

MAP GENERAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING
IN CELEBRATION OF INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY
ROLE OF WOMEN IN BRIDGING AND BUILDING A PROGRESSIVE FUTURE
A Project of MAP Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Committee
MARCH 8, 2023 WEDNESDAY | SHANGRI-LA THE FORT GRAND BALLROOM

To mark the month that celebrated women, the Management Association of the Philippines (MAP) invited three lady ambassadors to a panel discussion that tackled the role of women in bridging and building a progressive future, sharing their respective experiences in their home countries, in their tour of duties in the Philippines, and their general outlook.

INVITED GUESTS:

- H.E. Laure Beaufile, Ambassador of the United Kingdom
- H.E. Marykay Carlson, Ambassador of the United States of America
- H.E. Anke Reiffenstuel, Ambassador of Germany.

Moderator: Mr. Randolph T. Estrellado, COO, Maynilad Water Services, Inc.

Questions from the moderator and the audience to the three panelists gave them the chance to share their thoughts and ideas on women issues as follows:

- **Assessment of the progress of their respective countries on gender equality (SDG Goal No. 5) on a scale of 0 to 100.**

Ambassador Beaufile said that while a lot of progress had been made towards gender equality, the UK still has a long way to go. She pointed out that in the UK, women have suffered more because they are often in jobs that are less secure, and when the country faced inflation and job cuts, women were more affected. She also added that there is continued violence against women and girls in the UK and in other parts of the world. While the UK has made efforts to legislate against the issue of gender equality, it remains a big challenge. She likewise mentioned that despite the great progress in the workplace, there is still no equality in pay and a significant gap in gender-based pay still exists. On a zero to a hundred scale, the UK ambassador said the score will be 75.



For her part, US Ambassador Marykay Carlson concurred with Ambassador Beaufile on the issue of pay and equality and expressed dismay in the results of a recent poll in the US that women only earn 82 cents on the dollar compared to the men. Considering that ten or twenty years ago, it was at 80 cents, progress had been slow. Rather than thinking of the score, however, she pointed out that getting women around the world to work together to support and lift each other up, and make sure that they get the right pay for the same types of jobs men do will be a better path. She added that affordable childcare is also a major

concern in the US. Everyone needs to be part of a holistic effort to address this and not just leave the burden of child care exclusively on the shoulders of women.

Ambassador Anke Reiffenstuel did not also give a score for their country, pointing out that Germany is on a good track but more work needs to be done. She named three elements that have been initiated namely (1) the mindset or the awareness of women's rights; (2) an inclusive approach and the relevance of women as decision-makers through a political commitment of the government; and (3) to make gender equality a cross-cutting issue and include it in all the policies and actions of the government, organizations, and stakeholders.

- **Ambassador Carlson's response to the question on why there is no female US President yet while both Germany and UK already had women leaders**

The ambassador pointed out that Vice President Kamala Harris' role is considered very important and that there is growth in the number of women leaders in the congress and senate of the United States. It is about time for an American female president but there is a lot of work that people should do to make this happen, starting in kindergarten and grade school across countries where boys and girls are treated the same, with equal access to sports and to other opportunities. Then they will think of these opportunities to be within reach, all the way to the highest level of the government or business.

- **Ambassador Beaufile on how to address the employment gap and college education for males and females so that they can eventually assume better/higher position**

The ambassador noted the importance of role models, especially as children are being educated. If boys and girls are similarly educated in terms of doing house chores, or if girls are celebrated when they excel in math or science, assigning roles based on gender becomes unnecessary. She believes in the role of education and that textbooks should have topics with a gender lens, not just about women having the role of a hairdresser while men are the doctors or engineers.

The ambassador likewise stressed that pay is important and that she believes that sharing of that data in a public domain can be a good direction to address this. In the UK, companies that have more than 250 staff are asked to publish their gender pay gap and that is useful information to highlight the question of why there is a gender pay gap in the first place or why are women not getting that promotion.

As for childcare, it was lamented how people address this issue in the office. Women are expected to be responsible for child care but how should transportation be addressed for instance to make sure that they feel safe traveling for work or how to make application processes be completely gender transparent. There are a lot of solutions that can be considered and a transparent promotion process is one of them to eliminate bias that says men can work for longer hours because they don't have to go home and look after their kids.

US Ambassador Carlson weighed in on the issue of unconscious bias pointing out that the small and medium enterprises are run by women and yet when they get assisted by other companies, these are referred to in the Philippines and other countries as 'big brothers.' This issue underscores how language matters and that it doesn't have to be a male-run company to be able to impart the knowledge of helping women.

