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**Circle of Inspiring Women for Sustainable Future - Athens, 15<sup>th</sup> September 2015**

## **OUR CIRCLE, THE CONTINUING CYCLE...**

First of all, let me thank Dr. Zefi Dimadama for the opportunity to attend and speak at this wonderful event and initiative this morning/afternoon.

These days I seem to spend my life on a plane... traversing the airways from Ankara to America, from the UK to the UAE, from Iraq to Islamabad...

There is nowhere I won't venture... and yet it is so telling for me that whenever I get the opportunity to speak... contribute to... or benefit an opportunity that promotes and inspires women in their endeavors for success... my schedule quite quickly becomes amendable and accommodating.

And so here we are today in Athens.

Discussing inspirations that can foster and facilitate a sustainable future for women. I will also use some statistics to highlight key points. These statistics are taken from recent UN reports.

We call this discussion... this roundtable... this event... a "circle", yet I would like to offer up for thoughts, "our circle"... the ongoing circle, that we as strong women, encounter, battle through, and ultimately hopefully triumph in our goals and aspirations...

But let's start with the reality and just highlight some context that we are all well aware of.

On a global scale, Women continue to participate in labour markets on an unequal basis with men. In 2013, the male employment-to-population ratio stood at **72.2%**, while the ratio for females was **47.1%**. This is a startling difference.

Globally, women are paid less than men.

Women bear disproportionate responsibility for unpaid care work all across the world.

Women are more likely than men to work in informal employment, which in turn entails many negative implications.

Gender differences in laws affect both developing and developed economies, and women in all regions. Almost 90% of 143 economies recently studied by the UN have at least one legal difference restricting women's economic opportunities.

It makes for what could be quite depressing reading.

But it's not all doom and gloom. Things are changing. Progress is being made. It may not be fast enough, but we cannot be defeatist about this.

Globally there is a marked momentum for change. This circle today is part of that momentum.

Numerous studies indicated that women's economic equality is good for business. Companies greatly benefit from increasing leadership opportunities for women, which is shown to increase organizational effectiveness. My company is very proud of the fact that we are a certified women majority owned business.

It is exciting that the United States could quite possibly elect a woman as their new Commander in Chief for the first time.

But it isn't just the Western World that is leading the way with empowerment and change...

Rwanda had the highest number of women parliamentarians worldwide. Women there have won 63.8% of seats in the lower house.

The % of women in parliament globally has doubled in the last two decades. This is a huge statement.

If the skills and experiences of women in the UK who are currently out of work were utilized, this would bring an extra £15-21 billion pounds to the economy per year.

My point is that, we must focus on the positives. We must focus on the momentum. We must focus on the improvements. Far too easily do we run the risk of just focusing on the negatives.

All of us sitting here have such capacity and capability to capitalize on this momentum.

I recently inaugurated a program to empower young women in the Anatolian region of Turkey. This involved bringing 6 Turkish women CEOs to participate in a series of mentorship workshops. The most telling aspect of this was not the positive reactions of the young women attendees... but the positive enthusiasm and resolve to do more from these other women CEOs. There was such passion, dedication and almost surprise by just how easily it was to create such an empowerment opportunity. They were women who had succeeded. And the unquestionable enthusiasm to bolster the success of others was both inspiring and telling.

There is such opportunity here. It is **We** sitting in this circle today who must resolve to take it upon ourselves to bolster and build these platforms... as it is only **We** that truly understand their value and necessity for the future empowerment of young women.

There has never been a greater time for women to shine.

We all have our part to play.

And more importantly, we can all handover to the next generation a much greater platform, and a much brighter future which points to an even more illuminous and sustainable future.