

Dear friends,

I'm very glad I have been granted the opportunity to address you here today at this important gathering of social democratic friends from around the world.

It is a privilege to be able to speak to you on a matter of great importance; equal opportunities and emancipation.

In it's core, the social democratic movement is all about emancipation. About equal opportunities, regardless of sex, ethnic background or religious beliefs.

Whether economic, social or cultural barriers: social democracy is about removing those barriers. About empowerment. About enhancing one's opportunities in life.

We are a political movement of change, of progress, of idealism. We don't take the world as it is, but as we feel it should be.

Others sometimes mockingly refer to the weight of the world social democrats seem to enjoy carrying around on their shoulders. And yes, I reckon that in your party it's not fundamentally different than in mine, we do sometimes need to be a bit more cheerful. A bit more optimistic.

But let me tell you, equal rights for women haven't been achieved by loitering about. No, it has been built and fought for, for over decades, by men and women who tirelessly worked to achieve a more equal world.

A few weeks ago I spoke at the UN Commission on the status of women to mark the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. Two years ago Malala Yousafzai from Pakistan, stood in that same room to speak about her commitment to education for children, especially girls.

“A child, a teacher, a pen and a book can change the world.” She almost died before the world had a chance to hear her story.

Shot in the head by a gunman.

Because she went to school.

Malala has become world famous. There are millions of women in the world who are less famous but who, like Malala, live under the threat of violence.

Just because they are women.

Last year, a student at Columbia University in New York was raped. When she reported the assault to the university and went to the police, she was informed that the perpetrator was “not responsible”.

In protest, she has since been carrying the mattress on which she was raped around the campus. It bears the words “Carry That Weight”.

She has vowed to drag this heavy burden around with her until the perpetrator, who still attends the same university, has been brought to trial.

Friends,

Lack of equality comes in all sorts and shapes. In the Netherlands for instance, inequality is reflected by the fact that half of all Dutch women do not have economic independence. Even though all girls in the Netherlands go to school and girls perform better than boys in secondary education. Despite this evidence, many Dutch people still believe a woman’s place is at home, looking after the children while the man goes out to work. At best, they feel women should be allowed to work part-time.

I myself come from a family of strong, well educated and independent women. Take my grandmother, back in 1918. She studied architecture

in Delft. She and her sisters were motivated by her parents to study. Especially for that time, a very progressive move for those three young women. Unfortunately though, in those days, when women got married, many of them were fired. To work, to have a career wasn't a very normal thing for a lot of women. Women like my grandmother. She too got married and had children. After her husband, my grandfather, died in World War II, she came back from Indonesia: broke, unemployed and with three children.

Or take my aunt. My grandmothers' sister. She was a PhD biologist and conducted research with the first female professor of biology, Johanna Westerdijk. She was very talented, but she too had to give up her job when she got married.

Today, the chances of women and girls in my country are better than ever.

- 70% of women work.
- More girls than ever study at a college or university. There, they do awfully well. They study often more and faster than boys.
- And although progress is painfully slow, we see a bit more women at the top of big companies and institutions.

Yet there is a persistent phenomenon in my country that we can't seem to be able to shake off. Today, in my country, women are highly educated. Too often though, highly educated to work part-time, or not at all. Whereas throughout the EU on average 32.2% of all women

work part time. In the Netherlands 76.6% of all women work less than 36 hours a week

A lot of women tend to start working less as soon as they become mothers. Obviously, they are more than in their right to so. I am though a bit worried about the mechanisms by which this almost seems inevitable.

A lot of these women say; 'that's by my own free choice'. But I dare to question whether or not it is always such a free choice. I think one of the main ways by which women themselves hamper emancipation is their own standards on what is right or what is wrong. Many women for instance, feel they can take care of their children a lot better than their men do. That their personal contribution and leadership in running the household is vital to the survival of that very household.

That, combined with the frowns a lot of women get when they work fulltime, causes expectations. Sometimes explicit, more often implicit. About their role in the family. About how women should act. What choices they should make..

Friends,

I believe strongly in diversity. Diversity in the workforce. In boardrooms. In politics. Diversity is crucial in a world where social

problems are more complex. Diversity is crucial in a world that is changing faster every day. Our world today needs creativity, different angles, solutions that come from different perspectives. Or, as Einstein said, you cannot solve a problem with the same mindset with which you created it.

