



FEMINIST STRUGGLES & FEMINIST LEADERSHIP



**PROGRESSIVE
ALLIANCE**

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The Progressive Alliance commemorates *Women's Month* by featuring a 2-part newsletter to highlight the work of women leaders and women's movements from our political family.

The crises the world faces today also underscore the deepening inequality between men and women and the ongoing discrimination, violence and marginalization of peoples based on gender. It is with both recognition of this structural problem and with strong conviction that change has to come that we continue to struggle in making public and private spaces inclusive, safe, diverse, and fair. Together, we amplify the causes for gender equality so that they are visible, seen and supported.

This newsletter features *feminist leadership in support of equal rights and the intersectionality of feminist struggles on the ground* under a global phenomenon where repression of women's rights, sexism, and violence against women have become useful tactics for authoritarians.

We are proud of our dear comrades and sisters worldwide who break glass ceilings and relentlessly hold the line. Happy Women's Month!

In solidarity,

Machris Cabrerros
Coordinator
Progressive Alliance



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A roadmap, a clarion call and a moral compass to increase women's participation in politics.

Kasthuri Patto

DAP Deputy Secretary, International Affairs Department

DAP Vice Chairman, Women's Wing

As one of the major political parties in Malaysia, the Democratic Action Party (DAP), formed in March 1966 spent more than half a century as a force to be reckoned with on the opposition bench in the Malaysian Parliament, was in Government for a short stint between 2018 to 2020 (as a result of a devious coup) and finally as part of a coalition Government now, a Unity Government led by the 10th Prime Minister Dato' Seri Anwar Ibrahim.

Shortly after DAP's emergence as a political party adhering to the ideology of social democracy; with freedom, social justice, equal opportunity, and solidarity as its main tenets, the Women's Wing was formed in the early 70s and there began the journey of women as frontline cadres as well as loyal, determined foot soldiers for the party.

The DAP has been a progressive party within the then conservative Malaysian political landscape – identifying, grooming, mentoring and inspiring young men and women to take up the task of representing multicultural, multiethnic communities at state legislative assemblies and on a national level in the Parliament House, bringing the voices of the minorities, the oppressed, the discriminated and the voiceless – without fear, favour or prejudice.

Over the years, the DAP has pushed boundaries and smashed glass ceilings by placing women candidates in elections and proudly watch them grow and once again, continue the cycle to galvanise resources to identify leaders who can not only steer the party in the right direction but for nation too.

I was fortunate to be fielded as a candidate in the 14th General Elections in 2013 representing the constituency of Batu Kawan in Penang and won handsomely given the confidence and trust of the people towards the party and of me as the daughter of a DAP firebrand, P.Patto. My victory was more than a seat in the highest law-making body in the country.



I was the first female MP of Indian ethnicity on the Opposition bench since independence in 1957, after 56 years. By fielding a person like me, the DAP opened new possibilities for women who were like me that they could see themselves as fighters for democracy, equality, justice, freedom and good governance. The party firmly believes in inclusivity and hard-work, holding on to the concept of a Government that is for, by and of the people.

In 2022, the DAP was the first party in Malaysia to amend its party constitution to ensure 30% or 9 of the 30 elected members of the top decision-making body of the party or the Central Executive Committee (CEC) comprised of women and today the party has fulfilled the quota with capable and courageous women with conviction.

This bold and forward act of increasing more women in the CEC also led to more women fielded in the last General Elections in November 2022. Today, the DAP has 10 female MPs - the highest number of women representatives from a single party in the August House.

Of course, we still have a long way to go to ensure we have more women in politics, in Parliament and in decision making but it was the women in the party, 50 years ago, who sacrificed their blood, sweat and tears to pave the way for me and my cadres today to be torch bearers for women's rights, women's empowerment and gender equality for all – not just for the powerful and the privileged.

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Each time a woman stands up for herself, without knowing it possibly, without claiming it, she stands up for all women.”

— *Maya Angelou.*

Happy International Women's Day!



Fighting back with Feminist Foreign Policy

Ann Linde

*Former Foreign Minister of Sweden
Swedish Social Democratic Party*

We are living in times of crisis. The terrible pictures from Gaza hits us like a punch in the stomach. The war between Hamas and Israel are worse than could be imagined. When Hamas carried out its horrendous terrorist attack against Israel, women were systematically exposed to sexual violence. Numerous young women were raped and mutilated. We know that the women held hostages also has been harassed and assaulted. But the response from Israel, according to international law in the first phase, has now gone over all borders. The bombings have up till today (March 2024) led to around 30 000 dead, half of them women and children. And 2 million people are displaced. This is not acceptable and has to stop.

More than two years since Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine is of course on all our minds. Since the beginning of Russia's full-scale invasion, an estimated 3,238 women and girls have been killed and 4,872 injured. While 56 percent of the approximately 4 million internally displaced people are women.

