

REMARKS BY AMBASSADOR LE THI TUYET MAI
MEMBER OF THE CENTRAL COMMITTEE OF VIET NAM WOMEN'S UNION
AT THE ASEM CONFERENCE ON WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT:
CREATING OPPORTUNITIES IN THE WORLD OF WORK
(Vilnius, 25 – 26 May 2017)

Excellency Minister of Foreign Affairs Mr. Linas Linkevicius,
Excellency Minister of Social Security and Labour Mr. Linas Kukuraitis
Madam Chair,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

1. It gives me great pleasure to join colleagues from ASEM members and various institutions at this meaningful ASEM Conference.

I wish to take this opportunity to sincerely thank our host for their warm hospitality and considerate arrangements for our delegation. I am so impressed by the friendship of the people, the beauty and traditional culture of the beautiful capital of Vilnius.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

2. Under the theme “*Women’s economic empowerment: Creating equal opportunities in the world of work*”, our Conference is very timely. And for many reasons, the Vilnius Conference constitutes a strong message of ASEM’s commitment and meaningful contribution to the global endeavours for the advancement of women for inclusive and sustainable growth.

As UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres emphasized in his message for this year’s International Women’s Day, “When women participate fully in the labour force, it creates opportunities and generate growth” and gender equality is central to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The 2017 Global Summit of Women in Tokyo a few weeks ago pointed out the pressing need to make joint actions to speed up women’s ascent to business leadership.

As the first-ever ASEM Conference on women empowerment, our event opens a new chapter for ASEM in “strengthening cooperation in the field of gender equality and empowerment of women” as stated by our Leaders at the Ulaanbaatar Summit last year.

It is high time for us to work closely together to set forth direction with concrete action plan for ASEM cooperation in women economic empowerment in the third decade. By doing so, we can also join hands with the international community to deal with this important issue on the global stage.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

3. We highly commend Lithuania's championship in promoting ASEM cooperation in women's economic empowerment. And Viet Nam - as a co-sponsor - and other ASEM members are all here to support you. In that spirit, I wish to make three suggestions to further enhance ASEM cooperation in this field:

First, we need to develop new ways of thinking as well as comprehensive and cross-sectorial approach to women's economic empowerment. Gender analysis and gender budgeting should be integrated into national agenda, growth strategies and policy frameworks. In implementing the Agenda 2030, a special focus should be put on the SDG 5 of achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls as well as the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, CEDAW Convention, and the UN Women's Empowerment Principles.

Furthermore, gender equality should be at the core of ASEM agenda. We should put into action the specific projects in the ASEM "tangible cooperation area on women's empowerment", connecting with initiatives and projects of other ASEM tangible cooperation on areas on SME cooperation, higher education, vocational training and skills development, education and human resources development, trade and investment... Since they are cross-cutting and inter-related.

Second, we should focus on how we can enhance exchange of views, lessons learnt and best practices and provide policy recommendations on the advancement of women. It is important that we hold a regular ASEM roundtable to share views and experiences in this regard. We need to strengthen information exchange, policy coordination among government officials, experts, businesses and scholars, especially on increasing the female labour market participation, female entrepreneurship and access to finance for women, and closing the digital gender divide. It is also essential to establish a network of information sharing and linkages among various women's centers and institutes. Developed members of ASEM may provide technical assistance and capacity-building for developing members in this regard.

Third, it is important that we strengthen global and regional partnership for women's economic empowerment. To achieve all-around gender equality, we must generate an accumulated impulse from each and every effort. We must foster networking and coordination among women around the world and between regional and international fora, such as Women 20, APEC High-level Dialogue on Women and the Economy, ASEAN Committee on Women, EU Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality, Lower Mekong Initiative on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Dialogue...

Ladies and Gentlemen,

4. For Viet Nam, in the past three decades of reform and development, we always hold that any domestic reform and international integration must aim at and include gender equality and women's leadership as central elements, and women's businesses and employment is a key driving force behind innovative development.

It is our conviction that, as mothers, wives and sisters, women not only raise and pass on the best qualities to their kids and younger generations, they are also natural bonds linking different generations. Women play a crucial role in cementing ties between families and society, between states and regions and the world. Women should be empowered so that they can bring into full play their experience and approaches and to better represent their interests in the society.

In Viet Nam, gender equality has since 1986 been mainstreamed into most reform policies. Our country has fulfilled ahead of schedule five out of eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and all the criteria for advancing gender equality and empowering women and is now strongly committed to Sustainable Development Goals of Agenda 2030.

In 2016, Viet Nam ranked among the top in the number of women CEOs in Asia Pacific, ranked the third in ASEAN regarding the ratio of women's participation in the labour force. Our country holds the second highest number of female parliamentarians among ASEAN countries and fifth in the Asia-Pacific region. We have succeeded in eradicating gender inequality at all educational levels. If the majority of faculty members in universities were male 10 years ago, the male-to-female lecturer ratio strikes a balance now. Notably, female students outnumbered in high schools and universities.

The Center for Women in Politics and Public Administration (WiPPA) set up five years ago has enhanced significantly the government's commitment to gender equality at all levels.

Quite a number of micro-finance projects, training programs, capacity building courses... have been designed for women nationwide.

In recent years, the level of women's participation in economic development has been on the rise, but women still face many challenges in opening their own businesses and finding jobs and there is a lacking of social recognition for women's potential, talent and contribution.

As Viet Nam now embarks on deepening reform and intensive international integration, promoting gender equality and the economic empowerment of women are given higher priority.

5. Recently the Vietnamese Government enacted *the National Action Plan on Implementation of Agenda 2030*, including measures to achieve Sustainable Development Goal 5: to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.

Our Government put a strong focus on movements engaged by various actors, public and private, in order to promote women's economic empowerment, including to ensure women full and effective participation and equal opportunities to education, vocational training, labour market in business establishment and development, decision making and leadership in political, economic and public life; implement schemes to support female CEOs in business establishment and development; ensure all women, especially poor women in the rural areas has equal rights to economic resources, ownership and control over land use rights; enhance women's use of enabling technologies, ICT...

6. Moreover, we are working closely with ASEAN members to establish a resilient, dynamic, inclusive, people-oriented and people-centered Community, where the women's women is absolutely indispensable to such course. To this endeavours, we look forward to the continued support from all of you here.

We would be more than happy to welcome you in Viet Nam to work with us for women advancement, especially when Viet Nam hosts APEC, including the APEC Women and the Economy Forum in September this year and assumes ASEAN Chairmanship in 2020.

We believe that there will be fruitful deliberations at our Conference on how best we can move forward the agenda of gender equality and economic empowerment of women in the evolving global landscape.

In conclusion, please let me take this opportunity to wish you all continued good health, happiness and greater success.

Thank you very much.
