

Dear Heiner,

thank you so much for inviting us all on behalf of the Friedrich-Ebert-Foundation to this amazing exchange.

Dear Patricia,

Thank you so much for your inspiring talk.

I agree with almost all of your contributions.

Dear comrades,

We live in a world, in which gender equality has not been achieved in one single country.

Therefore gender inequality is not only an African – It is a worldwide challenge.

In too many countries women and girls do not even have the same rights as men and boys.

Gender equality is not bound to a certain society system, may it be capitalism, communism, democracy or dictatorship.

May I give you an example?

The French Revolution gave equal citizen rights to men only, although women and men had fought the revolution side by side.

The suffrage in France was established centuries later in 1945.

Every human is endowed with the same dignity and therefore every human should benefit from same rights.

As long as we do not accept and promote gender equality as an unnegotiable human right, that has to be put above religion, ideology, culture and tradition, we will not achieve it.

This includes the right to live a self-determined life free of any violence.

Gender equality is the prerequisite to overcome social, financial and other inequalities in our societies and to create just, sustainable, modern and future-compliant societies.

Especially progressives, social democrats and socialists have to realize that they have to be the agents of change.

And we as progressives, social democrats and socialists need to passionately defend and improve women's rights wherever we have the power.

May I share my biggest wish?

May all male progressives, social democrats and socialists follow the example of the Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, the Swedish Prime Minister Stefan Loeven or the German Foreign Minister Sigmar Gabriel who proudly say: "I am a feminist".

Dear comrades,

Some people think that feminists fight against men or that they hate men.

I can assure you: That's not true. Most of us are even married with men.

Others have the opinion that the biological differences between men and women determine their lives.

In the 1980ies we discussed "equality in difference" a lot.

And I still very much believe in it today.

We do not want egalitarianism but we want equal chances and opportunities for women and girls as for men and boys.

The gender should not restrict anybody to certain role models.

Every man and every woman should be able to live his or her life in exactly how they long to live it: free and self-determined.

Women and men should be equal in status, with equal opportunities and equal chances to establish and to live the life they truly long for.

Married or unmarried,

In love with a man or a women,
with or without children.

Dear comrades,

in all our societies the half or more than the half of our citizens are female.

But we are far away from a 50/50 planet.

We don't have a lack of insights.

We have a lack of gender equality implementation.

First of all gender equality and the elimination of all discrimination as well as violence against women and girls has to be anchored in our constitutions.

Legislation has to follow this principle and the executive has to take measures not only to empower women and girls but also to eliminate all gender based discrimination.

The demands and the rights deriving from the CEDAW Convention have to be made public and monitored by the government, the parliaments as well as the civil society.

Every country needs a national action plan to improve gender equality and to eliminate all kind of gender based discrimination.

These action plans should not only eliminate all discriminating structures, they should also empower and promote women and girls.

Every call to action should be checked whether it will truly improve gender equality.

This is the gender mainstreaming principle. Gender budgeting can be helpful as well.

To raise an awareness towards gender inequality and achieving true gender equality, everybody who is in charge also needs gender training.

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Last but not least we need gender sensitive leaders in leading positions.

We as progressives have to urge those countries, who haven't signed the convention yet.

And we have to urge the signature states to ratify and implement it.

This also applies to implementing the SDG goal 5 which is : "achieve gender equality and empower all women's and girls".

So what are gender equality improving prerequisites?

Equal access to education, equal rights in all areas, I.e. the right to own land, the right to inherit, and the right to vote as well as to be elected.

Even when legislation does not differentiate anymore there are more than enough structures in all of our societies, that preserve the unbalance of power between men and women.

In Europe women and men have equal rights and equal access to education.

Girls leave school and university with higher as well as better exams.

Nevertheless they face discrimination in all areas of society.

Why are women underrepresented in all leading positions of governments, administrations, economy, science, culture, media, politics and in almost all parliaments?

Why do women and girls hold the lion's share of unpaid work?

Why do they earn less money for equal work or work of equal value?

Why are mostly women responsible for the reconciliation of work and family?

Why do they own less property than men?

Why don't women participate in post conflicts negotiations? Armed conflicts they suffer the most in?