- **Ambassador Reiffenstuel on her thoughts regarding the European Institute for Gender Equality statistics that says 47% of women work part-time compared to 11% of men and how this is attributed to the roles that men and women are expected to do in the homes as well as the workplace**

Men or women can work part-time because they chose to do so and not because they are forced to or whether most of them are women who have to take care of their children at home, she opined. She noted in her visits to projects on gender issues and sexual and reproductive health that when teenagers get pregnant, they usually drop out of school. This limits their chances of having a better career and leads them to part-time, low-qualifying and poorly paid jobs. She said that children should have the same/equal access to education and pregnancy should not be a limiting factor.

- **On the activities or moves that US is doing to promote equity or equal opportunities**

Ambassador Carlson shared that every single US government agency under the Biden administration is mandated to have a diversity officer to ensure a more equitable and diverse workforce that should be inclusive. The goal is to make people bring their authentic self to the workplace saying that "diversity is being invited to the party and inclusion is being asked to dance." She also gave as an example how the state department oversees award processes, with gender references taken out to avoid bias.

For her part, Ambassador Beaufilet agreed with Ambassador Reiffenstuel that pregnancy is a physiological differentiator. Women do not get promoted because bosses or recruiters worry about the responsibilities should they get pregnant. She also mentioned that one in ten girls in Africa do not go to school when they have their periods because of the lack of access to sanitary pads. Another issue in the workplace is menopause. In the UK's Commonwealth and Development Office, there is a menopause policy that considers the onset of physiological transitions at a certain point in women's professional lives. Menopause has been a taboo subject across the world for so long but it should be kept in mind that it is not just a women's issue, it's a societal issue and this word should be used in the workplace or in the public domain without being afraid.

The UK Ambassador also tackled the issues on toilets and how it should include gender-neutrality where people have the freedom to choose what's right for their personal circumstance. Furthermore, breastfeeding women who have young children should be given special allowances wherein they can work flexibly. Equality does not happen by itself. It

takes a conscious effort to remove a deep structure of inequalities that has been there for a long time.

- **On what Germany is doing for other minority groups to promote diversity, equity, and inclusion beyond gender issues**

Ambassador Reiffenstuel replied that to the German government, equality means equality of the person, not just a specific group. Being aware of the gaps and the challenges is a particularly important step. For instance, they do not debate about immigration and they don't consider Germany as an immigration country, hence, the absence of immigration policy. There are a lot of foreigners living in Germany and making migrants a part of that society was a long process especially on their needs for equal rights and equal access to health, education, and jobs.

Ambassador Carlson added that equal rights under the law is important, but diversity and inclusion is also good for the bottom line because as business people expand their market base, they will bring in other ideas. When someone is hired for diversity, they should allow people to bring their authentic perspectives through their experiences, or whether they grew up in a rural area, or if they're a person of color, a woman, a trans, or gay. They should not be hired and be told to act like someone other than who they really are.

- **On their own personal journeys and challenges as a woman and how they got to their present position**

Ambassador Carlson recounted that in her freshman year in college, they had to pick eight courses in that semester. By the time she got to choose her classes, every course she wanted was gone so she ended up taking Politics of Latin America and a lesser known place of Shakespeare. The decision to take Politics of Latin America changed her life. She had a mentor who told her about the career of being a diplomat and shared that having grown up in the landlocked state of Arkansas, she did not have any international perspective but her mentor widened her horizon. She said that there are opportunities everywhere and if a person does not get what they're gunning for, there might be something totally better waiting ahead.

Ambassador Beaufile mentioned that she had very little ambition when she was a child. She was never taught to dream big but opportunities knock on doors and there are people who will give breaks that will lead to another. She just worked hard and that led her to where she is now but not without having experienced sexism and hardships when she was younger, with men calling her 'darling' or 'sweetheart' and how she handled those situations. It is important to work so that the future generation does not have to face the level of diversity that the past and current generation had gone through.

In relation to Ambassador Beaufile's shared experience, Ambassador Carlson also emphasized the importance and concept of 'allyship'. Fellow women, people of color, and all

men can be allies. Burden should not be on the shoulders of the minority of people who are less represented. The allies should step up for women by telling them when the joke is insensitive and uncomfortable.

Ambassador Reiffenstuel shared how the world was closed out where she grew up in East Germany. For her, reunification came at a perfect time when she finished her bachelor's degree. She immediately took the chance to go out of the country and stayed out for nearly a year. That was when she decided to work and live abroad while still relating to her country. She joined the foreign service where she met her husband, got married, and had three children. She experienced the same situation where she needed to work part-time.

