Excellency, The Right Honourable Adrienne Clarkson, child refugee from Hong Kong, prominent television journalist, author, Governor General of Canada.

-- Mme. Justice Louise Arbour, formerly a Judge of the Supreme Court of Canada, now UN High Commissioner for Human Rights

-- Mme. Louise Frechette, Canadian diplomat, first woman Deputy Minister at Canada's Department of National Defence, currently Under-Secretary General of the United Nations

– The Hon. Audrey McLaughlin, Member of Parliament, former leader of the NDP, tireless advocate for Northern Canada, supporter of human rights and women's equality.

– Her Excellency, The Honourable Iona Campagnola, Lieutenant Governor of British Columbia, who was with us last evening and gave her own eloquent testimony.

– Her Excellency, The Honourable Glenna Hansen, Commissioner of the North West Territories.

All of these women followed very different paths to positions of leadership in their communities. But all have been and continue to be important role models for us in Canada and for women everywhere. And they are all exceptionally strong advocates for the education and empowerment of women, both here in Canada and internationally.

### **A Key to Economic Well-being and Empowerment**

There is an important link between education and economic well-being, both on the personal and societal level. In Canada, women are a powerful force for economic progress. Women's participation in the paid labour force has steadily grown over the past two decades. In year 2004, women accounted for nearly half of the paid workforce. (47%) At the same time, Canadian women continue to make significant gains in education. For the first time in our history, half of Canadian women in their 20s are now college or university graduates. Women have increased their share of total employment in managerial positions, as well as in several professional fields including doctors, dentists, business and financial professionals. In fact, women currently make up almost half the business and financial workforce.

### **Women Meeting a Challenging Future with Innovation and Imagination**

I now want to focus on the evolution of women as leaders – from the front, from the rear and from new directions altogether. Women leading their own businesses are one of the most interesting trends in Canada recently. In 2003, this meant that close to 1 million women, 12% of all those with jobs, were working for themselves. Women entrepreneurs, or small business owners, are a 'growth industry'; women are starting small businesses at twice the rate of men. Women-led firms now constitute almost one-third of all businesses in Canada. They are represented in every region, every industry sector and are increasingly moving into non-traditional sectors. These businesses provide jobs for 1.7 million Canadians – more jobs than the 100 largest Canadian companies combined.

I believe these quite startling numbers are the result of a conscious decision on the part of many of us to choose a less circumscribed, more flexible professional lifestyle. One that is challenging and rewarding, but allows flexibility for care and nurturing of families. Professional growth on personal timetables, rather than the dictates of corporate, academic or governmental hierarchies.

This deliberate choice demands innovation – new ways of thinking, better and smarter uses of technology, openness to non-traditional careers. It must be noted that this trend comes at a time of increasing economic and commercial inter-connectedness, at both regional and international (or global) levels.

A senior member of one of Finland's prestigious applied research institutions has told me that their challenge was to move from linear to parallel research and development. I was very taken by this remark and how accurately it reflects modern realities in Canada and Finland. No longer can we pursue any activity -- academic, commercial, political, research or even sport -- in a completely linear manner.

Athletes cross-train. So must we all. Managers are increasingly challenged to manage horizontally, with teams of equals, often drawn from diverse backgrounds, disciplines and cultures. My experience has been that women bring a particular aptitude and potential to this new management style that encourages and even demands a parallel rather than completely linear approach.

This may be a good point to briefly share some of my experiences about how I have had to adapt my management style and work expectations to succeed in different environments:

Moscow, early 1970's. I was assigned to Consular duties at the Canadian Embassy in Moscow. However, when I started work, I felt hopelessly inept at managing my Russian staff. It seemed every day (or at least a few times a week!) there was an emotional storm of temperament, raised voices and tears. After a few weeks I was so convinced that this was my fault, I went to talk things over with my supervisor. He explained that these outbursts were not a sign of managerial or workplace shortcomings. Rather, they were a necessary safety valve in the society that was then Russia. My

role was to provide the right mixture of empathy, fairness (ensure there was no real grievance) and establish boundaries to ensure the emotion didn't get out of hand or become destructive.

Later I was posted to Washington DC. I often marvelled at the contrasts between the role of women there and in my previous assignment in the Soviet Union. In Washington in the early 1980's, women were clearly established as decision-makers in middle and senior management. Women – some quite young – worked for senior Congress-men and -women, held positions of responsibility in private industry, in important lobby groups, in academia and in powerful think tanks. All had interesting jobs in their fields of interest and specialization. No-one seemed to worry about job security; if they chose to leave or were fired, another position in their field could easily be found. They were prepared to be risk-takers.

