

THE CILIRD WAY

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS || LAW || DIPLOMACY

AUSTRALIA’S LNG EXPORT POLICY SPARKS INDUSTRY BACKLASH: MAJOR ENERGY COMPANIES INCLUDING SHELL AND SANTOS HAVE WARNED THAT AUSTRALIA’S PROPOSED DOMESTIC GAS RESERVATION RULES COULD DISCOURAGE LNG INVESTMENTS AND DESTABILIZE LONG-TERM EXPORT CONTRACTS.

GLOBAL LNG PRICES EXPECTED TO SHIFT TOWARD BUYER’S MARKET: ANALYSTS FORECAST THAT NEARLY 150 MTPA OF NEW LNG CAPACITY ENTERING MARKETS BETWEEN 2026–2028 COULD SIGNIFICANTLY LOWER GLOBAL LNG PRICES AND STRENGTHEN BUYERS’ BARGAINING POWER.

RENEWABLE ENERGY GROWTH WEAKENS LONG-TERM LNG DEMAND: EXPANDING SOLAR, WIND AND NUCLEAR ENERGY PROJECTS ACROSS EUROPE AND ASIA ARE PROJECTED TO REDUCE LNG DEPENDENCE, ESPECIALLY IN JAPAN, SOUTH KOREA AND EUROPE.

GEOPOLITICAL TENSIONS CONTINUE TO DISRUPT LNG TRADE ROUTES: CONFLICT-LINKED DISRUPTIONS AROUND THE STRAIT OF HORMUZ ARE INCREASING VOLATILITY IN LNG SHIPPING MARKETS AND REVIVING CONCERNS OVER GLOBAL ENERGY SECURITY.

COAL CONSUMPTION RISES AS LNG SUPPLIES TIGHTEN IN ASIA: SEVERAL ASIAN ECONOMIES, INCLUDING INDIA AND SOUTH KOREA, ARE TEMPORARILY INCREASING COAL USAGE AMID RISING LNG COSTS AND SUPPLY DISRUPTIONS CAUSED BY MIDDLE EAST TENSIONS.

CHINA’S RENEWABLE PUSH RESHAPES GLOBAL ENERGY MARKETS: CHINA’S RAPID INVESTMENT IN CLEAN ENERGY TECHNOLOGIES AND REDUCED DEPENDENCE ON IMPORTED LNG ARE ACCELERATING THE GLOBAL TRANSITION AWAY FROM FOSSIL FUELS.

QATAR EXPANDS LNG PRODUCTION DESPITE DEMAND CONCERNS: QATAR HAS CONTINUED ITS LARGE-SCALE LNG EXPANSION PLANS, AIMING TO STRENGTHEN ITS DOMINANCE IN GLOBAL GAS EXPORTS EVEN AS ANALYSTS WARN OF A POTENTIAL GLOBAL SUPPLY SURPLUS AND WEAKENING LONG-TERM DEMAND.





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Letter from the Editorial Board

WITH THIS EDITION OF THE CILIRD WAY, WE ARE PLEASED TO CONTINUE CREATING A SPACE FOR DISCUSSION, REFLECTION, AND ENGAGEMENT ON ISSUES SURROUNDING INTERNATIONAL LAW, INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS, AND DIPLOMACY. EACH EDITION BRINGS TOGETHER DIVERSE PERSPECTIVES THAT HELP US BETTER UNDERSTAND THE RAPIDLY CHANGING GLOBAL LANDSCAPE.

THE ARTICLES FEATURED IN THIS NEWSLETTER EXPLORE CONTEMPORARY DEVELOPMENTS, EMERGING LEGAL CONCERNS, AND EVOLVING DIPLOMATIC CONVERSATIONS THAT CONTINUE TO SHAPE OUR WORLD TODAY. AS THIS EDITION ALSO COINCIDES WITH WOMEN'S DAY, WE WOULD LIKE TO ACKNOWLEDGE THE GROWING ROLE OF WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP, POLICYMAKING, AND GLOBAL AFFAIRS, WHOSE CONTRIBUTIONS CONTINUE TO INSPIRE MEANINGFUL CHANGE ACROSS SECTORS.

AT CILIRD, WE BELIEVE THAT KNOWLEDGE BECOMES MORE VALUABLE WHEN SHARED AND DISCUSSED OPENLY. THIS NEWSLETTER IS NOT ONLY A COLLECTION OF ARTICLES, BUT ALSO A PLATFORM THAT ENCOURAGES CURIOSITY, DIALOGUE, AND INFORMED THOUGHT.

WE SINCERELY THANK ALL OUR CONTRIBUTORS, EDITORS, AND READERS FOR THEIR CONTINUED SUPPORT AND ENTHUSIASM. YOUR ENCOURAGEMENT MOTIVATES US TO KEEP IMPROVING AND EXPANDING THIS INITIATIVE WITH EVERY EDITION.

WE HOPE YOU ENJOY READING THIS EDITION AND FIND IT BOTH INSIGHTFUL AND ENGAGING.

— THE EDITORIAL BOARD

MAJOR NEWS



MARCH 2026

ESCALATION OF US-ISRAEL MILITARY ACTION AGAINST IRAN

THE BIGGEST DEVELOPMENT OF MARCH 2026 WAS THE SHARP RISE IN CONFLICT IN WEST ASIA. AFTER TALKS OVER IRAN'S NUCLEAR PROGRAMME FAILED, THE UNITED STATES AND ISRAEL LAUNCHED MAJOR MILITARY STRIKES AGAINST IRAN. NEARLY 900 AIR AND MISSILE ATTACKS TARGETED IRANIAN MISSILE BASES, AIR DEFENCE SYSTEMS, AND SUSPECTED NUCLEAR SITES. KEY ACTORS IN THE CONFLICT INCLUDED THE U.S. CENTRAL COMMAND (CENTCOM), THE ISRAEL DEFENSE FORCES (IDF), AND IRAN'S ISLAMIC REVOLUTIONARY GUARD CORPS (IRGC). IN RESPONSE, IRAN CARRIED OUT MISSILE AND DRONE ATTACKS ON ISRAEL, U.S. MILITARY BASES IN THE GULF, AND COUNTRIES SUCH AS BAHRAIN AND THE UAE.

THE CONFLICT WAS DRIVEN BY LONG-STANDING TENSIONS OVER IRAN'S NUCLEAR AMBITIONS, MISSILE PROGRAMME, AND SUPPORT FOR GROUPS LIKE HEZBOLLAH. IRAN'S GROWING REGIONAL INFLUENCE AND TENSIONS AROUND THE STRAIT OF HORMUZ FURTHER WORSENERD THE SITUATION. THE IMPACT WAS SEVERE, WITH OVER 24,000 INJURIES REPORTED ACROSS COUNTRIES INCLUDING IRAN, ISRAEL, LEBANON, IRAQ, SYRIA, BAHRAIN, AND THE UAE. THE CONFLICT ALSO DISRUPTED GLOBAL OIL SUPPLY ROUTES AND INCREASED FEARS OF A LARGER REGIONAL WAR. THE UNITED NATIONS, EUROPEAN UNION, CHINA, AND SEVERAL OTHER COUNTRIES CALLED FOR RESTRAINT AND CEASEFIRE TALKS.



GLOBAL ENERGY SHOCK DUE TO THE STRAIT OF HORMUZ CRISIS

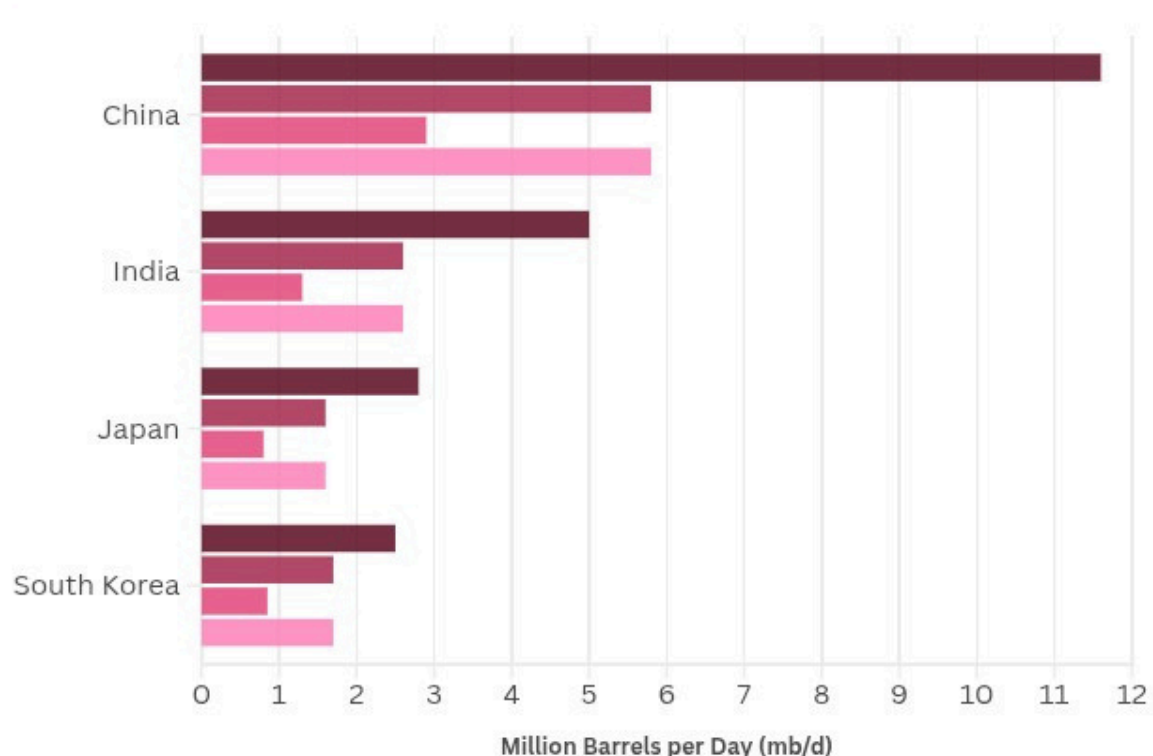
THE CONFLICT IN WEST ASIA ALSO TRIGGERED A MAJOR GLOBAL ENERGY CRISIS DUE TO DISRUPTIONS IN THE STRAIT OF HORMUZ, ONE OF THE WORLD'S MOST IMPORTANT OIL ROUTES. RISING TENSIONS BETWEEN IRAN, ISRAEL, AND THE UNITED STATES SHARPLY REDUCED OIL TANKER MOVEMENT, WITH SHIPPING FALLING BY OVER 90% DURING PEAK CONFLICT. SINCE THE STRAIT CARRIES NEARLY 20% OF GLOBAL OIL SUPPLIES, THE DISRUPTION CAUSED OIL PRICES TO RISE SHARPLY.