Why are so many women and girls still victims of domestic or gender based violence? And why does nobody or a few only fight against daily sexism, that preserves old fashioned role models and existing discriminations.

May I give you some truly impressive figures?

According to a release of the world economic forum's global gender gap index we have to wait another 170 years for world wide gender parity.

The 4 most important indicators are:

1. economic terms

2. political power,

3. health

and

4. education

The good news is that not everyone has to wait that long.

South Asia is projected to close the gender gap in 46 years

Western Europe in 61 years.

Latin America in 72 years

and Sub Sahara Africa in 79 years

North America in 158 years due the slow progress within the last decade.

Let's achieve gender equality earlier and support UN women's campaign "planet 50/50 til 2030".

Dear comrades,

No matter what legal framework we may live in, all our societies have structure that discriminate.

It is our challenge to overcome those structures.

And who if not we, the progressives, the social democrats and the socialists should be agents of change?

For years we believed, that progress will result automatically in gender equality.

Today we have to learn that hard won rights are in danger.

Isn't it incredible that someone who has not a scrap of decency towards women and who's behaviour towards women is from a past century has been elected president of the United States of America?

Isn't it incredible that the polish government wants to tighten the right of abortion, to the extent that even post rape abortion will be made illegal?

Isn't it incredible that Sandinistas in Nicaragua have tightened the right of abortion as well?

Isn't it incredible that governments do not fight against female genital mutilation, that they refuse free access to contraception and make abortion illegal?

And isn't it incredible that countries like Russia consider to withdraw their signature from the Istanbul convention and now declare: domestic violence against women as a private matter that should not be punished?

And isn't it incredible that some countries refrain from punishing the perpetrator of a rape if he marries the victim?

Any – absolutely ANY kind of violence against women is a crime that has to be dealt with as a crime

Abduction and rape of women and girls as a mean of terrorism and conduct of war are crimes and violations against human rights.

Rape, sexual harassment as well as sexual acts against the declared will of women and girls are crimes.

And all this has to be seen and prosecuted as a crime- one can not get away from- without exception.

We have to teach girls and adult women that they have the right to express their wishes and that they are entitled to express a No.

And we have to teach boys and men that they have to respect a female NO.

Therefore we also need national action plans to prevent and eliminate violence against women and girls and to protect the victims of violence.

Gender based discrimination, inequality and violence is a violation of a fundamental human right and cannot be justified by a religion, by culture or traditions.

Improving and achieving gender equality is a core value of our party family.

Those who preserve gender based inequalities cannot call themselves progressives, social democrats or socialists.

Every country faces different challenges, but aren't we united when it comes to achieving full gender equality?

What do we have to do?

We as progressives, social democrats and socialists have to raise our voices for gender equality.

We have to raise our voices on behalf of those who cannot raise their voices yet, when being discriminated.

We have to defend all those hard fought women's rights and we have to keep on fighting for all rights, that have not been achieved yet.

We have to provide frameworks within our societies that support gender equality and eliminate gender based discrimination and violence.

We have to call for

- same rights for women and men,
- economic independence of women
- equal access to education for girls and boys
- elimination of child labour
- equal access to medical care for everybody

- sexual self-determination as well as sexual and reproductive health and rights
- a life free from violence
- making gender equality a prerequisite for development cooperation
- implementing gender mainstreaming in the actions of governments

And

- we simply have to call for parity in our parliaments and all decision making bodies.

Last but not least we have to live and to introduce our political demands for full gender equality in our organizations, too.

With our calls for gender equality we are credible when we do what we expect others to do.

That means that we need gender parity in all our decision making bodies on all levels and mandates.

And let's invite civil society and NGO's to join in at our fight for more gender equality.

First and foremost: gender equality is a question of justice and humanity.

And more and more it will be the key driver for the future of all our societies.

We also know that empowerment of women is a key factor for developing countries.

Meanwhile we know of many researches i.e. by the IMF, by McKinsey and the European Institute for Gender Equality that an increase of women's participation in the labour market on the level of men will improve the economic growth in all countries.

Let's also use this fact for those who only think in terms of investment and return of investment.

Improving gender equality is a major benefit for the entire society.

Women AND men can will benefit from it.

Thank you for your attention and being such a wonderful audience.

It has been an honour!