

Speech by Ms. Melinda Gates, Co-Chair, Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, at the “Global Leaders’ Meeting on Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment: A Commitment to Action,” held at United Nations Headquarters, 27 September 2015

(Check against delivery.)

Thank you.

It is simply amazing to see so many world leaders come up to the podium and announce commitments to gender equality and women’s empowerment.

And all of this is happening against the backdrop of the passage of the Sustainable Development Goals, by which the countries of the world are pledging to end extreme poverty. I am proud to be a part of this impressive gathering at this critical moment.

We cannot achieve any of our ambitious goals without focusing very deliberately on gender. The world is increasingly recognizing this fact.

We knew the Beijing Conference was a breakthrough when it happened 20 years ago. With the benefit of hindsight, we can see that it was even more than that. It was the beginning of a global movement.

Like many of you, I have learned a lot over the years about the vital role that women can play in making societies better. Everywhere I go, I see not only that women are preoccupied with caring for their families, but also that they continually find creative ways to use limited resources to solve the problems they face.

They are the lifeblood of communities because of their devotion and their ingenuity. The more they overcome marginalization, discrimination, and oppression, the better off every human being will be.

Around the world, women are disproportionately at risk of—and affected by—poverty, ill health, and other challenges. However, when they are equipped with the right tools and opportunities, they can help ensure a better life for their families, communities, and nations.

Unlike most of today’s speakers, I represent a foundation, not a government. We look for innovative ideas; test them; and generate data and evidence about what works.

We aim to be catalysts, but we do not have the influence or the reach that you do within your own countries. We are proud to be your partners—and our goal is to assist and augment the work that you and your governments are doing in the fight against extreme poverty and disease.

The past 20 years have seen stunning progress. Women and girls have gained formal political equality in most places. They are much more likely to survive than ever before, with maternal and child mortality falling by almost half.

The next priority is to make sure that women and girls not only survive, but thrive. To make sure that formal political equality becomes a real-life, day-to-day equality.

That means physical safety. That means access to family planning and other health services. That means the power to make important decisions. That means economic opportunity.

This event is billed as a commitment to action. Our foundation will be a partner and funder in this space for years to come, and we look forward to collaborating with each of you. All the partners here must support each other in the years ahead as we act, and we must hold each other accountable for progress.

It is thrilling to imagine how the words we hear today will be translated into better lives for people around the globe.

Thank you.