BRENT CRUDE INCREASED FROM AROUND \$80-85 PER BARREL TO NEARLY \$120 IN MARCH 2026. OIL-EXPORTING COUNTRIES LIKE SAUDI ARABIA, THE UAE, AND KUWAIT WERE AFFECTED, WHILE IMPORT-DEPENDENT COUNTRIES SUCH AS INDIA, CHINA, JAPAN, AND EUROPEAN NATIONS FACED RISING FUEL COSTS AND SUPPLY UNCERTAINTY. MAJOR SHIPPING COMPANIES LIKE MAERSK AND MSC SUSPENDED OR REROUTED OPERATIONS IN THE REGION. THE INTERNATIONAL ENERGY AGENCY CALLED IT ONE OF THE BIGGEST OIL SUPPLY DISRUPTIONS IN RECENT HISTORY, AFFECTING OVER 10 MILLION BARRELS PER DAY. MANY COUNTRIES RESPONDED BY USING EMERGENCY OIL RESERVES AND FINDING ALTERNATIVE SUPPLIERS. THE CRISIS EXPOSED THE WORLD'S HEAVY DEPENDENCE ON WEST ASIAN OIL AND WEAK GLOBAL SUPPLY CHAINS.

Asia's Daily Oil Dependency on the Strait of Hormuz

Based on 2025 EIA/Kpler data. Shortfall scenarios modelled at 50% and 100% Hormuz disruption.

■ Total Crude Imports (mb/d) ■ Hormuz-Dependent Imports (mb/d)
■ Projected Shortfall - Partial Closure (mb/d)
■ Projected Shortfall - Full Closure (mb/d)



Source: U.S.A. EIA, Kpler vessel tracking, The Print / India Ministry data, South Korea trade ministry figures

Made with Flourish • Create a chart



The background image of the top section shows the interior of the United Nations General Assembly chamber. It features a large, semi-circular room with rows of desks and chairs, each equipped with a computer monitor. The room is dimly lit, with light coming from the windows on the right side. The title is centered in a white rounded rectangle with a pink border.

UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY ADOPTS INSTITUTIONAL REFORM RESOLUTION

IN MARCH 2026, THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY ADOPTED AN IMPORTANT INSTITUTIONAL REFORM RESOLUTION UNDER THE UN80 INITIATIVE LED BY SECRETARY-GENERAL ANTÓNIO GUTERRES. THE RESOLUTION PASSED OVERWHELMINGLY WITH 168 MEMBER STATES VOTING IN FAVOUR. THE REFORM AIMS TO IMPROVE THE EFFICIENCY, COORDINATION, AND ACCOUNTABILITY OF THE UNITED NATIONS SYSTEM BY RESTRUCTURING HOW MANDATES ARE DESIGNED, IMPLEMENTED, AND REVIEWED. IT PROPOSES STRONGER MONITORING SYSTEMS, BETTER DATA USAGE, AND CLEARER ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURES WITHIN THE UN FRAMEWORK. COUNTRIES SUCH AS INDIA, GERMANY, AND BRAZIL STRONGLY SUPPORTED THE REFORMS, ARGUING THAT THE EXISTING UN STRUCTURE REFLECTS OUTDATED POST-WORLD WAR II REALITIES AND FAILS TO ADDRESS CONTEMPORARY GLOBAL CHALLENGES EFFECTIVELY. THE RESOLUTION REPRESENTS AN IMPORTANT POLITICAL STEP TOWARD BROADER UN REFORM, INCLUDING RENEWED DEMANDS FOR RESTRUCTURING THE UN SECURITY COUNCIL TO BETTER REFLECT PRESENT-DAY GLOBAL POWER DYNAMICS. ALTHOUGH THE RESOLUTION IS NOT LEGALLY BINDING, IT SIGNALS INCREASING INTERNATIONAL PRESSURE FOR INSTITUTIONAL MODERNISATION AND MORE EFFECTIVE GLOBAL GOVERNANCE.

The background image of the middle section shows a large conference hall with rows of chairs and desks, each with a computer monitor. The room is dimly lit, with light coming from the windows on the right side. The title is centered in a white rounded rectangle with a pink border.

WTO MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE HIGHLIGHTS GLOBAL TRADE CRISIS

THE 14TH MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE (MC14) OF THE WORLD TRADE ORGANIZATION HELD IN YAOUNDÉ, CAMEROON, EXPOSED GROWING DIVISIONS WITHIN THE INTERNATIONAL TRADING SYSTEM. REPRESENTATIVES FROM OVER 160 WTO MEMBER STATES MET TO DISCUSS ISSUES INCLUDING AGRICULTURAL SUBSIDIES, DIGITAL TRADE REGULATIONS, AND INSTITUTIONAL REFORM. HOWEVER, THE CONFERENCE CONCLUDED WITHOUT A CONSENSUS AGREEMENT. MAJOR DISAGREEMENTS EMERGED BETWEEN DEVELOPED AND DEVELOPING COUNTRIES. THE UNITED STATES ADVOCATED STRONGER PROTECTIONS FOR DIGITAL TRADE AND E-COMMERCE, WHILE COUNTRIES SUCH AS INDIA AND BRAZIL OPPOSED THESE MEASURES, ARGUING THAT THEY COULD RESTRICT DOMESTIC POLICY FLEXIBILITY AND DISADVANTAGE DEVELOPING ECONOMIES. THE DEADLOCK REFLECTED BROADER STRUCTURAL PROBLEMS WITHIN GLOBAL TRADE GOVERNANCE. RISING GEOPOLITICAL TENSIONS, PROTECTIONIST POLICIES, THE U.S.-CHINA TRADE RIVALRY, AND THE WEAKENING OF THE WTO DISPUTE SETTLEMENT MECHANISM SINCE 2019 HAVE ALL REDUCED CONFIDENCE IN MULTILATERAL TRADE INSTITUTIONS. THE CONFERENCE OUTCOME RAISED CONCERNS ABOUT THE FUTURE RELEVANCE OF THE WTO. GLOBAL TRADE GROWTH PROJECTIONS FOR 2026 WERE REDUCED TO APPROXIMATELY 1.9%, WHILE BUSINESSES FACED INCREASING UNCERTAINTY AND FRAGMENTATION IN INTERNATIONAL MARKETS. THE FAILURE OF THE CONFERENCE REINFORCED FEARS THAT REGIONAL AND BILATERAL AGREEMENTS MAY INCREASINGLY REPLACE MULTILATERAL TRADE COOPERATION.

STRATEGIC RESET IN INDIA-CANADA RELATIONS

MARCH 2026 ALSO WITNESSED A SIGNIFICANT DIPLOMATIC DEVELOPMENT AS INDIA AND CANADA INITIATED EFFORTS TO RESTORE BILATERAL RELATIONS. CANADIAN PRIME MINISTER MARK CARNEY VISITED INDIA AND HELD TALKS WITH PRIME MINISTER NARENDRA MODI, MARKING THE FIRST BILATERAL VISIT BY A CANADIAN PRIME MINISTER SINCE 2018. THE TWO COUNTRIES AGREED TO REVIVE NEGOTIATIONS ON THE COMPREHENSIVE ECONOMIC PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT (CEPA) AND SIGNED AGREEMENTS RELATED TO CRITICAL MINERALS, CLEAN ENERGY, NUCLEAR COOPERATION, AND URANIUM SUPPLY. THIS DIPLOMATIC RESET FOLLOWED THE SERIOUS DETERIORATION IN RELATIONS IN 2023 AFTER ALLEGATIONS REGARDING INDIAN INVOLVEMENT IN THE KILLING OF A SIKH ACTIVIST IN CANADA LED TO EXPULSIONS OF DIPLOMATS AND SUSPENSION OF NEGOTIATIONS. BY 2026, BOTH COUNTRIES RECOGNISED THE STRATEGIC AND ECONOMIC ADVANTAGES OF REBUILDING TIES. CANADA SOUGHT TO DIVERSIFY ITS TRADE PARTNERSHIPS BEYOND THE UNITED STATES, WHILE INDIA EMERGED AS AN IMPORTANT INDO-PACIFIC PARTNER. DESPITE CONTINUED CONCERNS OVER SECURITY AND IMMIGRATION ISSUES, THE RENEWED ENGAGEMENT REFLECTED A PRAGMATIC SHIFT TOWARD ECONOMIC COOPERATION AND STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP.