When Facebook COO Sheryl Sandberg needed to go to the bathroom in the break of a meeting in which a million dollar deal was made; she saw the partner of the company where the meeting was held, turn pale.

He had no idea where the ladies' room was. Sandberg asked whether the company had perhaps just recently moved into the building. That was not the case, they'd been there for several years.

Sandberg said: Are you telling me I'm the first woman to close a deal with you here in this room?

And the partner of the firm said: I'm afraid so. Or maybe you're the only one who had to go to the toilet.

Also in my country, figures on representation of women in top positions in Dutch companies is far from reassuring. Currently 8,9% of all members of Boards of Directors is female. Of the members of Supervisory Boards only 11,2% is woman.

Apparently, it is still seen as a threat to allow for a woman in the boardroom or in high positions. I honestly can't think of any other reason. Because there are plenty of women who are more than willing and more than capable. For that reason I've, together with the President of the Dutch employers' organization ( an unusual coalition), started a register for top women. Women in that register, over 800 by now, are boardroom ready. Companies looking to appoint new board members can use the register to scout female talent if they promise to put at least 50 percent females on their shortlist for fulfilling that position. For me that register is an important tool and symbol for capable and willing women in top positions. Because never again do I want to hear, that capable and willing women cannot be found. And I have learned that we can do more by helping women and by building unusual coalitions.

Friends,

I'm worried about the next generation. The generation of girls that are now studying. And the generation of my daughter, who is now fourteen.

Their position and prospect are now better than ever. As I said, women do better in education, they study more often than men. But the mere fact that this generation has equal opportunities before the law does not mean that they have them in their day to day life.

Because this is also the generation that says emancipation is finished (or even irrelevant), everything is settled, 'I make my own choices now.

It's true. A lot has been achieved when it comes to equal opportunities. For women, but also for instance for LGBT we have come from very far. And in large parts of the world it were socialdemocrates, progressives, that made the difference. But let's not be blindsided by the successes we've had. Because the biggest threat to emancipation comes from those that say that with equality before the law, the process of emancipation has been brought to an end. Inequality comes in all sort and shapes. Sometimes brutal, as in the case of Malala Yousafzai, sometimes by disinterest by officials, as was the case with the student in New York, sometimes by subtle, cultural and societal mechanisms that perhaps aren't as gruesome in its appearance but can be just as great a barrier to equality non the same.

Let's not scale back our ambitions. We owe it to the next generation to continue to motivate them, to encourage them to be independent, to be equal. But I also want them to know that they can count on us. It's up to us to support the brave women around the world who dare to take a stand to improve the position of women. Change starts with you and with me, and with what we do when we leave this room. We cannot

hide behind organizations and institutions, and we cannot look away from what is happening in our own back yard.

Many women and girls have no influence on how they live their lives. In many places, women and girls are still not free to decide when they marry, whom they marry and when they will have children.

We need to achieve more if we are to ensure that women and girls can actually go to school.

Can be financially independent.

Can be free of discrimination.

And can feel safe.

We need to ensure that girls and women like Malala and the student at Columbia University can count on protection and justice. And especially to the women here today: our power, our knowledge and our experience are of great value for the next generation. We need to offer the next generation of women our shoulders to stand on. Just as you and I stand on the shoulders of previous generations of women. Women that fought for the rights we have now. Rights we can't even imagine to have ever had to do without.

We need to work together.

Sheryl Sandberg, COO of Facebook, writes in her book

Lean In ':

"We must be thankful for what we have, but be dissatisfied with the status quo. This discontent gives the impulse to want to change. We must continue."

Today I call upon you for a renewed solidarity. A solidarity 2.0 if you will. A solidarity by offering that new generation your shoulders to stand on.

Friends,

I know our pasts differ. And our paths towards the future will too. But we do share a strong conviction, a common belief in equality. Equality in education. Equality in the workforce. Equality at home. Friends, let's carry that weight on our shoulders. The weight of those women. Malala, the student from Columbia University, the next generation of girls and women who strive for equality and yes, also the weight of women like Sheryl Sandberg in boardrooms around the world. Let's carry that weight. Optimistically, cheerful, but never halfheartedly.

Thank you