

JCCP Program Closing Speech

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بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

Good morning distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, colleagues.

It isn't easy giving this speech, in the presence of such esteemed people that I look up to and consider as role models, especially after their amazing speeches yesterday. Trust me it is no easy feat. I stand here today in awe of your aura. And specifically for this reason I've written a very long thank you speech just to impress you. So bear with me.

We are all here today because we are talking about women leadership, women empowerment, women sisterhood and

also women collaboration. We have to recognize that without our counterpart "the man", we really as a society cannot be whole. Just as men need us in an aging population, such as Japan, we also need them for their support and for them to generously share their power with us. We do know it might be painfully uncomfortable for them to do so. We also know it is necessary.

We have learnt many things during these past few days. We have learnt that flexibility is imperative in this ever changing world we live in. I want to add that agility is even more important than

flexibility because it deals with the speed of change and not only the ability to change. We have learnt from Jun Mutoh-san the motivation matrix; and from Akiko Kokubo-san that women tend to be transformational leaders, emphasizing “vision and encouragement”, whereas men tend to be more transactional leader emphasizing on the “carrot and stick” approach.

We did some workshops on the importance of communication and what are the points and issues we should focus on and the difference between an average leader and an exceptional leader.

We worked on case studies and personally met female executives and spoke with female employees at JFE steel manufactory. We went to site visits to industries that could not have been more juxtaposed. From one which deals with extremely high temperatures and extremely dangerous material and hazardous environment to one which handles and cares for babies, infants and children.

We’ve had speakers from universities, from HR, from company executives and pioneers in their own right. For all that exposure, I trust I speak for all of us, from the GCC, when I say thank you JCCP from all our hearts. Your efforts in planning, putting together and executing this program has been flawless and impeccable; I reiterate my thanks, especially to Tsuyoshi Nakai-san; we are grateful.

I also want to thank Her Excellency Dr. Maitha Al Shamsi and Mr. Ali Al Shamsi for establishing and sponsoring the FCW. We from the other GCC countries thank you for making it a possibility.

And since this is a collaborative effort between Japan and the GCC, allow me to analyze women’s challenges in the GCC and how FCW can help us move forward and how essential it is for women to help women in order to sustain our business climate.



The first thing we have to do is acknowledge that there is a gender mold. A set of stereotypes and perceived notions about the inherent characteristics of women that make them fit for one role and not the other. For example, the statement that 'women are good listeners' is used to hire women to work in HR because 'they listen better' to employee concerns. On the other hand, the statement that 'women are emotional' is used to belittle an individual's sense of judgment or composure, and therefore, may prevent her from working in difficult decision making positions. In essence, the gender mold is what society wants women to be like, and not what they really are.

Nina Simone, a late American jazz and blues singer, once sang: To be young, gifted and black / We must begin to tell our young / There's a world waiting for you / Yours is a quest that's just begun.

While these lyrics were written for the American civil rights movement, this message deeply resonates with young women in the GCC. To be young, gifted and a working woman in the GCC means

that we have to find the drive within ourselves to reach our potential because more often than not, we will most likely be faced with a business community that doesn't want us to play a major role in shaping the future.

Other than the gender mold, women are impeded by having less access to the professional and social networks that help them accelerate their careers. Meaningful interactions between women subordinates and their supervisors, many of whom are men, has kept women at a disadvantage in networking, which in turn has led to them having weaker chances at more challenging assignments or higher positions for advancement.

And in the Middle East, with all the cultural and communications challenges present, we see that members of the same gender prefer networking with each other. This means that women prefer networking with other women (in the comfort zone-*not bad in networking*). Therefore, we have ended up with many talented individuals stuck in their current positions within the workplace because, amidst a scarcity of women in decision-

making positions, they haven't been able to reach out to a man in power for his sponsorship to include them in his circle of male network connections.

So where do we go from here?

FIRST - We have to network with men – we have to know how to build and maintain relationships with “powerful” men.

SECOND - We have to break the gender mold………… how?

This subject must be tackled cohesively and on a regional level. Very few, if any, current decision-makers (whether governmental or in the private sector) are ‘solely’ focused on women; so our causes are stuck in what I call a bureaucracy-clogged pipeline. We overcome this by increasing the presence of women in decision-making government bodies (just like the UAE). We must also empower young women to aim for decision-making positions and play a leading role in all aspects of the job force, while at the same time; encourage our communities to push their daughters towards professional

excellence (much in the line with what ARAMCO is currently doing).

LAST but not least, we have to increase the visual presence of female role models in the media – please become the new fashionistas.

I want it to be fashionable to be independently financially well-off, to be strong, to be smart, to be… P O W E R F U L !! I will say it again… P O W E R F U L !!

I want it to be attractive. I want it to be something teenage girls aspire for and covet… not in others, but in themselves. Because only when you're powerful can you enforce change, only when you're powerful can you endorse change and only when you're powerful can you sponsor change and become a game player. We've waited on the sidelines for far too long.



In conclusion, I would like to say that I am proud to be an Arab woman, an Arab

working woman, despite all the challenges that we still face and I am proud to be a leader, despite the tiny size of the team I currently lead. I am proud and grateful to have walked on the path that women before me have paved and I hope that my footsteps will be followed by the generations of women that follow. We may live in a region where cultural and social development has been stifled, but we continue to fight for the right to move forward. The journey to equal opportunity in the workplace is long and hard, but much like our pearl-diving, seafaring ancestors, we will be persistent and diligent in finding our pearls... and we will keep sailing until we reach the shore, for we surely will one day...

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