Two and a half years has now passed since the Taliban took control in Afghanistan and the situation for women and girls are horrific. The brave women in Iran are still protesting a misogynist regime, many of them paying a heavy price with prison torture and even death.

In these countries as well as in Sudan, Yemen, Myanmar, resilience against acts of deprivation of liberty and revolts against human rights attacks has had "a female face."

This must be noticed in the international community's response, which needs a holistic security approach that puts human security at its core. Yet, unfortunately, there is a proven track record of women and girls taking a heavier toll from armed conflict settings and crises. In addition, conflict and post-conflict countries tend to show the highest sexual violence rates worldwide, with rape and other forms of gender-based violence being used as weapons of war.

And then, the climate and environmental crisis threatens our planet and its inhabitants, disproportionately affecting women and girls.

In my experience after nearly 7 years as minister for trade, Eu and finally Foreign affairs, a feminist lens transforms our view of the world. We need to highlight the need for a gender perspective in areas that have been considered gender-neutral by default.

Nevertheless, the systematic integration in external affairs of women and girls' rights, followed by the mobilization of

adequate resources and the promotion of women's representation in decision-making (the three R's of Swedish FFP) has produced tangible results and changes, ending by encouraging other pioneering countries which have incorporated (or made an effort to adopt) feminist principles into their foreign policies too.

Several countries adhering to the approach have been on a constant rise. Canada followed suit in 2017. Then came France, Mexico, Spain, Luxembourg, Germany, Chile and the Netherlands. Others have declared their intention to do the same, like Belgium, Libya, Cyprus, and Scotland.

In other cases, the promotion of gender equality has been at the heart of the different dimensions of foreign policy, even without adopting the same labels, notably in Finland, Denmark, Norway, Australia as well as Switzerland. Moreover, the phenomenon is not restricted to states; political parties also adhere to the FFP agenda. In the UK, the Labour Party has namely adopted a feminist approach to development.

All experience speaks to that the more equal a country is, the more stable and prosperous it is. Equality, democracy and economic development simply go hand in

hand. As we know by now: In societies where women are economically and politically emancipated there is more peace and less violence. Women's economic empowerment is key to sustainable development and economic growth.

Several studies have shown that empowering women economically leads to sustainable growth of society as a whole. When half of the population still does not enjoy the same Rights, Representation and Resources as the other half, there is a need to adopt a gender lens to foreign policy. There is a clear need for a Feminist Foreign Policy, and a tool is to always use these three "R"s.

The fact is that research shows that, in the majority of cases, gender discrimination in the labour market leads to a lower economic growth. This is because available sources are not being utilized to their full extent, and employment opportunities and wages are not solely based on productivity but on gender. Gender roles and power relations shape our societies far more deeply than traditional economic models suggest.



One of the most important things with pursuing a Feminist Foreign Policy is the fact that you do it systematically. It is not just and gender ad hoc thing you need to remember.

Much more than that, it is a process and comprehensive approach to foreign policy. For the time being, Feminist Foreign Policy is a developing practice, and there is no single or consolidated definition.

Since UN adopted the resolution 1325 on Women Peace and Security, more than twenty years ago, we know more about how important it is to include women in all aspects of peace and security. Conflicts and the use of arms disproportionately affect groups already in vulnerable situations and often highlight issues of power, cultural expectations, divisions of labour and family reproduction.

Women are chronically underrepresented at key forums where decisions on disarmament and non-proliferation are made. Because of this, we collectively lose important perspectives. Research shows that peace agreements where women took part is more sustainable.

Another important fact is that if women are not at the table, crimes like rape will not be considered part of the peace agreement that demands accountability – it will be seen as an ordinary crime. And we know that rape is used as a terrible tool in wars and conflicts. In conflicts and wars, resources need to be allocated for example to secure places where women gather, like water fountains in Africa.

So let me apply the three “R”s when it comes to Women, Peace and Security.

Rights

– All individuals should enjoy the same rights and be free from all discrimination. Conflicts and the use of arms disproportionately affect groups already in vulnerable situations and often highlight issues of power, cultural expectations, divisions of labour and family reproduction.

Representation

- All individuals must have the same right to participation, education and influence in decision-making processes. Women are chronically underrepresented at key forums where decisions on disarmament and non-proliferation are made. Because of this, we collectively lose important perspectives. Research shows that peace agreements where women took part is more sustainable.

Another important fact is that if women are not at the table, crimes like rape will not be considered part of the peace agreement that demands accountability – it will be seen as an ordinary crime. And we know that rape is used as a terrible tool in wars and conflicts.

Let me take a concrete example: When UN held the negotiations about the war in Yemen, they were held outside Stockholm. We have asked the delegations from the government and the rebels to include women in their delegations.

I am still the only Foreign Minister in EU who has spend full days in Yemen, and twice, and I know from these visits and many virtual meetings that the women in Yemen has so much to contribute with, but they are not represented at the decision making tables.

