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Closing Remarks – Gender Equality and the Future of Work

2 November 2018

Colleagues, we're approaching the end of our formal proceedings this morning.

On behalf of the MCC Founding and STEM groups, thank you for participating today.

Every one of you has a choice about where you spend your time, the issues you focus on. That you chose to spend time with us today for a discussion on gender equality and the future of work tells me that this issue is critical to our collective action and that if we get it right, generations to come will reap the rewards.

Across the world, we are witnessing, and being part of, seismic shifts in the business, technological, social and political landscape.

We have talked a lot today about the impact of machines and technology as we shape our future. But now, I want to take just a few brief minutes to focus on people.... and the centrality of humanity. As the former UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein said 'human decency is the only currency of human interaction'. If we are to create a gender equal future of work, to accelerate impact, that acceleration will be driven by people - by engaging people's hearts and minds - it will be driven by our shared human belief in the rightness, the value and the truth of the work itself.

The issue of gender equality is now high on our public agenda and it needs to stay that way.

Yesterday, I returned from Geneva and Pakistan having spent the week with my fellow UN Special Rapporteurs responsible for monitoring the human rights of women and girls across the world. I am seeing a backlash against women's rights in almost every nation - in the US, Hungary, Poland, Italy, Bulgaria and Croatia – In Brazil, Honduras, Venezuela, Nicaragua and other Latin American countries. In Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Egypt, Russia and across the Middle East and North African. Even in our near neighbour PNG, where an inability of many to understand change (climate, technological) in any conceptual framework is leading to an increase in violence against women, including in sorcery related violence.

In so many countries we are witnessing the shrinking of civil society space, a pushback against gender equality initiatives, reprisals against those who stand for change and radical shifts in how individuals and communities value and relate to each other.

The world is at a cross roads and today we have an opportunity to either exacerbate gender inequality by embedding it into the future of work or once again putting gender equality at the front and centre of our national debate, by asking "What future do I want for my own daughter, what future do I want for the daughters of our world".

Just asking this question and acting on it, is in itself a global disruption.



Because views and positions are polarising. There are forces determined to bring men and women back to traditional gender roles, forces that fail to recognise the value of the diversity of the human experience and the importance of building inclusive environments.

Powerful groups at the extremes are stretching these divides.

It's an environment where it would be easy to become discouraged.....to lose faith in the possibility of change..... to believe that our vision of an equal world is ever-further out of reach.

But I continue to feel optimistic, to feel a strong sense of empowerment and anticipation.

Because I know now what leaders can achieve when they act collectively, with open hearts and open minds, willing to collaborate and learn from each other, experimenting together, co-creating our gender equal future.

As I travel globally and bear witness to what is emerging, I hold on to the progress we have made here Australia.

The Founding Male Champions of Change group was established nearly 8 years ago.

In that time, we've grown to 12 groups, with over 200 leaders across Australia... and now globally with the establishment of MCC Global Tech Group and MCC Pakistan.

We've enjoyed deep partnerships with strong civil society and global governance organisations such as CEW, Our Watch, WGEA, the Office for Women, the Sex Discrimination Commissioner and the United Nations – many of our colleagues are here today.

In that time – together – we have listened deeply, we have learned and we have shifted systems.

For example, all our members provide detailed, annual public reporting on their progress advancing women in leadership.

They take the Panel Pledge, as a means to ensure women's voices are valued equally in our national discourse.

We have redefined the concept of merit, to help ensure bias does not exclude women from roles and opportunities.

Targets are routinely set and measured against. Individuals are held accountable for the achievement of these targets.

We are multiplying the impact of our work, using economic power to engage suppliers in our gender equality aspirations.

The All Roles Flex model is now a threshold for all MCC organisations and those considered Employers' of Choice.

Pay Equity Audits are completed regularly.

We are providing workplace support to employees' experiencing domestic and family violence.

We have audited the face of our organisations to ensure a public presence that is welcoming, inclusive and respectful to women.



We are confronting the issues of backlash and setting clear expectations on the role of leaders in eliminating everyday sexism.

And there are many, many more strategies being tested and evaluated every day.

None of these actions were common amongst Australia's largest and most influential organisations 8 years ago.

Today they are. These all started with small projects or experiments sponsored by your MCC Action Groups.

We are living proof that change is possible. Particularly when that change is guided by shared commitment and values - values that transcend ideology, politics, sector, gender and background - values like:

- ◆ Fairness
- ◆ Decency.
- ◆ Respect.
- ◆ Inclusion.

This period of disequilibrium is exciting. It's a time to re-energise and try new things, to conceptualise bold experiments, not necessarily "bet the business" experiments but "big on ambition" experiments – experiments to constructively shape a gender equal future of work.

We can re-imagine systems that have entrenched gender inequality for far too long.

We can create a culture that listens to, values and learns from the experiences of young women and girls.

We can take action to ensure people have fair and equal access to jobs and opportunities particularly as jobs become more mobile in a gig economy.

We can create an environment where decency and respect are the basis for all workplace relationships.

We can ensure a future where the talent of every Australian is harnessed to innovate, to maintain and equally share in our prosperity.

What I know now, that I didn't 8 years ago is that decent, powerful leaders working together can make gender equality happen.

This is why I feel so optimistic.

In closing let me thank the wonderful MCC team who have led our work in this area. I knew early on that if the MCC strategy was to succeed we needed highly talented individuals to make it happen. Annika Freyer CEO, Somali Cerise, Anna York, Amanda Hede, Sandra Conte and Amalina Whitaker are those individuals. To each of you, thank you so much for your hard work, your expertise and for bringing us all together. I also acknowledge the immense contribution of the MCC Institute Board and the wise leadership of Janet Menzies as Chair.

A special thanks also to the KPMG team: Stefanie Bradley, Shey Newitt and Elizabeth Shaw who conducted many interviews with experts to help us understand the complexity of the changing nature of work. Your work has laid the foundation for our discussion guide.

In closing this morning, I have one final request. As you leave, I urge you to be daring, to ask yourself:



“What bold and ambitious experiment will I lead today, to ensure that the women of tomorrow are integrated equally into every aspect of working life?”

Thank you.