SHIFT IN US TARIFF POLICY DISRUPTS GLOBAL TRADE

ANOTHER MAJOR DEVELOPMENT WAS THE CHANGE IN U.S. TARIFF POLICY FOLLOWING A FEBRUARY 2026 DECISION BY THE U.S. SUPREME COURT THAT STRUCK DOWN BROAD TARIFFS IMPOSED UNDER THE INTERNATIONAL EMERGENCY ECONOMIC POWERS ACT (IEEPA). IN RESPONSE, THE U.S. ADMINISTRATION INTRODUCED A NEW 10% GLOBAL TARIFF UNDER SECTION 122 OF THE TRADE ACT AND INITIATED FRESH SECTION 301 INVESTIGATIONS TARGETING COUNTRIES INCLUDING CHINA, INDIA, AND THE EUROPEAN UNION. THE POLICY REFLECTED THE CONTINUATION OF ECONOMIC NATIONALISM AND PROTECTIONISM AIMED AT REDUCING TRADE IMBALANCES AND STRENGTHENING DOMESTIC INDUSTRIES. HOWEVER, THE TARIFFS DISRUPTED GLOBAL SUPPLY CHAINS, INCREASED BUSINESS COSTS, AND CONTRIBUTED TO INFLATIONARY PRESSURES WORLDWIDE. THE MOVE ALSO WEAKENED CONFIDENCE IN MULTILATERAL TRADE INSTITUTIONS LIKE THE WTO AND INTENSIFIED FEARS OF RETALIATORY TRADE MEASURES. DEVELOPING ECONOMIES DEPENDENT ON EXPORTS WERE PARTICULARLY VULNERABLE TO THE CONSEQUENCES OF GROWING TRADE FRAGMENTATION AND PROTECTIONIST POLICIES.



APRIL 2026



US-ISRAEL CONFLICT WITH IRAN INTENSIFIES

THE CONFLICT BETWEEN THE US-ISRAEL ALLIANCE AND IRAN ESCALATED SHARPLY DURING APRIL 2026. AFTER THE US-IRAN CEASEFIRE ENDED ON APRIL 7, THE UNITED STATES IMPOSED A NAVAL BLOCKADE ON IRAN, RESTRICTING SHIPPING ACTIVITIES AROUND IRANIAN PORTS AND THE STRAIT OF HORMUZ. PRESIDENT DONALD TRUMP ALSO ANNOUNCED THE DEPLOYMENT OF 10,000 ADDITIONAL TROOPS TO THE MIDDLE EAST. IRAN RESPONDED WITH ATTACKS ON SAUDI ARABIA'S EAST-WEST OIL PIPELINE, DAMAGING AN IMPORTANT EXPORT ROUTE. MEANWHILE, ISRAEL AND LEBANON AGREED TO A U.S.-BROKERED CEASEFIRE AND DIRECT TALKS, MARKING THE FIRST SUCH NEGOTIATIONS IN DECADES. THE CONFLICT WAS DRIVEN BY TENSIONS OVER IRAN'S NUCLEAR PROGRAMME, MISSILE DEVELOPMENT, AND SUPPORT FOR HEZBOLLAH. IRAN'S CONTROL OVER PARTS OF THE STRAIT OF HORMUZ AND THE COLLAPSE OF DIPLOMATIC NEGOTIATIONS FURTHER WORSENERD THE SITUATION. THE HUMANITARIAN IMPACT WAS SEVERE. THOUSANDS WERE KILLED OR INJURED ACROSS IRAN, LEBANON, ISRAEL, AND IRAQ, INCLUDING U.S. MILITARY PERSONNEL. OIL PRICES ROSE SHARPLY TO NEARLY \$120 PER BARREL, WHILE GLOBAL POWERS INCLUDING THE UN, EUROPEAN COUNTRIES, RUSSIA, AND CHINA CALLED FOR DIPLOMATIC NEGOTIATIONS AND AN END TO THE BLOCKADE.



GLOBAL ENERGY CRISIS DEEPENS

THE CONTINUED CLOSURE OF THE STRAIT OF HORMUZ CREATED ONE OF THE WORST GLOBAL ENERGY SHOCKS IN RECENT YEARS. OPEC+ ANNOUNCED ONLY A SMALL INCREASE IN OIL PRODUCTION, WHICH ANALYSTS DESCRIBED AS INSUFFICIENT BECAUSE THE CONFLICT HAD SEVERELY DISRUPTED GULF OIL EXPORTS. GLOBAL OIL SUPPLY REPORTEDLY FELL BY 12-15 MILLION BARRELS PER DAY, THE LARGEST DISRUPTION ON RECORD. TANKER MOVEMENT THROUGH HORMUZ REMAINED EXTREMELY LIMITED, WITH ONLY A FEW SHIPS TRAVELLING UNDER MILITARY PROTECTION. THE CRISIS PUSHED CRUDE OIL PRICES TO AROUND \$115-120 PER BARREL DURING APRIL. FUEL PRICES INCREASED WORLDWIDE, CAUSING INFLATION AND ECONOMIC PRESSURE IN BOTH DEVELOPED AND DEVELOPING COUNTRIES. NATIONS SUCH AS INDIA AND JAPAN USED STRATEGIC OIL RESERVES, WHILE ASIAN REFINERIES REDUCED PRODUCTION DUE TO SUPPLY SHORTAGES. THE INTERNATIONAL MONETARY FUND AND INTERNATIONAL ENERGY AGENCY WARNED THAT THE CRISIS COULD SLOW GLOBAL ECONOMIC GROWTH. SEVERAL EUROPEAN COUNTRIES ALSO INTRODUCED EMERGENCY MEASURES, INCLUDING ENERGY STOCKPILE RELEASES AND FUEL TAX CONTROLS.

UNITED NATIONS WARNS OF GLOBAL FOOD CRISIS

THE UNITED NATIONS RAISED SERIOUS CONCERNS ABOUT A POSSIBLE GLOBAL FOOD AND SUPPLY CRISIS CAUSED BY RISING FUEL AND FERTILISER COSTS LINKED TO THE IRAN CONFLICT. UN SECRETARY-GENERAL ANTÓNIO GUTERRES WARNED THAT THE WORLD WAS MOVING TOWARD A "GLOBAL FOOD EMERGENCY." THE FOOD AND AGRICULTURE ORGANIZATION (FAO) STATED THAT A PROLONGED HORMUZ DISRUPTION COULD SEVERELY AFFECT GLOBAL AGRICULTURE BECAUSE MODERN FARMING DEPENDS HEAVILY ON FUEL, NATURAL GAS, AND FERTILISERS. THE GLOBAL REPORT ON FOOD CRISES NOTED THAT 266 MILLION PEOPLE HAD ALREADY FACED ACUTE HUNGER IN 2025, AND THE CONFLICT RISKED WORSENING CONDITIONS. POORER COUNTRIES IN AFRICA AND SOUTH ASIA WERE EXPECTED TO SUFFER THE MOST BECAUSE RISING FERTILISER PRICES AND TRANSPORT DELAYS COULD REDUCE AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION. FOOD PRICES ALSO INCREASED IN EUROPE AND THE UNITED STATES. THE CRISIS HIGHLIGHTED HOW GEOPOLITICAL CONFLICTS CAN QUICKLY TURN INTO HUMANITARIAN EMERGENCIES AFFECTING FOOD SECURITY WORLDWIDE.



EUROPEAN UNION APPROVES MAJOR UKRAINE AID PACKAGE

THE EUROPEAN UNION APPROVED A €90 BILLION LOAN PACKAGE FOR UKRAINE DURING AN INFORMAL SUMMIT IN CYPRUS HELD ON APRIL 23-24. THE PACKAGE AIMS TO SUPPORT UKRAINE'S ECONOMY AND DEFENCE NEEDS OVER THE NEXT TWO YEARS. HUNGARY REMOVED ITS EARLIER OBJECTIONS, ALLOWING THE EU TO ALSO ADOPT ITS 20TH SANCTIONS PACKAGE AGAINST RUSSIA. UKRAINIAN PRESIDENT VOLODYMYR ZELENSKYY DESCRIBED THE DECISION AS A MAJOR LIFELINE FOR UKRAINE. THE EU SUMMIT ALSO FOCUSED ON THE EFFECTS OF THE IRAN CONFLICT AND RISING ENERGY PRICES. EUROPEAN LEADERS DISCUSSED MEASURES TO REDUCE ENERGY COSTS, INCREASE GAS STORAGE, AND PREVENT SUPPLY SHORTAGES DURING THE SUMMER MONTHS. THE AID PACKAGE DEMONSTRATED CONTINUED WESTERN SUPPORT FOR UKRAINE WHILE ALSO SHOWING HOW THE UKRAINE WAR AND THE MIDDLE EAST CRISIS WERE INCREASINGLY CONNECTED THROUGH ENERGY AND SECURITY CONCERNS.

NORTH KOREA CONDUCTS MAJOR MISSILE TESTS

NORTH KOREA CARRIED OUT SEVERAL MISSILE TESTS DURING APRIL 2026, MAKING IT ONE OF THE BUSIEST MONTHS FOR ITS WEAPONS PROGRAMME. LEADER KIM JONG UN SUPERVISED TESTS OF NEW SHORT-RANGE BALLISTIC MISSILES EQUIPPED WITH ADVANCED WARHEAD TECHNOLOGY.