Well, only 1 woman was invited in the formal delegations. Then we decided to invite women from the two parties and let them stay at the same isolated building where the negotiations took place. This meant that all times when it was not negotiations behind closed doors, the women were present, to be able to give their views. The Stockholm agreement is still the only international agreement valid in Yemen.

So let's go to the third "R":

Resources

– Resources need to be allocated to promote equal opportunities. This means that we should identify and promote targeted measures – for example strengthening gender mainstreaming of grants management and pursue diversity-responsive budgeting. In conflicts and wars, resources need to be allocated for example to secure places where women gather, like water fountains in Africa.

So what are the lessons I draw in trying to influence policy agenda on development, defense and/or international affairs with this feminist framework your social democratic government has introduced? The most important thing is to be persistent, to be very clear about the goals and methods and apply the Feminist Foreign Policy also in all international organizations.

And I cannot underline enough what leadership means. And that goes not only for government officials, but it also of vital importance in your party or your organization.

I think we all have a responsibility to be gender-responsive in our leadership. But what does it mean in practice? It means that those of us who are in executive or management positions should work towards gender equality both internally within our own workplace/organization, and when carrying out the own organization's external work. - This involves for example:

- *Leading by example,*
- *Setting priorities and targets,*
- *Communicating clearly and convincingly,*
- *Managing staff, resources and operations, and*
- *Holding yourself and others to account for being gender responsive.*

Let me share a few concrete illustrations that have worked when implemented the Sweden's feminist foreign policy.

Sweden tried to lead by example when we were a member of the UN Security Council in 2017-2018.

We then consistently sought to ensure that the Council included a focus on Women Peace and Security in all discussions and decisions. We pushed for the Council to be briefed by civil society representatives, for WPS to be discussed in each and every country file, and we showed that it was indeed possible to achieve gender balance among those briefing the Council during Sweden's Presidency in July 2018. I am happy to see how several members have taken this approach onboard.

We also insisted that briefings to the Security Council include a gender perspective, including information on women's role in the peace processes being discussed. That consistent request impacted what the Secretariat prepared. And that is the point – not having to ask.

The same thinking guided Sweden's and mine OSCE Chairpersonship in 2021, when we in a similar way sought to integrate WPS in all dimensions. OSCE is the Organisation for Security and cooperation in Europe, and consists of 57 countries in Europe, North America and Central Asia. As Chairperson in Office – as a leader – I brought this up in all my meetings and I consulted with women's organizations in every visit in the region.

The OSCE Special Envoys to conflicts were asked to especially look at how to increase women's participation in peace processes. Again, we sought to combine country level efforts with dedicated leadership at higher-level to promote multilateral engagement for WPS.

I appointed a special representative for gender, and an Advisory group on gender to advise OSCE.

A typical example was when I decided to hold the yearly meeting with all military advisers at the Nordic Centre for Gender in Military Operations, a NATO certified centre placed in Stockholm, educating military personnel on how to integrate gender perspective into operations planning, execution and evaluation. The resistance was strong, some countries even said they would not take part, but after the three days in Stockholm, even the most reluctant persons said to me they got new insights.

When I was Minister of Trade, we pursued a Feminist Trade Policy. First, to be able to get an accurate picture to formulate adequate responses, you need to analyse the situation, and for that you need gender specific data. Only a third of the world's nations gather data that makes it possible to measure and understand women and girls economic situation.

Hundreds of millions of women and girls are still “invisible” in the statistics. Access to data is a prerequisite for gender mainstreaming. Women and men must therefore be visible in the statistics, so it needs to be disaggregated by gender.





It was difficult to find disaggregated data on trade, but when we found it, for example by studies in USA, one conclusion was that there is little doubt that gender-based tariffs have discriminatory impact. Tariff on women's silk shirts, for example, is six times the tariff on men's silk shirts.

As one result of the inequalities on trade Sweden supported a toolbox on trade and gender, done by UNCTAD (UN organ for trade and development) to assess to what extent trade policies affect men and women differently.

To this end, we started to ask for the inclusion of gender equality in the negotiations on EU free trade agreements. It should be mainstreamed into all areas of the agreements, tariffs, non-tariff barriers, rules etc. We also started to identify barriers that limit women's participation in trade.

Feminist Foreign Policy doesn't look the same in every country, we are here in Asia, and the Global South has to work out how a Feminist Foreign Policy will look here. Because a Feminist Foreign Policy looks not only at the immediate security needs in times of war and conflict to overcome inequalities, gender, and racist stereotypes but also colonial legacies and asymmetries of power in global relations.

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So my final words would be: Put your gender glasses on and you start to see the world differently!

Women's solidarity breaks through blockades

Halide Türkoğlu

*Women's Assembly Spokesperson
DEM Party*

There exists a limited history of women's struggle over the last two centuries, but, beyond this, evidence shows that it is women who have shaped the history of humanity. We can see this from mythology, from archaeological excavations, and in between the lines of history written by male-dominated powers. As the successors of this history of women pioneers, we continue our struggle in the lands where we live.