However, even in this environment, it would be almost another 10 years before Madeleine Albright – a first-generation émigré and refugee – was appointed US Ambassador to the United Nations and then first female Secretary of State in President Bill Clinton's 2<sup>nd</sup> term. As she notes in her biography, *"Madam Secretary"*, an over-night success that was 25 years in the making!

One final example, this time drawn from a recent experience in Finland. This is connected to the State Visit of Governor General Adrienne Clarkson to Finland in 2003. During the State Visit, Her Excellency opened an exhibition in Rovaniemi, Lapland of Inuit prints, drawings, paintings, jewellery and sculpture. *"Isumavut: The Artistic Expression of 9 Cape Dorset Women"* is deeply evocative of our Northern societies in transition. For me, the most eloquent testimony came from the words of the Inuit artists themselves. I'd like to share with you quotations from two. First, Oopik Pitsiulak, who said,

"I started to see how women think, how they have an artistic way of forming things, like carvings, sewing, any female art... That was when I realized that women can do a lot. Women are very capable..."

And Ovilu Tunnillie:

"I can make carvings like a man can, and I enjoy it because my father taught me."

Words that speak eloquently of maintaining traditional ways in times of transition, of individual empowerment and generosity across generations. And a singularly strong reminder for me that in educating future women leaders we must take care not to forget our collective Canadian heritage.

We are witnessing the beginning of a new era – a paradigm shift (to use a very 20<sup>th</sup> century expression!). Since we are in an academic setting, I want to give two particularly exciting examples of academic vision in enabling young women leaders of the future.

The first is an innovative 3-year project called *"Educating Women for Global Management"*, which was financed by the European Commission and Human Resources Development Canada. During the project, 24 European students and 6 teachers spent an exchange period at 3 Canadian universities. The European Coordinator of the project is Turku Polytechnic in Finland. In Canada, the project is coordinated by UNBC. This project is important in several ways:

- It increases cooperation between European and Canadian higher education institutes.
- It adds to students' practical awareness and knowledge of business life in Europe and Canada.
- Furthermore, the project emphasizes issues connected with female leadership and promotes women seeking management positions.

Its goals are ambitious but realistic and their achievement is an important contribution to 'growing' good global managers. Through the program to date, 5 Canadian students have studied in Finland. Two Finnish teachers have visited Canada and 2 Finnish students have completed work terms here.

One Canadian student has completed a work term in Finland. "Educating Women for Global Management" is an excellent example of innovative approaches to addressing the education needs and broadening the employment opportunities for young people in a rapidly-changing global labour market.

UNBC is also central to my second example – The University of the Arctic. In fact, UNBC is home to the U. Arctic International Academic Office. And one of this vast virtual University's regional campuses is located in Rovaniemi, Lapland, in Finland. This unique institution, which uses both distance learning and classroom settings to deliver its courses, was officially launched in Rovaniemi in June 2001.

The University of the Arctic, from the beginning, has understood the great role of education in empowering the North, in serving our communities, in creating shared knowledge, in building regional identity and thus strengthening the voice of the Arctic. It is an innovative way of using new technologies and approaches to offer educational opportunities to circumpolar youth. U. Arctic is delivering a wide variety of programming, from course delivery to exchanges of students and faculty, to field research. Student enrollment in 2004 was 377 and 108 students took advantage of the North2North mobility exchange program

U. Arctic offers something that we in more southern latitudes take for granted – the ability to chose learning options without having to leave our home communities or regions, for months or years at a time. Obviously, it is a good idea! And one with exciting future possibilities.

### **Conclusion**

In closing, I would like to address one final issue. In Canada, the word feminism, over the years, has become a somewhat negative term. What a pity! I know that there are many unsung feminists, women and men, who have helped me to reach this point in my career. Men who have opened the doors closed to women – opened them from the inside.

The first was my grandfather, who taught me to believe in myself and encouraged me to continue my education when all my friends were leaving college in favour of marriage and families. In those days, women were not supposed to have both a career and a family.

I believe that feminism is for everyone -- it makes good business, public policy and academic sense.

Together we must ensure that no woman or girl is left behind as we move into this new century. We must empower women, who comprise 51% of the world's population, 51% of the world's resources, 51% of the world's creativity. I know of no institution or individual that can succeed by developing only 49% of its resources.

Giving women the opportunity to achieve their potential and contribute their full range of talents can only reap rich rewards.

This, my friends, is our greatest opportunity and our greatest global challenge.

I thank you.