ACCORDING TO STATE MEDIA, THE TESTS AIMED TO IMPROVE BATTLEFIELD ACCURACY AND ATTACK CAPABILITY. ANALYSTS BELIEVE THAT THE GROWING CONFLICT IN WEST ASIA ENCOURAGED NORTH KOREA TO ACCELERATE ITS MILITARY PREPARATIONS AND MISSILE DEVELOPMENT.

THE TESTS INCREASED TENSIONS ON THE KOREAN PENINSULA, WITH SOUTH KOREA, JAPAN, AND THE UNITED STATES CONDEMNING THE LAUNCHES. REGIONAL GOVERNMENTS WARNED THAT THE NEW MISSILE SYSTEMS POSED SERIOUS THREATS TO NEARBY MILITARY BASES AND CIVILIAN AREAS.

US TARIFF POLICIES DISRUPT GLOBAL TRADE

THE UNITED STATES INTRODUCED MAJOR NEW TARIFF MEASURES DURING APRIL 2026. PRESIDENT TRUMP IMPOSED 100% TARIFFS ON IMPORTED PATENTED PHARMACEUTICAL PRODUCTS AND THREATENED 50% TARIFFS ON COUNTRIES SUPPLYING WEAPONS TO IRAN.

THE POLICY AIMED TO PRESSURE COMPANIES INTO SHIFTING PRODUCTION TO THE UNITED STATES AND REDUCE FOREIGN DEPENDENCE. THE TARIFFS ALSO FORMED PART OF A BROADER ECONOMIC NATIONALIST STRATEGY FOCUSED ON PROTECTING DOMESTIC INDUSTRIES AND ISOLATING IRAN INTERNATIONALLY.

THE MEASURES DISRUPTED GLOBAL SUPPLY CHAINS, ESPECIALLY IN THE PHARMACEUTICAL SECTOR. COMPANIES WARNED OF RISING PRICES, SHORTAGES, AND INCREASED PRODUCTION COSTS. COUNTRIES SUCH AS CHINA AND INDIA FEARED MAJOR EXPORT LOSSES IF THE TARIFF THREATS CONTINUED. ECONOMISTS WARNED THAT INCREASING PROTECTIONISM COULD WEAKEN GLOBAL TRADE FURTHER, RAISE INFLATION, AND ENCOURAGE RETALIATORY TARIFFS FROM OTHER COUNTRIES. THE DEVELOPMENTS REFLECTED A GROWING TREND TOWARD ECONOMIC FRAGMENTATION AND DECLINING FAITH IN MULTILATERAL TRADE SYSTEMS.

MAY 2026

US-IRAN CONFLICT AND STRAIT OF HORMUZ CRISIS

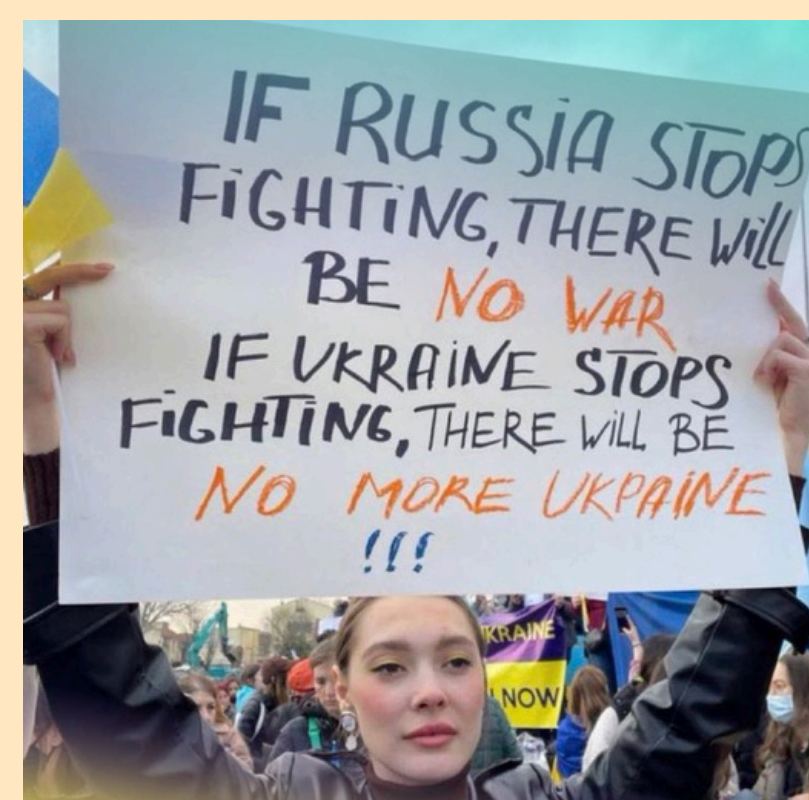
THE ESCALATING CONFLICT BETWEEN THE UNITED STATES, ISRAEL, AND IRAN REMAINED THE BIGGEST INTERNATIONAL ISSUE. MILITARY TENSIONS INCREASED AFTER NAVAL CONFRONTATIONS, MISSILE EXCHANGES, AND ATTACKS ON SHIPPING ROUTES NEAR THE STRAIT OF HORMUZ, ONE OF THE WORLD'S MOST IMPORTANT OIL TRANSIT CORRIDORS. THE UNITED STATES AND ALLIED FORCES INCREASED NAVAL DEPLOYMENTS IN THE GULF, WHILE IRAN WARNED THAT CONTINUED PRESSURE WOULD THREATEN GLOBAL ENERGY SUPPLIES. THE CRISIS DISRUPTED INTERNATIONAL TRADE AND ENERGY TRANSPORTATION SIGNIFICANTLY. NEARLY 20% OF GLOBAL OIL SUPPLY AND ONE-QUARTER OF LNG TRADE NORMALLY PASSES THROUGH THE STRAIT OF HORMUZ. TANKER TRAFFIC REPORTEDLY DECLINED SHARPLY, WITH SEVERAL SHIPPING COMPANIES SUSPENDING OPERATIONS DUE TO SECURITY THREATS AND RISING INSURANCE COSTS. MORE THAN 150 COMMERCIAL VESSELS WERE DELAYED DURING PERIODS OF HEIGHTENED TENSIONS. THE CONFLICT ALSO TRIGGERED MAJOR ECONOMIC CONSEQUENCES WORLDWIDE. BRENT CRUDE OIL PRICES CROSSED \$120 PER BARREL DURING THE MONTH, WHILE ANALYSTS WARNED PRICES COULD RISE FURTHER IF DISRUPTIONS CONTINUED. THE UNITED NATIONS, IMF, EUROPEAN UNION, RUSSIA, AND CHINA REPEATEDLY CALLED FOR DIPLOMATIC NEGOTIATIONS TO PREVENT A WIDER REGIONAL WAR. THE CRISIS ALSO RAISED CONCERNS ABOUT INFLATION, FOOD SECURITY, AND GLOBAL SUPPLY CHAIN INSTABILITY.

GLOBAL ECONOMIC UNCERTAINTY AND RISING OIL PRICES

THE WORSENING GEOPOLITICAL SITUATION IN WEST ASIA INCREASED GLOBAL ECONOMIC UNCERTAINTY. RISING OIL PRICES, INFLATION CONCERNS, AND DISRUPTIONS TO MARITIME TRADE ROUTES CREATED FEARS OF SLOWER GLOBAL ECONOMIC GROWTH. SEVERAL INTERNATIONAL FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS LOWERED GROWTH FORECASTS, WARNING THAT PROLONGED INSTABILITY COULD WEAKEN INDUSTRIAL PRODUCTION, INVESTMENT, AND CONSUMER DEMAND. ENERGY COSTS ROSE SHARPLY ACROSS TRANSPORTATION, MANUFACTURING, AND AGRICULTURE. FUEL PRICES INCREASED GLOBALLY AS SHIPPING COMPANIES PASSED HIGHER INSURANCE AND TRANSPORT COSTS ONTO CONSUMERS. IN THE UNITED STATES, GASOLINE PRICES REPORTEDLY ROSE ABOVE \$4.50 PER GALLON, WHILE EUROPEAN AND ASIAN ECONOMIES FACED INCREASING ELECTRICITY AND TRANSPORT EXPENSES. CENTRAL BANKS IN THE UNITED STATES, EUROPE, AND ASIA MAINTAINED CAUTIOUS APPROACHES TOWARD INTEREST RATES WHILE GOVERNMENTS INTRODUCED EMERGENCY MEASURES SUCH AS FUEL SUBSIDIES, TAX REDUCTIONS, AND STRATEGIC OIL RESERVE RELEASES. DEVELOPING ECONOMIES FACED ADDITIONAL PRESSURE BECAUSE RISING FUEL AND FERTILISER COSTS INCREASED FOOD PRICES AND WEAKENED ECONOMIC RECOVERY EFFORTS. INTERNATIONAL AGENCIES ALSO WARNED ABOUT A POSSIBLE GLOBAL FOOD CRISIS IF SHIPPING DISRUPTIONS CONTINUED.