In our geography, the richness of different ethnic identities, beliefs and cultures provides an important stepping-stone for the growth of our women's movement. The freedom struggle of Kurds and Kurdish women, who have existed in these lands for thousands of years, has brought these differences together under the umbrella of the DEM Party Women's Assembly. The power of women's organisation and solidarity against an authoritarian and misogynist regime inspires our struggle.

Today, as we approach the local elections to be held on 31 March, our organising is based on our Women's Freedom paradigm. Of course, there are many difficulties in organising against an authoritarian government that has been in power for 22 years and that has built its policies on anti-Kurdish and misogynist hate. To begin with, it is not easy to overthrow codes based on gender inequality that have been created by a male-dominated mentality that has lasted for thousands of years.

We are preparing for these local elections under a power that targets our co-representative and co-presidency system, that threatens women's right to alimony, and that has withdrawn from the Istanbul Convention. It requires strength of will to wage a struggle against the "special war" that targets the existence of the Kurdish people and that has enforced a regime of isolation on the Kurdish leader Abdullah Öcalan, and on our political prisoners. Further, since 2016, our elected mayors have repeatedly been replaced by government-appointed trustees.

These widespread political attacks make mobilisation difficult, while war and violence severely impact women's lives. However, the growth of the Kurdish freedom struggle has paved the way for a great transformation. The Women's





freedom paradigm put forward by Öcalan has created consciousness and awareness not only among Kurdish women but throughout Kurdish society. This has mobilised not only women in Turkey, but also women across the region.

Laws that legitimise violence against women, and the protection of the perpetrators of violence, have left women defenceless. Insecurity is increased by the government's "special war" policies against Kurdish women, and by the lack of services in the Kurdish language. Before the imposition of trustees, our movement had achieved a lot. The "centres for combating violence" that we opened in our municipalities inspired women's confidence. Our women's centres provided free psychological and legal support to thousands of women. Moreover, through the professional training courses we provided and the cooperatives we opened, we gained experience and strengthened women and women's organisations. This has strengthened our fight against male-dominated power.

While carrying out this work we have been subjected to all kinds of pressure and violence by the state. They want to intimidate us through detention and arrest. They want to send a message to the women who are mobilising: if you oppose us, you will be detained. If you oppose us, you will be arrested. Male-dominated powers that cannot tolerate women taking part in political mechanisms won't hesitate to employ policies of prohibition and usurpation in order to push women out of politics.

It has not been easy to implement our system of equal representation and co-chairship in local government. For the first time, men have lost their thousand-year monopoly of politics, and women have won the authority to speak and decide. Our system has been targeted by male-dominated power since the day we established it, but we have succeeded in implementing our principle of co-chairship and equal representation in all our mechanisms. We recognise the gains that we have achieved in politics through resistance and struggle as a common achievement of women all over the world.

We have made great progress, not only against the male-dominated state, but also with our male comrades. We have fought together to change the codes of "masculinity". Changing and transforming men is part of our struggle. As the attacks on our system - which we have built with great effort and cost - have deepened, this has only made us more united in its defence. Today, thousands of women politicians and activists are in prison. Gülten Kışanak, our co-mayoral candidate for the Metropolitan Municipality of Ankara, is conducting her election campaign from prison, despite her long detention and despite the fact that she should, legally, have been released. Women candidates campaigning on the streets are working under police blockades every day. But women's resistance is breaking these blockades and barriers. Women's voices, and the determination of Jin-Jiyan-Azadi (Women-Life-Freedom), are breaking the male-state blockade, demonstrating the will and power of women to make change. When we believe in the legitimacy and rightfulness of our actions, there is nothing we cannot achieve.

Finally, I would like to share a message from our imprisoned co-mayoral candidate Gülten Kışanak with you.

'They ask why did you become a candidate? And why Ankara? Firstly, I became a candidate to respond to these conspiracy trials and trustee politics. Secondly, I became a candidate to put the Kurdish question and the women's freedom problem, which we have not been able to solve throughout the 100-year history of this country, at the centre of politics. If we cannot move forward on these issues, we can neither

neither build liveable cities nor experience and have freedom.

There is only one thing that women, youth, the oppressed and the marginalised must do. Today is the day to stand with the will of the people against the trustees. I invite everyone to take a stand against it. We invite everyone to insist on democratic politics. This republic was founded with the extraordinary struggle and efforts of women. Women struggle for equal rights was then rendered invisible and they were only given the right to vote and be elected. Women have been excluded from the republic, democracy, and politics. Against this political approach, women insist on coming out into the public spheres. We stand at the centre of politics.

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Because democratic politics cannot exist without women.

Peace is won through efforts. We will work, we will explain, we will reveal the power and will of peace politics against war. With our heart, consciousness, and sincerity, we will be with the people to build social peace. I am striving to be a follower to you, to alleviate the pain of our suffering mothers. As free, equal citizens in a common homeland, we are setting out to break all the blockades, isolations and barriers put in front of us. We will fight together with women, and we will win together. May our path be clear, to reach peace and a democratic republic. I wish all women's organisations and activists good luck in advance.'