- **On a notable action where the panelists significantly elevated women's status at work or society and its impact**

The US Ambassador shared how her vulnerabilities were often revealed in areas where she had not lived up to her expectations. She stressed that it doesn't mean that when someone becomes an ambassador, suddenly they are not vulnerable anymore. It was harder during the pandemic when people were all on virtual calls and it was important to deliberately ask, and to watch the body language of the people virtually. When a person appears uncomfortable, especially the women, make sure to ask them if they have something to say because sometimes they don't have the same confidence or culture that they were brought up in. Giving them the voice to speak out can lift them to share their concerns.

Ambassador Beaufile added that another way is for her to leave work on time. This gives women the confidence to do the same and instill a mindset that they don't have to work extra hours. She shared that she has two young kids, and she takes the time to go to their school and attend parent-teacher conferences. It is important to give women opportunities to find their voices in the workplace.

Ambassador Reiffenstuel also stated that people should never stop asking questions, especially the things that seem to be normal because most of the time, it can be taken for granted and may seem okay in the office but it is not. People just got used to this so the process of reflecting and asking 'what if' and 'is it really' should not stop.

- **On being in first world countries, where other countries might not be there yet so the 'nice to have' are difficult to implement. Based on what they have seen or observed in the Philippines, what would be easy to implement without having to cost too much**

Ambassador Beaufile said investing in women's rights and women's education is a very sensible value for money investment because when a girl is educated, the returns on health, as well as good governance are great. She reiterated the point of Ambassador Carlson about the importance of having women in the boardroom or in the workplace being good for the bottom line and that the same goes in having women in politics. Women can bring to the table issues like education, health, well-being, and families.

- **On the advice they would give to women who reached a point where they may have to choose between progressing their career or nurturing their family and what corporates can do to make this less of a dilemma**

Women should not have to make that choice and should have affordable child care available, according to Ambassador Carlson. There should not be an unconscious bias that assumes women are the only ones who can care for children. It is not fair that women have to make a choice. Those children being born are the future of their countries, whether it is in the Philippines or the United States. It is the government's and society's responsibility to provide a platform with equal access to opportunity for advancing in career, as well as in taking care of their children – not just consider this as women's work.

German Ambassador Reiffenstuel agreed and further pointed out that the society, the country, and the government should provide a framework where women and men are not forced to decide but to find themselves in a situation where they can make a choice on how best to proceed.

- **On making it mandatory for the government or companies to have women on boards.**

For Ambassador Beaufile, she personally feels it should be mandatory to have women on board. They will bring a different perspective and that's how change happens. Events like this are really important, not just to celebrate all women during the International Women's Day, but so we do not take for granted all the work that those who came before did and that they persisted even without the existing rights today. She enumerated tools that everyone could make to have an impact on the years to come:

- a) One commitment today in terms of what should be done to promote women's place in the workplace; and
- b) Commit to looking out on what those tools would be

Ambassador Carlson quoted the words of the former Secretary of State, Madeleine Albright, "*There's a special place in hell for women who don't help other women.*" Her call to action was for women to help other women, and bear in mind the concept of allyship. It is not just women helping women, but rather people helping people. The other call to action was self-actualization, women not being the first person to tell themselves 'no.' When women earn a hundred percent pay like what men are earning, there shouldn't be a need for a special program, but while women are still earning 80 or 82 cents on the dollar, then a special program that elevates the underrepresented people is necessary.

Ambassador Reiffenstuel pointed out that the Philippines has the huge potential and her call to action was to embrace this potential for all genders and to maximize this, no one should be excluded.

KEY TAKE-AWAYS

There are points that are relevant take-aways shared by the three panelists:

- The concept of allyship where women can help uplift other women and together push to be treated with equality and respect, considering and providing for their needs. It doesn't cost anything to step up for women wherever someone may be in the gender spectrum. We have a long way to go for women to have the same rights and privileges as men, but if we all work hand in hand in supporting women, there will be a higher chance for these rights to progress in the society
- Women should be celebrated and not be seen as weaker or lower than men. International Women's Day should not only be the day to give women the recognition and respect they deserve but this should be a part of our everyday life.. Empowering women should be a priority, giving them inclusion in the major decision-makings in the workplace or organizations. Talented women can be seen all over the world but are not being lifted up because of lack of confidence due to the fact that they are afraid to speak.
- There is more to gender equality and the present generation should be able to maximize the potential of creating a better mindset for future generations. It is never too late to stand up for what is right and do our part in supporting and protecting women in the workplace, communities, country and across the world.