RUSSIA-UKRAINE WAR CONTINUES WITH RENEWED TENSIONS

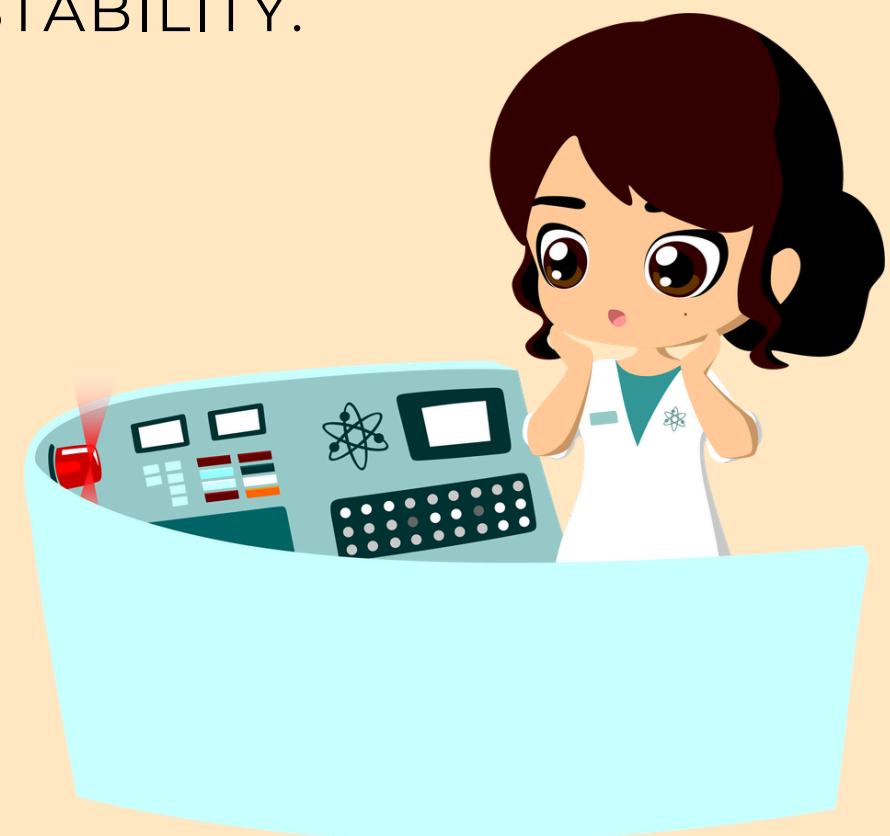
THE RUSSIA-UKRAINE WAR CONTINUED WITH RENEWED MILITARY OFFENSIVES, MISSILE ATTACKS, AND INTENSIFIED DIPLOMATIC ACTIVITY. HEAVY FIGHTING PERSISTED IN EASTERN AND SOUTHERN UKRAINE, WHILE BOTH SIDES REPORTED SIGNIFICANT MILITARY CASUALTIES AND INFRASTRUCTURE DAMAGE. DRONE AND MISSILE STRIKES TARGETED ENERGY FACILITIES, TRANSPORT SYSTEMS, AND MILITARY POSITIONS, WORSENING HUMANITARIAN CONDITIONS IN SEVERAL REGIONS. WESTERN COUNTRIES MAINTAINED STRONG POLITICAL, MILITARY, AND ECONOMIC SUPPORT FOR UKRAINE. THE UNITED STATES, EUROPEAN UNION, AND NATO MEMBERS ANNOUNCED ADDITIONAL DEFENCE ASSISTANCE PACKAGES INCLUDING AIR DEFENCE SYSTEMS, ADVANCED AMMUNITION, AND FINANCIAL AID. EUROPEAN GOVERNMENTS ALSO CONTINUED DISCUSSIONS REGARDING RECONSTRUCTION SUPPORT AND ENERGY SECURITY MEASURES LINKED TO THE WAR. RUSSIA CRITICIZED CONTINUED WESTERN MILITARY SUPPORT AND WARNED AGAINST FURTHER NATO INVOLVEMENT. SANCTIONS ON RUSSIA REMAINED A MAJOR ISSUE IN GLOBAL DIPLOMACY, WITH SEVERAL COUNTRIES DEBATING THEIR LONG-TERM ECONOMIC IMPACT. THE PROLONGED CONFLICT CONTINUED TO AFFECT GLOBAL GRAIN EXPORTS, ENERGY MARKETS, AND INTERNATIONAL SECURITY DISCUSSIONS. ANALYSTS NOTED THAT THE SIMULTANEOUS CRISES IN UKRAINE AND THE MIDDLE EAST WERE PLACING INCREASING PRESSURE ON GLOBAL SUPPLY CHAINS AND GEOPOLITICAL STABILITY.



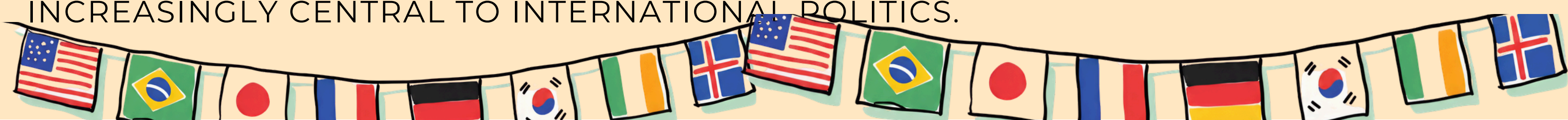
HUMANITARIAN CRISIS IN GAZA AND MIDDLE EAST DIPLOMACY

THE HUMANITARIAN SITUATION IN GAZA REMAINED ONE OF THE WORLD'S MOST SERIOUS HUMANITARIAN CONCERNS DURING THE MONTH. MILLIONS OF CIVILIANS CONTINUED TO FACE SHORTAGES OF FOOD, MEDICINE, ELECTRICITY, FUEL, AND HUMANITARIAN AID BECAUSE OF ONGOING CONFLICT AND RESTRICTIONS ON AID DELIVERIES. HOSPITALS AND HUMANITARIAN ORGANIZATIONS WARNED THAT HEALTHCARE SYSTEMS WERE OPERATING BEYOND CAPACITY. THE UNITED NATIONS, RED CROSS, AND SEVERAL HUMANITARIAN AGENCIES REPEATEDLY CALLED FOR IMMEDIATE HUMANITARIAN ACCESS AND TEMPORARY CEASEFIRES TO ALLOW AID DELIVERIES INTO AFFECTED AREAS. INTERNATIONAL MEDIATORS INCLUDING EGYPT, QATAR, TÜRKİYE, AND EUROPEAN COUNTRIES INTENSIFIED DIPLOMATIC EFFORTS TO NEGOTIATE PAUSES IN FIGHTING AND SECURE THE RELEASE OF HOSTAGES AND DETAINEES. GLOBAL POLITICAL REACTIONS REMAINED SHARPLY DIVIDED. WHILE SOME GOVERNMENTS EMPHASIZED ISRAEL'S SECURITY CONCERNS, OTHERS CRITICIZED THE SCALE OF CIVILIAN SUFFERING IN GAZA. DEMONSTRATIONS SUPPORTING BOTH PALESTINIANS AND ISRAELIS TOOK PLACE ACROSS EUROPE, NORTH AMERICA, ASIA, AND THE MIDDLE EAST. HUMANITARIAN AGENCIES WARNED THAT PROLONGED RESTRICTIONS ON AID AND INFRASTRUCTURE DAMAGE COULD LEAD TO WIDER REGIONAL INSTABILITY.

FAILURE OF THE UN NUCLEAR NON- PROLIFERATION TREATY CONFERENCE



A MAJOR UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE REVIEWING THE NUCLEAR NON-PROLIFERATION TREATY (NPT) ENDED WITHOUT A FINAL AGREEMENT. THE CONFERENCE FAILED TO ACHIEVE CONSENSUS BECAUSE OF DISAGREEMENTS REGARDING IRAN'S NUCLEAR PROGRAMME, GEOPOLITICAL CONFLICTS, AND BROADER SECURITY CONCERNS. SEVERAL NON-NUCLEAR COUNTRIES CRITICIZED NUCLEAR POWERS FOR FAILING TO MAKE PROGRESS TOWARD DISARMAMENT OBLIGATIONS, WHILE NUCLEAR-ARMED STATES ARGUED THAT RISING GLOBAL INSTABILITY MADE REDUCTIONS IN NUCLEAR DETERRENCE UNREALISTIC. IRAN'S NUCLEAR ACTIVITIES BECAME ONE OF THE MOST CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES DISCUSSED DURING THE CONFERENCE, WITH WESTERN COUNTRIES EXPRESSING CONCERNS REGARDING URANIUM ENRICHMENT AND REGIONAL SECURITY RISKS. DIPLOMATS WARNED THAT THE INABILITY TO ADOPT A JOINT DECLARATION WEAKENED INTERNATIONAL CONFIDENCE IN THE GLOBAL NON-PROLIFERATION SYSTEM AT A TIME WHEN NUCLEAR RISKS WERE BECOMING INCREASINGLY CENTRAL TO INTERNATIONAL POLITICS.





DIplomacy's Gender Gap: A Persistent Challenge

~ ANUSHKA GOEL

TODAY'S WORLD HOLDS GENDER EQUALITY AS ONE OF THE PILLARS OF DEVELOPMENT AND GROWTH OF ANY COUNTRY, YET WHEN IT COMES TO HANDLING INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS AND PRESENTING GLOBAL ISSUES AT THE FOREFRONT, SUCH INITIATIVE AND VISION IS TAMPERED BY NOTIONS OF PATRIARCHY AND POLITICAL AGENDAS.