Being a Woman in Venezuela

Dariana Polo Iglesias

*Sec. Política Internacional
Cambiemos Movimiento Ciudadano*

In Venezuela, women represent approximately 54.30% of the population; Furthermore, in our country more than 60% of households are headed by a woman. It's for this reason that for Cambiemos Movimiento Ciudadano it's essential to promote changes that favor the personal, social, political and economic development of women in our country.

The gender violence, through its different types, is one of the most complex realities that Venezuelan women must face today. Thousands of complaints are registered annually for some type of gender-based violence and only in 2023, a little more than 200 femicides were registered; That is why for Cambiemos Movimiento Ciudadano it's essential to work on legislative and systematic reforms that allow violence against women to be eradicated. This is why in the reform carried out to the "Organic Law of the Right of Women to a Life Free of Violence"

promoted by the National Parliament in 2021, from Cambiemos Movimiento Ciudadano we promoted the inclusion of crimes of political violence and digital violence as autonomous crimes; an important advance in our national legislation and in the fight to eradicate violence against women in our country. Likewise, in 2023 we promoted a State pact for the eradication of gender violence, inviting the various sectors of society to join forces to guarantee that Venezuelan women have a life free of violence.

On the other hand, in relation to the political participation of women, in Venezuela there is a wide inequality gap with respect to men. To give an example, the percentage of representation of women in the National Parliament it's 30%, that is, even though women represent more than half of the Venezuelan population, we are far from occupying half of the seats in our



parliament . That is why at Cambiemos Movimiento Ciudadano we promote equal participation quotas for electoral processes , the participation of women in decision-making positions and, likewise , we propose legislative reforms and adaptations to the electoral system. In that sense, within our party we also promote parity and the political participation of women. Today women represent 60% of the positions in the National Direction of the party (highest decision-making body) and 50% of our parliamentary representation. Our parliamentary fraction is led by a woman, as is our fraction of municipal councilors and the Mayor's Office of the Municipality “Juan Germán Roscio” in the state of Guárico.

Finally, in relation to the situation of women in Venezuela, it's important to highlight the deep debt that the Venezuelan State owes to the rights related to women's autonomy. In Venezuela, the voluntary interruption of pregnancy is still penalized, and can lead to 6 months to 2 years in prison for the woman who commits it, with the only exception when the life of the pregnant woman is at risk. This is even more serious if we highlight the fact that there are no adequate preventive policies by the part of the State and

aking into account that our country has been going through a deep economic crisis for several years, access to contraceptive methods is increasingly complicated for Venezuelan women, especially for those who reside in rural areas, which comprise approximately 12% of the population. That is why at Cambiemos, recognizing the legitimate right of women to exercise autonomy over their bodies, we promote the recognition of sexual and reproductive rights, placing special emphasis on comprehensive sexual education, free access to contraceptives and decriminalization of the voluntary interruption of pregnancy.

This is why -aware of the gender inequalities in our country and the violence that women face- we have committed to promoting female leadership, bringing them to spaces of representation and decision-making, where their work can be made visible and their proposals heard, as well as legislate and develop our work from a gender perspective and with active participation in the feminist agenda, aspiring to contribute to the construction of a more just, equal and equitable society.



Women Opposition Politicians Persecution in Zimbabwe

Stabile Mlilo

*Human Rights Activist and Politician
Former Member of Parliament - Zimbabwe*

As the women of Zimbabwe join the rest of the world to celebrate the International Women's Day, with an interesting theme Invest in Women: Accelerate Progress. In the name of investing in Women in Zimbabwe we have seen a lot of persecution of Women Politicians especially those from the opposition, Citizens Coalition for Change.

My name is Stabile Mlilo a Human Rights activist, a politician and a former Member of Parliament my journey of being a political prisoner started on the 8th of January 2023, it was a Saturday morning when I went with my colleagues to a meeting that was to be held in Budiriro, which is a suburb in Harare, Zimbabwe. I was with our Women Coordinator, Mrs. Monica Mukwada, when we arrived at our venue the police had already surrounded the venue and we were told that there was no meeting by the police.

As we were about to leave the place, Riot Police came and started beating and arresting innocent people and this when I met my fate with my other 12 fellow women to make us 13 females and 13 males who were arrested at Budiriro before the meeting had taken place. We went to police cells for 2 days and then we were taken to court, but the treatment when we were taken to court was like we were murderers we were accompanied by heavily armed Riot Police and the Magistrate ruled that we must be put in Remand and were taken to the biggest prison in Zimbabwe named Chikurubi where we spent our whole 2 weeks with my 12 other colleagues. The food we ate was just pathetic for the first week as we ate porridge and sadza with beans and spinach which was not well washed to remove stones, no one had access to us including our lawyers. Most of the women had come for the meeting for the first time and getting arrested to them was so scary. Our charge was Public Violence and Criminal Act which attracts a jail term of 5 years.

