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At the Seminar: “Towards a better future for women and work: Voices of women and men”

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I am going to be talking about what employers are doing across the region, and it is going to be speaking back a little to the question that was raised about SMEs. What we see out there in terms of government programs is that most programs for supporting private sector development are for large companies. But jobs are created in SMEs, and they struggle with coming through with those programs and complying with the labour standards and laws that are there. So I think we should not only think about the people and what we can do inside organizations but also the policy level. Now I would like to come to my presentation.

At the regional level, I’m based in Bangkok so this is the region I look at. What we are seeing in terms of trends are that we have this enormous growth in the region and it is quite striking in terms of looking at other regions how Asia is a powerhouse. However, it has not been accompanied by equality measures, or we are seeing inequalities in fact growing. Data on gender gaps in Asia and the Pacific show that female labour force participation rate is either staying the same or fell in Eastern, South-Eastern and Southern Asia, which is very worrying in terms of wanting to have women in the workforce. We are seeing that there is something that is stopping them, in spite of all this tremendous growth and economic activity. So we need to be looking at this, we have been talking about the measures in place but we also need to talk about the quality of those jobs. Today, several people have been raising the issue of gender gap in income that Susan talked about that 61 percent of women say they contribute a small source of the household income. This is telling perhaps, and we need to delve further down there to understand what this means.

We have talked today about arguments for gender equality, and I would like to add a couple more. It is of course a human rights issue. We know it is the right thing to do but we need to repeat these arguments again and again. In addition, on the efficiency side, greater gender equality could increase the GDP in Asia and Pacific in 2030 by

between three and five percent. Then across the sub-region of South Asia the figure is up to 12.5 percent, which shows that we are losing out in our economies. Women's limited access to employment is causing estimated losses of USD42 to 47 billion per year in the Asia and the Pacific region. The arguments are compelling and they are available. We know that if we could close these gaps, we could be getting more growth, and I think likely we would see more equal growth (in particular if some of the remaining gender barriers are addressed/removed).

Here are a few more facts from the region. Women represent ten percent or less of senior management and around five percent of CEOs. It is important that both women and men see women role models in leadership roles, that men and younger men see women as leaders, in order to see themselves as future leaders if they so choose. Having small numbers of women as senior managers is actually detrimental to the future pipeline of leaders, so it is really something that we need to address. We also see a persistent glass ceiling preventing women from reaching top positions and I will be talking about how employers see that later. We have been hearing about the glass ceiling but I am sure you have heard expressions like leaky pipeline, the sticky floor, and the glass walls. I think really what we need to do is to take action to break down these walls once and for all and to be showing progress. On the brighter side of things, women own and manage nearly 30 percent of all business in Asia and the Pacific, and they represent about 26 percent of employers. We know that women hire more gender balanced or gender diverse teams so this is a good thing for the future, and something to think about and support. As raised time and again, women are underrepresented in policy and social dialogue.

ILO produced a report with the Employers' Organizations in Asia Pacific to look at what Employers are doing in terms of trying to raise the leadership of women, get women to break through the glass ceiling and move up into better quality jobs. In terms of business benefits of this, they include better financial performance, competitive advantage, increased innovation, and enhanced client insight, to name a few. I also noted down additional indirect benefits that you can find in the report, which include improved employee engagement and lower turnover of employees. So there are so many reasons to do the right thing and we have heard about this in the Gallup report. The top barriers to women's leadership in Asia Pacific, as we are talking about leadership, as you would expect, the first things that we have been saying are issues such as capacity building and management training. However, equally weighted was women having

more family responsibilities as men, and additionally, the next most important barriers stated was the issue of the roles assigned by society to men and women. Masculine corporate culture and stereotypes about women's leadership capacities come to the mind-set. If we look further down, we will see the mention of work and family balance. In terms of percentage of managers who are women at junior, middle and senior management levels, you can see clearly that Japan is struggling. There are a relatively high number of junior managers, so this means the pipeline is being built – however there is a need to be working on the next levels.

In terms of equal opportunity policy measures that companies are implementing in Asia and the Pacific, there are efforts being made towards leadership positions, but a lot of focus is on issues related work-family balance such as flexible working hours, part-time working hours, the promotion of telework, maternity, paternity, parental leave. Other measures most mentioned are related to recruitment, retention and promotion as well as mentoring and sponsorship. Perhaps we need to be thinking more about how we can support companies to look straighter at the issues of work-family balance and provision of that care 'bridge to the economy' for workers with family responsibilities. ILO's Employers' representatives are developing a good practice manual on companies and what they are doing to promote gender equality in the workforce.

One of the areas that we have not really talked about is actually about women in business. ILO supports women's entrepreneurship promotion through both direct supports to countries and through Employers' Organizations. It was said earlier that women manage 30 percent of the businesses in Asia, but there is a real potential to grow these numbers further, in addition to growth potential of these companies. As in employment, women in business are also facing challenges to manage work and family, to access relevant services and to start and grow their businesses. Most of the available programs are actually promoting quite general management training that is mainly supporting women and men to start a business. Often these programmes target women and enable them to start a business but don't help them to grow. We need to rethink how we are promoting private sector development and make sure that it is gender responsive so that challenges would be addressed and more growth results could be leveraged.

Companies and governments alike can promote women's entrepreneurship development, so what are companies doing out there? Companies are promoting through their supplier diversity policies. Companies as well as governments can be sourcing and

linking up with women-led businesses, improving their access to markets. Companies are providing women's entrepreneurship training and supports, access to capital through angel investors, sponsoring contests that are generating role models of women entrepreneurs and organizing conferences and commissioning research. There is a lot happening out there, but what usually happens in given countries is that there is very little coordination of all those initiatives.

Lastly, there is growing momentum in private sector on women's economic empowerment. Companies are doing a lot already to ensure that they achieve targets that they set. They are usually applying multipronged approaches in terms of support to businesses and businesses supporting women. We all need to 'walk the talk' on the measures and communicate progress. It is easy to lose momentum gained when working on gender if we cannot see the figures and the tangible results. That is where, at the workplace level and with workers and employers, we can be making and communicating that progress, making sure we are on track for the long and big goal of equality. Thank you very much.