LIBERAL FEMINISTS BELIEVE THAT THIS GENDER GAP COMES FROM PATRIARCHAL STRUCTURES THAT LIMIT WOMEN'S CIVIL RIGHTS, INCLUDING ACCESS TO EDUCATION AND JOBS. SOCIETIES HAVE BEEN SET UP TO MAINTAIN PATRIARCHAL, HIERARCHICAL, AND OPPRESSIVE POWER SYSTEMS. SOCIAL STEREOTYPES, ESPECIALLY THOSE AFFECTING VIEWS ON LEADERSHIP AND GENDER ROLES, CREATE A SIGNIFICANT BARRIER TO INCLUSION. MCGLEN AND SARKEES (1993) POINT OUT THAT SOCIETAL BELIEFS AND THEIR UNDERLYING VALUES STRONGLY SHAPE THESE STEREOTYPES.

TRADITIONAL GENDER ROLES TEND TO LIMIT WOMEN TO SPECIFIC SOCIETAL ROLES. THERE ARE QUESTIONS ABOUT WHETHER WOMEN ARE BEST SUITED FOR POLICYMAKING OR IF THEY SHOULD FOCUS ON CAREGIVING OR BEING HOUSEWIVES, MAINLY DEALING WITH FAMILY AND HOUSEHOLD RESPONSIBILITIES. THIS SOCIETAL EXPECTATION PUTS INDIVIDUAL WOMEN IN A TOUGH SPOT AS THEY TRY TO BALANCE THEIR PROFESSIONAL AND PERSONAL LIVES. THE PATRIARCHAL EXPECTATION THAT WOMEN BEAR PRIMARY RESPONSIBILITY FOR DOMESTIC AND CAREGIVING DUTIES SIGNIFICANTLY AFFECTS THEIR ABILITY TO ACHIEVE WORK-LIFE BALANCE. FREQUENT TRAVEL AND DEMANDING ASSIGNMENTS FURTHER COMPOUND THESE CHALLENGES FOR WOMEN JUGGLING PROFESSIONAL RESPONSIBILITIES WITH FAMILY EXPECTATIONS. COMPOUNDING THESE DOMESTIC CHALLENGES, WOMEN DIPLOMATS OFTEN ENCOUNTER SPECIFIC ISSUES RELATED TO INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION IN THEIR HOST COUNTRIES.

REGARDING INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION, A SIGNIFICANT ISSUE IS THE GAP BETWEEN CHANGING GENDER ROLES AND TRADITIONAL SOCIAL ETIQUETTE IN HOST COUNTRIES. SEVERAL WOMEN NOTED THAT MEN IN THESE COUNTRIES OFTEN DID NOT KNOW HOW TO ACT POLITELY WHEN THE FOREIGN REPRESENTATIVE WAS A WOMAN. THIS SOMETIMES CREATED AWKWARD OR "ANNOYING" SITUATIONS, AS OLD RULES OF ETIQUETTE HAD NOT ADJUSTED TO WOMEN IN POSITIONS OF AUTHORITY. THE BROADER SOCIETAL STRUGGLE FOR WOMEN TO BALANCE A DIPLOMATIC CAREER WITH FAMILY LIFE IS A PERSISTENT THEME.

THERE IS AN ONGOING STRUGGLE BETWEEN DIPLOMATIC CAREERS AND FAMILY LIFE FOR WOMEN. HISTORICALLY, WOMEN HAVE HAD TO PROVE THAT THEIR CAREERS WOULD NOT HARM THEIR FAMILIES. A WIDESPREAD BELIEF CONTINUES THAT PAID WORK WOULD AFFECT A WIFE'S COMMITMENT TO WHAT SOCIETY SEES AS HER MAIN DOMESTIC AND MATERNAL DUTIES. SOME SINGLE WOMEN FEEL THEY MUST CHOOSE BETWEEN THE TWO, WHICH IS BACKED BY A HIGHER NUMBER OF SINGLE WOMEN IN FOREIGN SERVICE. HOWEVER, MOTHERS INTERVIEWED OFTEN FIND IT EASIER TO BALANCE OVERSEAS WORK AND FAMILY DUE TO LOWER COSTS FOR HOUSEHOLD HELP AND PRIVATE SCHOOLING IN MANY DEVELOPING COUNTRIES. THIS DILEMMA IS PARTICULARLY PRONOUNCED FOR DUAL-CAREER COUPLES AND TANDEM COUPLES WITHIN THE FOREIGN SERVICE.



HOWEVER, MOTHERS INTERVIEWED OFTEN FIND IT EASIER TO BALANCE OVERSEAS WORK AND FAMILY DUE TO LOWER COSTS FOR HOUSEHOLD HELP AND PRIVATE SCHOOLING IN MANY DEVELOPING COUNTRIES. THIS DILEMMA IS PARTICULARLY PRONOUNCED FOR DUAL-CAREER COUPLES AND TANDEM COUPLES WITHIN THE FOREIGN SERVICE.

STILL, WORK-FAMILY BALANCE IS A LARGER ISSUE. FOR DUAL-CAREER COUPLES ABROAD, HOST COUNTRY RULES OFTEN PREVENT NON-CITIZENS FROM WORKING, MAKING IT TOUGH FOR SPOUSES TO FIND JOBS. ALTHOUGH THERE ARE EXCEPTIONS LIKE WAIVERS FOR TEACHERS OR BILATERAL AGREEMENTS, THE VIENNA CONVENTION COMPLICATES PRIVATE SECTOR EMPLOYMENT FOR DIPLOMATIC SPOUSES.

TANDEM COUPLES, WHERE BOTH PARTNERS WORK IN FOREIGN SERVICE, FACE THEIR OWN SET OF ISSUES. THESE INCLUDE SUPERVISION PROBLEMS; MANY GOVERNMENTS PROHIBIT SPOUSES FROM BEING EACH OTHER'S SUPERVISORS, WHICH IS PARTICULARLY CHALLENGING IN SMALLER EMBASSIES WITH MID- TO HIGH-LEVEL STAFF. LOGISTICAL PROBLEMS IN ASSIGNING TANDEM COUPLES CAN LEAD TO ONE SPOUSE BEING UNABLE TO WORK. PLUS, WHEN TANDEM COUPLES WANT TO TAKE VACATIONS TOGETHER, IT CAN PUT PRESSURE ON SMALL EMBASSY STAFF, AND DECIDING WHICH PARENT SHOULD LEAVE DUTIES DURING A CHILD'S EVACUATION CREATES A TOUGH DECISION.

MEN IN THIS SITUATION OFTEN STRUGGLE TO SHIFT FROM BEING THE "PROVIDER" TO BEING LABELED "DEPENDENT" ON THEIR DIPLOMATIC ID CARDS. IT BECOMES HARD FOR THEM TO PURSUE CAREERS OUTSIDE OF FOREIGN SERVICE, LEADING TO INSTANCES WHERE HUSBANDS COMMUTE ACROSS TIME ZONES TO MANAGE BUSINESSES OR SEEK JOBS IN THE EXPATRIATE COMMUNITY. FURTHERMORE, THE EDUCATION OF CHILDREN PRESENTS UNIQUE CHALLENGES FOR MOTHERS IN DIPLOMATIC ROLES, ADDING ANOTHER LAYER TO WORK-LIFE CONSIDERATIONS.

WHILE SOME CHILDREN RECEIVE A GREAT EDUCATION ABROAD, A KEY ISSUE ARISES WHEN THE HOST COUNTRY LACKS EDUCATIONAL OPTIONS IN THE FAMILY'S NATIVE LANGUAGE. THIS CAN HINDER A CHILD'S ABILITY TO ATTEND UNIVERSITY IN THEIR HOME COUNTRY, POSSIBLY FORCING THEM TO SEPARATE FROM THEIR DIPLOMATIC PARENT TO ACQUIRE THE NECESSARY LANGUAGE SKILLS. CUSTOMARY LAWS AND LEGAL BARRIERS HAVE OFTEN STOPPED WOMEN FROM PARTICIPATING IN PUBLIC LIFE. THIS HAS CREATED THE EXPECTATION THAT WOMEN SHOULD FOCUS ON RAISING CHILDREN AND MANAGING HOMES, LEAVING GLOBAL PEACE EFFORTS TO MEN.



NORMS DIRECTLY IMPACT NETWORKING, A CRUCIAL ASPECT OF DIPLOMATIC SUCCESS. TRADITIONAL GENDER ROLE EXPECTATIONS CAN HINDER HOW WOMEN DIPLOMATS ESTABLISH CONNECTIONS, POTENTIALLY LIMITING THEIR ACCESS TO VITAL NETWORKS AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR CAREER ADVANCEMENT. IT INTERSECTS WITH BOTH DOMESTIC AND INTERNATIONAL CULTURAL EXPECTATIONS. IN DIPLOMATIC CONTEXTS, WOMEN DIPLOMATS FREQUENTLY ENCOUNTER CULTURAL NORMS THAT REINFORCE PATRIARCHAL VALUES AND PERCEPTIONS OF WOMEN'S ROLES, MAKING CROSS-CULTURAL INTERACTIONS MORE CHALLENGING.

THE IMPACT OF PATRIARCHY IS NOT UNIFORM; IT INTERSECTS WITH OTHER ASPECTS OF IDENTITY SUCH AS RACE, CLASS, AND ETHNICITY. THESE INTERSECTIONAL CHALLENGES CAN INTENSIFY THE DISCRIMINATION FACED BY WOMEN DIPLOMATS WITHIN THE DIPLOMATIC ARENA.