*IN PHOTO: Hon. Stabile Mlilo
waving to colleagues who had
come to court as she was being
taken back to Chikurubi Prison.*





IN PHOTO: Patiently waiting for our judgment but it was another disappointing day and no bail was granted and we had to go back to Chikurubi Prison.

Other women politicians who have suffered under the current regime is , one of our youngest Member of Parliament Joana Mamombe who was arrested for protesting 3 years ago and was sent to Chikurubi prison. She was severely beaten and tortured, it took nearly 4 years for her and her colleagues to be acquitted by the courts. As for us one year after we still report to the police and also still attend court every month and our trial has not started as yet.

Just last year before our general elections we have a colleague in Mashonaland West who was arrested and upto now she is still in jail though she won to be a Councillor in the general election but she has not been released.

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As we celebrate Women's Month it is always in pain as women who currently do not have the freedom in their country, who cannot be the voice of the voiceless, where persecution is used to silence us when Women Rights are Human Rights.

The 12 women who were arrested in Budiro, are still struggling as most of them lost their businesses by the time they were in jail and life has been so difficult for them as our court case still continues and we have two who come from outside Harare and getting transport money to come to court every month is a big challenge for them.

5 Questions for our Women Party Leaders

Feminist Struggles and Feminist Leadership

Alka Lamba

*President
All India Mahila Congress*

OPENING STATEMENT

I am honoured to write for the progressive alliance. It is a privilege to represent the world's largest women's political organization, the All-India Mahila Congress. India's journey toward genuine women's empowerment began with the formation of the Congress party in 1885. The Congress made groundbreaking decisions reflecting its unwavering commitment to this cause. In a nation where women were traditionally restricted to the home, who could have imagined the Congress appointing Sarojini Naidu as Indian National President in 1925? Since then, the Congress has achieved significant progress in women's empowerment, including abolishing barbaric practices like SATI PRATHA and child marriage. Additionally, the Congress enacted crucial legislation such as free education for girls, Domestic Violence act, anti-dowry laws, and laws against workplace harassment. Despite the Indian National Congress's monumental efforts, much remains to be done. At the All-India Mahila Congress, our vision is to politically empower women. The Indian National Congress leadership is firmly committed to achieving equal participation for women at all levels.



We are striving for 50% women's representation in both the Assemblies and the Lok Sabha. However, achieving this ambitious goal, though attainable, presents challenges. We have a well-defined plan in place to identify potential women leaders across the country, provide them with political leadership development training, and obtain biannual and annual action plans from them. We will then monitor their performance against these plans. Furthermore, we plan to establish a helpline so that women in need can connect with us. Additionally, we will ensure a network of women lawyers, from the block level to the national level, to provide free legal assistance.

Q1: The All-India Mahila Congress is one of the biggest, if not the biggest, women centre-left organization in the world. With your million's members, what are your priorities as you deal with both long-term and day to day politics?

The All-India Mahila Congress plans to actively engage its office bearers and workers in election management activities, including door-to-door campaigns and booth management. We will also ensure their participation in social activities at every level to connect with women, particularly housewives. These social activities will encompass programs like peaceful protests (dharna) against government policies detrimental to women, such as rising prices of household essentials, liquor policies, sanitation, health, and drinking water issues.

Additionally, our organization will prioritize positive daily programs led by our office bearers and women, such as health check-ups, storytelling/spiritual gatherings, career counselling, and more. Women leaders, without a strong grassroots presence and connection to ordinary people, especially women, will struggle to exert influence on political organizations and secure their rightful place. Therefore, we will guide them in connecting with the public and raise awareness about the process of seeking and obtaining election tickets.

Q2: Are there changes over the years that your movement has to cope with in order to continuously expand your members and attend to policy demands that are relevant to the times?

The world is constantly evolving, and the Mahila Congress has adapted accordingly. During the Congress party's rule, advocating for change was a more streamlined process. However, since the 2014 shift in government, we have had to adjust our approach. Over the past decade, women's safety concerns have significantly worsened. The current regime demonstrates a lack of empathy or sympathy towards women in general and an unwillingness to provide a 50% reservation for women due to a regressive and outdated mindset. Consequently, our organization has been forced to take to the streets to demand justice and equal rights. We also prioritise staying up to date on emerging policy issues and global trends to effectively advocate for progressive policies that benefit women and marginalized communities.

Q3: With India as the largest democracy now embarking on consequential elections in all states, how have your organization been mobilizing women candidates and campaigners? Are there flagship agenda of the women leaders in India that reflect in the election debates?

As India, the world's largest democracy, prepares for crucial elections across all states, the All-India Mahila Congress is actively mobilizing women candidates and campaigners. Our organization will focus on identifying capable women leaders willing to contest assembly and parliamentary elections. Additionally, we have identified skilled speakers and campaigners who will be deployed strategically across the country based on their language proficiency. Flagship agendas of women leaders in India often centre around issues like healthcare, education, economic empowerment, and women's safety, reflecting the diverse needs and priorities of women across the country.

