

Expo Dubai

**A Curated Conversation on “Leadership on All Levels”:
The Constitutive Meeting of the “Gender Working Group”**

Expo Dubai, International Gender Champions

**Welcoming remarks by
Thomas Greminger, Director, GCSP**

Dubai, United Arab Emirates on 08 March 2022

Thank you for inviting me here today. It is a pleasure to join this first meeting of a Gender Working Group here in Dubai and offer some welcoming remarks at this impressive Expo on Leadership at all levels to advance gender equality.

From my experience as Secretary General of the OSCE, as the director of the Geneva Centre for Security Policy-GCSP and an International Gender Champion then and now, I can share some of my reflections as well as insights from the IGC.

Firstly, it is clear that we will not ‘evolve’ automatically to a more equal state.

The structures and hierarchies we have created privilege certain characteristics and ways of working and will continue to do so unless we redesign them. Leaders at the ‘top’ must prioritise reform politically – even in the face of apathy or resistance – and provide frameworks, resources and accountability to implement reforms.

Secondly, we do indeed – as you have identified – need leadership on all levels.

Top-down **Laws and policies** alone won’t work – we also need to engage **hearts and minds**: appealing to values of respect, freedom, choice and dignity; creating a positive vision of what can be achieved through role models and inspirational stories; and addressing people’s fears around change, disruption and losing out.

At the OSCE we developed a **gender parity strategy**. However, I realised that prioritising numbers alone does not work – culture truly matters. **Safe spaces** are at the heart of dialogue – they are also at the heart of leadership. Hierarchies can privilege power and authority of some over others and lead to abuse of position and relations. I openly addressed sexual harassment and other challenges to create a healthy and inclusive professional working environment – which benefits not just women, but everyone. I also launched systematic work on preventing sexual abuse and exploitation, as absolutely key in organisations that has 15 field operations with more than 2,000 staff.

As you look to develop this working group, I can share a few insights from **the IGC**. With a membership of over 300 Champions across six multi-lateral hubs – Geneva, NY, Vienna, Den Haag, Nairobi and Paris, it catalyses commitment and action, engaging some of the most senior leaders in global governance on a **personal level**. The key ingredients for success have been simplicity, accountability and the network effect:

- Firstly, **simplicity** – a core founding principle of IGC was the Panel Parity Pledge – the **PPP** – which has made single sex panels unacceptable in IGC’s Hubs. It is visible and easily actionable. We now have a new **GBV Pledge** which is also easy to understand albeit requiring deeper and more sustained action to truly realise – zero tolerance of sexist attitudes and behaviours and gender-based violence.
- Secondly, **accountability** – in addition to the PPP and GBV Pledge, Champions make 2 further personal commitments visible on IGC’s website and for all members of their organisation to see. Champions are given a badge the logo is a constant reminder of the commitments, which Champions report on in IGC’s annual survey.

- **Finally, the network effect** – Champions invite peers to join the network and it is attractive to join. We meet in each hub twice per year and more often in events to exchange, strategise and identify synergies. Several Champion-led Impact Groups in Representation, Disarmament, Trade, Nuclear, Justice... and now hopefully Climate. These impact groups identify blind spots and shape policies, priorities and culture.

I believe that cooperative groups and networks – such as this group, the IGC, and the Arab Women Mediators Network, which the GCSP supported last year - are critical to bridging ‘leadership at all levels’ – and across all borders. I wish you every success in your endeavours and look forward to the rest of the conversation.