BEYOND SOCIETAL INFLUENCES, ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURES WITHIN FOREIGN POLICY INSTITUTIONS THEMSELVES CONTRIBUTE TO THE EXCLUSION OF WOMEN. FOREIGN POLICY INSTITUTIONS OFTEN EXCLUDE INDIVIDUALS BY SETTING UP A SEPARATE AGENDA FOR WOMEN'S ISSUES. THIS LIMITS WOMEN'S INVOLVEMENT BECAUSE THEIR CONCERNS ARE NOT TAKEN AS SERIOUSLY AS MEN'S. THIS SITUATION HELPS EXPLAIN WHY WOMEN IN POLITICS OFTEN END UP IN OFFICES FOCUSED ON WOMEN'S ISSUES..

THERE IS ALSO A NEED TO CONSIDER INDIVIDUAL FACTORS RELATED TO WOMEN'S "PERSONAL SPHERE." THIS VIEW LOOKS AT WHETHER THE ISSUE COMES FROM INDIVIDUAL WOMEN RATHER THAN JUST FROM SOCIETAL EXPECTATIONS

THESE INTERTWINED SOCIETAL, ORGANIZATIONAL, AND INDIVIDUAL FACTORS COLLECTIVELY CONTRIBUTE TO THE PERSISTENT UNDERREPRESENTATION OF WOMEN IN INTERNATIONAL DIPLOMACY. EFFORTS TO CHALLENGE PATRIARCHY WITHIN THE INDIAN FOREIGN SERVICES INCLUDE POLICY INITIATIVES AND REFORMS AIMED AT PROMOTING GENDER EQUALITY. THESE ENCOMPASS POLICIES RELATED TO MATERNITY LEAVE, FOSTERING INCLUSIVE WORK CULTURES, AND IMPLEMENTING AWARENESS PROGRAMS TO DIRECTLY CONFRONT PATRIARCHAL NORMS.

WOMEN DIPLOMATS WITHIN THE IFS ACTIVELY PARTICIPATE IN GLOBAL FEMINIST MOVEMENTS. THEY ADVOCATE FOR GENDER EQUALITY NOT ONLY WITHIN THEIR NATIONAL FOREIGN SERVICES BUT ALSO IN INTERNATIONAL DIPLOMATIC FORUMS, CONTRIBUTING TO A BROADER GLOBAL DISCOURSE ON CHALLENGING PATRIARCHAL NORMS IN DIPLOMACY.

IN CONCLUSION, DESPITE GENDER EQUALITY BEING A GLOBAL PILLAR OF DEVELOPMENT, INTERNATIONAL DIPLOMACY CONTINUES TO BE HINDERED BY PATRIARCHAL VIEWS AND POLITICAL AGENDAS. HISTORICALLY MALE-DOMINATED DUE TO PERCEPTIONS OF WOMEN'S UNDERSTANDING OF WARFARE , DIPLOMACY STILL SEES WOMEN UNDERREPRESENTED, A PHENOMENON OFTEN ATTRIBUTED TO THE "GLASS CEILING". CHALLENGES STEM FROM SOCIETAL FACTORS LIKE PATRIARCHAL STRUCTURES AND WORK-LIFE BALANCE ISSUES , ORGANIZATIONAL BARRIERS THAT MARGINALIZE WOMEN'S CONCERNS , AND INDIVIDUAL PERCEPTIONS ABOUT THEIR DIPLOMATIC SKILLS. WHILE OBSTACLES PERSIST, INITIATIVES LIKE THOSE WITHIN THE INDIAN FOREIGN SERVICES DEMONSTRATE ONGOING EFFORTS TO CHALLENGE THESE NORMS AND ADVANCE GENDER EQUALITY IN DIPLOMACY.

WOMEN IN DIPLOMACY AND INTERNATIONAL LAW

~HARNOOR AND NIMRAT

THE STORY OF WOMEN'S STRUGGLE FOR EQUALITY BELONGS TO NO SINGLE FEMINIST, NOR TO ANY ONE ORGANIZATION, BUT TO THE COLLECTIVE EFFORTS OF ALL WHO CARE ABOUT HUMAN RIGHTS.” — GLORIA STEINEM

TRADITIONALLY, WOMEN DIDN'T HOLD ANY DIRECT ROLE IN THE CONDUCT OF DIPLOMACY AND INTERNATIONAL LAW. THE MERE INVOLVEMENT THAT THEY HAD WAS BEING THE SUPPORTERS OF THEIR SPOUSES, AS INITIALLY IT WAS A MALE-DOMINATED FIELD. THEY STRUGGLED EVEN FOR VOTING RIGHTS, SO IT WAS EVIDENT THAT THEY'LL FACE PROBLEMS WHILE BECOMING A PART OF THESE. THEY DIDN'T HAVE ANY INDIVIDUALITY; RATHER, THEY WERE JUST INTRODUCED AS THE WIVES OF THEIR HUSBANDS. WIVES OF THESE MEN WERE EXPECTED TO SHOW UP AT TEA, ENGAGE IN SOCIAL GATHERINGS AND WELFARE PROGRAMS, ETC. NONETHELESS, WOMEN HAVE BEGUN TO CARVE OUT A MEANINGFUL SPACE IN THIS FIELD. THOUGH THE GROWING PRESENCE IS DISPROPORTIONATE. AS THE NUMBER OF FEMALE DIPLOMATS HAS INCREASED STEADILY AND THE NUMBER OF FEMALE AMBASSADORS HAS INCREASED IN COMPARISON TO ANY OTHER TIME IN HISTORY, PARTICULARLY IN THE DEVELOPED PART OF THE WORLD SUCH AS THE NORDIC COUNTRIES, REACHING AROUND 42-51% FEMALE AMBASSADORS, NEARING GENDER PARITY. IN CONTRAST, ASIA'S SHARE HAS RISEN ONLY SLIGHTLY TO ABOUT 12- 13 %, STILL FAR BELOW THE GLOBAL AVERAGE.

MANY WOMEN MADE IMPORTANT CONTRIBUTIONS TO INTERNATIONAL LAW AND DIPLOMACY IN THE PAST, BUT THEY ARE FREQUENTLY DISREGARDED TODAY, AND THE MAJORITY OF PEOPLE AREN'T EVEN AWARE OF THEIR NAMES. OUT OF THE MANY FORGOTTEN NAMES, ALEXANDRA KOLLONTAI STANDS OUT. KOLLONTAI WAS A TRAILBLAZING RUSSIAN REVOLUTIONARY AND A SIGNIFICANT THEORETICAL AND POLITICAL FIGURE IN THE EARLY 20TH CENTURY. SHE SERVED AS THE FIRST FEMALE DIPLOMAT IN HISTORY AND THE FIRST PEOPLE'S COMMISSAR FOR WELFARE. KOLLONTAI PROMOTED MARXIST FEMINISM AND ATTACKED BOURGEOIS FEMINISM FOR ITS LIMITED FOCUS ON MIDDLE- AND UPPER-CLASS WOMEN'S RIGHTS BY RELATING GENDER EQUALITY TO THE GREATER CLASS STRUGGLE. AS SHE ENVISIONED A "NEW WOMAN" LIBERATED FROM FINANCIAL DEPENDENCE AND TRADITIONAL FAMILY DUTIES, SHE ADVOCATED IDEAS SUCH AS SHARED CHILDCARE, FREE UNIONS, AND FRIENDSHIP OVER POSSESSIVE LOVE. EVEN THOUGH SOME OF KOLLONTAI'S RECOMMENDATIONS WERE NOT FULLY CARRIED OUT, HER WORK IS STILL IMPORTANT FOR ITS BOLD ATTEMPT TO CHALLENGE PATRIARCHAL NORMS AND INTEGRATE FEMINISM WITHIN A SOCIALIST FRAMEWORK, AND WHEN WE TALK ABOUT OUR COUNTRY,

WOMEN'S ROLE IN INDIAN DIPLOMACY CANNOT BUT BEGIN WITH ONE WOMAN WHO HAS CONTRIBUTED TO INDIAN DIPLOMACY MUCH MORE THAN ANY MAN OR WOMAN. C.B. MUTHAMMA BECAME THE FIRST WOMAN TO JOIN THE INDIAN FOREIGN SERVICE (IFS) IN 1949, BREAKING GENDER BARRIERS AT A TIME WHEN CIVIL SERVICES WERE INACCESSIBLE FOR WOMEN. THROUGHOUT HER CAREER LIFE, SHE DID NOT ONLY FACE