Q4: What personal experience can you share with us that has shaped your leadership?

During my formative years in school, I was deeply inspired by the late Indira Gandhi ji. Her charismatic and radiant presence had a profound impact on me. Then came the captivating personality of Rajiv Gandhi. On my journey, starting from when I gained the respect of Smt. Sonia Gandhi Ji, she advised me to observe and learn from Smt. Sushma Swaraj. Through this experience, I witnessed firsthand the true essence of democracy, where leaders show respect for their opponents. My personal experience that has shaped my leadership within the Mahila Congress is witnessing the resilience and determination of women from diverse backgrounds who have overcome immense challenges to advocate for their rights and create positive change in their communities. Their stories of courage and perseverance inspire me to continue fighting for gender equality and social justice, and they remind me of the importance of amplifying women's voices and experiences in the political arena.



Q5: What defines feminist leadership during these times of democratic decline, widening inequality, and return of war?

Progress in society and genuine women's empowerment are inextricably linked. It is a tragedy that in the world's largest democracy, the government of the past decade has taken us backward. In these challenging times, where democracy in our nation faces threats, the role of the All-India Mahila Congress becomes even more critical and necessary. It is a well-documented fact that during periods of turmoil and the rise of fascist regimes, women are among those who suffer the most. However, thanks to the unwavering commitment of the Congress party, the All-India Mahila Congress has developed the necessary vision, clarity, and courage to confront the current regime head-on and work towards its defeat. In times of democratic decline, widening inequality, and the return of war, feminist leadership requires a steadfast commitment to principles of justice, equality, and solidarity. It involves challenging patriarchal power structures, amplifying the voices of marginalized communities, and advocating for policies that address the root causes of oppression and violence. Feminist leaders prioritize collaboration, empathy, and intersectionality in their approach to leadership.

They recognize the interconnectedness of social justice struggles and the importance of building coalitions across diverse communities. They strive to create spaces for dialogue, mutual respect, and collective action, resisting authoritarianism and standing up for the rights and dignity of all people, particularly those most marginalized and vulnerable.



5 Questions for our Women Party Leaders

Feminist Struggles and Feminist Leadership

Monica Haydee Fein

Party Leader

Socialist Party - Argentina

Q1: 1.You are the first Socialist woman elected mayor in Argentina. Can you please share us your reflections on breaking the glass ceiling and how feminist leadership should be nurtured by the movement to allow for more safe, diverse and equalizing policies in society?

We all know that it is more difficult to do something as a woman, because we always have to prove that we are better prepared than men, that we are very capable, and even so it is never enough and we feel the macho and patriarchal contempt, because our actions are measured with a different yardstick. Those 8 years in the municipality were a great learning experience; we were able to contribute collectively to the transformation of the city. Today I still think the same way as I did when I was 18 when I started participating in the student centre at the university, that transformations, changes, are always collective, with others. Betting on organisation, on building open, diverse spaces that guarantee the participation and free and responsible action of those who are part of these processes.

Today, in this historical and political context, my party, socialism, has opted for two consecutive terms with a woman as President and I feel that this opens the way for many women comrades to become President in the future.

I was the first woman mayor of the city of Rosario. A city that has had progressive governments for more than 30 years, a city that has been choosing to govern its destinies with alternative options to the national parties and so many years of progressivism and mayors who thought of public policies as state policies, not short-term policies, allowed us as a city to be a pioneer in the debate, planning and implementation of many public policies with a gender perspective together with women's organisations.

We live in times of fractures that deepen intolerance and those of us who do politics within party structures, workers' organisations, organisations, have the obligation to give back to society transparent, open, diverse organisations that express the synthesis of their members. I believe that the feminist movement, like other social movements, is setting a course for us today. Without equality, any democratic order is incomplete.

We need more humane societies, other ways of consuming, other ways of leading. The current order concentrates and centralises wealth and produces and reproduces inequality and exclusion.

Q2: How has feminist values and struggles drive your leadership as a public health expert, politician and party leader during these time of increasingly difficult challenges in public affairs?

In my term of office as mayor, the eruption of the "Ni una menos" (Not one less) was a turning point in my country, with thousands of women in the streets all over the country, with the visibility of the women's movement which, although it had a long history, burst onto the public scene questioning everything, with the fundamental protagonism of the youth. Undoubtedly, nothing was the same.

That is why it is so important to talk about the challenges of progressivism to transform politics, drawing inspiration from the processes that women and dissidents have been carrying out in feminism and other movements for equality.

These complex, cross-cutting, diverse models of organisation are showing us that while not magical or idyllic, power can be built with popular participation, even in dissent. Contemporary feminist theory can make important contributions to reframing the necessary debates about the failures of capitalism and the promises and misunderstandings of democracy and development.

Progressivism has the enormous challenge of rethinking itself alongside social movements that promote new, more democratic and participatory forms, another construction of power, in order to create the conditions that can bring about change. The coming progressivism has to come from the hand of many women changing structures, empowered women and men questioning their privileges. We have to push the wheel of history in that direction, so that changes can happen.



Q3: Many of the rights women have fought and won over decades in Argentina are seeing a reversal such as the closure of the Ministry of women, gender and diversity. What are the prospects in the coming months or years with this backlash for the women's movement under the Milei government?

President Javier Milei has acceded to the government on the basis of two electoral promises. On the one hand, the promise that after a harsh initial adjustment, the country will emerge from the economic crisis in which it has been submerged for at least two decades. The other promise is linked to a cultural battle or crisis of traditional values that is based on the assumption that each of the social conquests (feminist, sexual diversity, environment, human rights) are driven by the personal interest of assaulting the State and its resources.

In a context in which the economic promise is not being fulfilled, the government increases the focus of attention on the promised Culture Battle.

That is why the risks of violence against the feminist collective are growing. Not only because of the increase in declarations against rights already won (from the right to legal abortion to gender parity in representation lists) but also because the President's violent discourse, especially on social networks, enables public discourses and violent public actions.

In the days leading up to 8M, the expressions of the feminist movement have multiplied, which will undoubtedly mobilize thousands and thousands in the streets to show that we are not willing to back down.

There is an awareness in each collective that we have achieved all the advances through mobilization and struggle, and that in the same way we are going to defend them.



Q4: The populism of Milei is not isolated in Argentina but also has impulses in Latin America. What do you think has changed in people's perspective about leadership in the current context that draws them to populist right-wing politics? What lessons can the progressive movement take from this?

Indeed, the populist movement is not an isolated case in Argentina, but is a worldwide phenomenon with special development in Latin America. One of the current differences is that this populist methodology has been adopted by right-wing political movements, when before it was some so-called left-wing movements that positioned themselves politically in this method.

Today Javier Milei can be placed in the same space as Nayib Bukele (President of El Salvador) and Donald Trump (former President of the USA), as well as in a global movement that includes the Spaniard Santiago Abascal or the Hungarian Viktor Orbán.

All leaders who question the liberal and republican democracy that we know and that has been the framework for the great advances of social democratic and progressive ideas from the post-Second World War to the present day.

Undoubtedly, after decades of advances in civil and social rights, we have failed to find new answers to new challenges. We have not been able to develop proposals that sustain economic growth and social cohesion, and inequality has been deepening (for example, gender inequality but also the unequal access to housing, education, goods and services offered by a society in which the fact of "having" is increasingly important over human values).

In this deepening of exclusion, we were not able to give a social democratic or progressive response that could overcome it. It's as if we've been trapped in our classic response that no longer solves serious social problems.

And that's where you start to see a two-way crisis. Economically, with new forms of work in which access to knowledge has a great impact. And economically, with a growth in unemployment, a loss of purchasing power and a deterioration of the daily economy.

That is where the gap lies between right-wing populisms and has been very intelligent in holding us responsible for the failure of a model that is in crisis in the world. And this failure is attributed both to the economic proposal that is developed within the framework of our institutional models and also to a supposed "crisis of traditional values".

Social advances and conquests are assigned responsibility for modifying a state of affairs that was supposed to be virtuous and maintained social balances. There is a permanent nostalgia. All past times were better. It would be better to repeal abortion. It would be better to go back to the. Traditional family model. It would be better for men to work outside the home and for women to educate their children and take care of the home. There is a very strong idea of restoring a past model. These right-wing movements have been very successful in that. And we have to be able to build a counter-narrative. Take back the initiative.

Q5: What are forms of solidarities we can forge to combat the challenges of today at the regional and global level? How does it translate to the struggles you currently face in Argentina?

Undoubtedly, one of the answers to these challenges is international solidarity and the prospect of strengthening our global movement.

But not only to feel accompanied, but to build a counter-narrative that allows us to retake the initiative. To re-enthuse the social majorities that a better future is possible. And that this future must necessarily be feminist, ecological and egalitarian.

That it is possible to build a world in which all worlds fit, and diversity is celebrated.

But this movement must also be able to propose a model of society that begins to respond to new forms of employment, to new forms of wealth generation – closely linked to knowledge and innovation. And that it is capable of promoting public policies that guarantee the equitable distribution of resources.

*We have to be able to show that the conquests we have achieved after so many *lucha*.no are privileges, but that the privileges that must be aimed at are those obtained by the super-rich (who are getting richer and richer) and that deepen social inequality.*

We need to generate new ideas about education, about the care economy and the green economy. To propose a collective project that can raise awareness of the value of a society in which men and women, and people of sexual dissidence, can access the same rights and the same opportunities.

In the face of such important challenges at the global level, as progressive women it is essential to think about global responses and strategies. I have no doubt that if we manage to organize all our creative and transformative force, the future will be as we dream it.



FEMINIST STRUGGLES & FEMINIST LEADERSHIP



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