EXTERNAL CHALLENGES IN DIPLOMACY BUT ALSO INTERNAL BIASES OF THE PATRIARCHAL SYSTEM. SHE WAS DENIED A PROMOTION DUE TO HER GENDER; SHE BOLDLY CHALLENGED THE SYSTEM BY TAKING THE GOVERNMENT TO COURT. THE JUDGMENT BY THE SUPREME COURT CRITICIZED THE SEXIST RULES WITHIN THE IFS AND CALLED FOR REFORMS. IT WASN'T JUST A PERSONAL BATTLE FOR HER TO GET JUSTICE; INSTEAD, SHE SET A POWERFUL EXAMPLE FOR WOMEN TO FIGHT FOR THEMSELVES USING INTERNATIONAL LAW AND LEGAL FRAMEWORKS TO QUESTION SYSTEMATIC INJUSTICE. A REMARKABLE EXAMPLE OF WOMEN BREAKING BARRIERS IN DIPLOMACY IS VIJAYA LAKSHMI PANDIT, WHOSE CAREER ILLUSTRATES BOTH SYMBOLIC AND PRACTICAL CHANGE IN GLOBAL GOVERNANCE. SHE WAS MORE THAN A DIPLOMAT; SHE REPRESENTED INDIA'S PERSPECTIVE WORLDWIDE DURING AN ERA WHEN HER NATION AND WOMEN HAD MINIMAL PRESENCE IN GLOBAL POLITICS. BORN INTO THE PROMINENT NEHRU FAMILY AND GUIDED BY MAHATMA GANDHI AND SAROJINI NAIDU, PANDIT CHAMPIONED THE PRINCIPLES OF LIBERTY, EQUALITY, AND JUSTICE BEYOND INDIA'S FRONTIERS. HER TIME OF GLOBAL ACKNOWLEDGMENT ARRIVED AT THE 1945 SAN FRANCISCO CONFERENCE, DURING WHICH THE UNITED NATIONS WAS BEING ESTABLISHED. ALTHOUGH HE WASN'T PART OF THE OFFICIAL COLONIAL DELEGATION, PANDIT ARTICULATED STRONG OPPOSITION TO IMPERIALISM AND ADVOCATED FOR INDIA'S RIGHT TO SELF-GOVERNANCE. HER ELEGANCE, CHARM, AND SKILL IN MERGING TRADITIONAL INDIAN IDENTITY WITH CONTEMPORARY DIPLOMACY GARNERED GLOBAL ATTENTION—TO THE EXTENT THAT AMERICAN NEWSPAPERS REFERRED TO HER AS “THE WOMAN WHO SWAYED AMERICA.”

IN 1953, SHE SHATTERED RECORDS BY BEING THE FIRST ASIAN AND FIRST FEMALE PRESIDENT OF THE UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY, CHANGING A LANDSCAPE PREVIOUSLY RULED BY MEN. PANDIT ADDITIONALLY ACTED AS INDIA'S AMBASSADOR TO THE SOVIET UNION, THE UNITED STATES, THE UNITED KINGDOM, AND OTHERS—POSITIONS THAT ALLOWED HER TO SHAPE INDIA'S FOREIGN POLICY DURING ITS EARLY DEVELOPMENT. BEYOND TITLES AND SPEECHES, VIJAYA LAKSHMI PANDIT'S STORY WAS REMARKABLE DUE TO HER ABILITY TO NAVIGATE THE INTRICATE INTERSECTIONS OF GENDER, NATIONALISM, AND GLOBAL DIPLOMACY. SHE WASN'T MERELY SYMBOLIZING A NEWLY INDEPENDENT COUNTRY; SHE WAS DEMONSTRATING TO THE GLOBE THAT WOMEN COULD INFLUENCE AND DIRECT INTERNATIONAL LAW AND DIPLOMACY WITH STRENGTH AND DETERMINATION—CREATING A PATH FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS.

WHENEVER WE'LL TALK ABOUT WOMEN SHAPING DIPLOMACY AND INTERNATIONAL LAW, THERE'S ALWAYS A NAME NAVANETHEM PILLAY 'NAVI'—A 'NON-WHITE SOUTH AFRICAN LAWYER, JUDGE, AND HUMAN RIGHTS ADVOCATE WHO HAS NOT ONLY BROKE THE BARRIER IN THE MALE-DOMINATED SOCIETY BUT HAS ALSO REDEFINED THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN GLOBAL JUSTICE. HER LIFE JOURNEY IS THE IMPACTFUL TESTAMENT TO HOW A WOMAN CAN CHALLENGE SYSTEMIC INJUSTICE AND CREATE A PIVOTAL EFFECT FOR THE NEW COMING GENERATION. TO UNDERSTAND HOW TO INCREASE WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN INTERNATIONAL LAWMAKING AND DIPLOMACY, IT IS ESSENTIAL TO IDENTIFY THE BARRIERS TO THEIR PARTICIPATION. FEMALE LEADERS FACE THE DISADVANTAGE OF BEING THOUGHT OF AS INCOMPETENT DUE TO THE FALSE BELIEF THAT WOMEN DON'T POSSESS THE SAME LEVEL OF LEADERSHIP QUALITIES AS MEN. MOREOVER, WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP POSITIONS ARE JUDGED HARSHLY BECAUSE THEY ARE GOING AGAINST THE CONVENTIONAL GENDER ROLES SET UP BY SOCIETY FOR THEM.

TRAITS SUCH AS ASSERTIVENESS AND DECISIVENESS MAY BE LABELED NEGATIVELY IN WOMEN, SUCH THAT THEY MAY BE CALLED BOSSY OR AGGRESSIVE, WHEREAS MEN WITH THE SAME CHARACTERISTICS ARE SEEN AS CONFIDENT LEADERS. ALTHOUGH WOMEN MIGHT HAVE A FORMAL PRESENCE IN INTERNATIONAL ARENAS, A LOT OF THE ACTUAL DECISION-MAKING TAKES PLACE IN INFORMAL SETTINGS SUCH AS PRIVATE DINNERS, EXCLUSIVE CLUBS, ETC., WHICH WOMEN MIGHT NOT HAVE ACCESS TO. THEREFORE, THIS SORT OF REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN TAKES THE FORM OF TOKENISM, RATHER THAN ACTIVE PARTICIPATION. ANOTHER BARRIER IS THE GLASS CLIFF PHENOMENON, WHEREIN WOMEN ARE APPOINTED IN LEADERSHIP POSITIONS AT THE TIME OF CRISIS, AND THIS PATTERN SETS UP WOMEN TO FAIL, HENCE REINFORCING THE MYTH THAT WOMEN ARE LESS CAPABLE LEADERS.



IT IS ALSO NECESSARY TO TAKE INTO ACCOUNT THE FACT THAT INTERNATIONAL LEGAL SYSTEMS HAVE HISTORICALLY BEEN CONTROLLED BY POWERFUL COUNTRIES AND MALE-DOMINATED INSTITUTIONS, WHICH END UP PRIORITIZING ECONOMIC OR MILITARISTIC INTERESTS OVER THE RIGHTS OF WOMEN AND OTHER MINORITIES. THEREFORE, WE MUST QUESTION THE LAW IN ITSELF. CAROL GILLIGAN'S RESEARCH HAS BROUGHT ABOUT THE IDEA THAT MORAL REASONING IN WOMEN INVOKES THE ETHIC OF CARE AND THE ETHIC OF RIGHTS. THIS ETHIC OF RIGHTS IS ABSTRACT, OBJECTIVE, AND IGNORES THE CONTEXT AND RESPONSIBILITY TO CARE ABOUT RELATIONSHIPS BECAUSE IT IS BASED ON AN ABSTRACT IDEA OF RIGHT AND WRONG. THE LEGAL SYSTEMS ALREADY IN PLACE SEEM TO MIRROR THE MORAL REASONING GENERALLY EMPLOYED BY MEN. FEMINIST THINKERS HAVE DESCRIBED THE POSSIBILITY OF A "FEMININE" REASONING THAT CONSISTS OF FACTORS SUCH AS CONTEXT AND LIVED EXPERIENCE, WHICH ARE GENERALLY CONSIDERED IRRELEVANT TO LEGAL THINKING.

ON TOP OF EVERYTHING, IT IS OF UTMOST IMPORTANCE TO ACKNOWLEDGE HOW LAYERED MARGINALISED IDENTITIES LEAD TO A DEBILITATING ISOLATION OF WOMEN BELONGING TO THESE GROUPS. KIMBERLÉ CRENSHAW COINED THE TERM INTERSECTIONALITY TO DESCRIBE THE COMPOUNDING DISADVANTAGE EXPERIENCED BY PEOPLE WITH MULTIPLE OPPRESSED IDENTITIES AND THE POTENTIAL FOR SOCIAL MOVEMENTS SUCH AS FEMINISM TO IGNORE THE IMPACT OF OTHER MARGINALIZED IDENTITIES, SUCH AS RACE, CLASS, NATIONALITY, RELIGION, ETC. WOMEN FROM THE GLOBAL SOUTH OR INDIGENOUS GROUPS ARE MORE LIKELY TO BE EXCLUDED FROM INTERNATIONAL-LEVEL DECISION-MAKING. FOR INSTANCE, A QUEER WOMAN OF COLOR MIGHT HAVE TO DEAL WITH RACISM, SEXISM, AND HOMOPHOBIA AT THE SAME TIME IN PROFESSIONAL ENVIRONMENTS THAT SAY THEY SUPPORT GENDER EQUALITY.

ALTHOUGH WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN INTERNATIONAL LAW MAKING AND DIPLOMACY HAS CERTAINLY INCREASED SIGNIFICANTLY WITH TIME, A LOT OF PROGRESS HAS YET TO BE MADE. FORMAL EQUALITY ALONE CANNOT ACCOUNT FOR PROPER REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN IN THESE INSTITUTIONS. CHANGES NEED TO BE BROUGHT ABOUT IN PRACTICE TO INCLUDE WOMEN IN INFORMAL DECISION MAKING. MOREOVER, WHEN WE TALK ABOUT WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION, WE MUST TALK ABOUT THE PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN FROM ALL SECTIONS OF SOCIETY. IN DIPLOMACY AND INTERNATIONAL LAW, TRUE GENDER EQUALITY WON'T HAPPEN UNTIL INCLUSION MEANS MORE THAN JUST SHOWING UP; WE NEED TO CREATE INCLUSIVE SPACES FOR WOMEN WHERE WE ACKNOWLEDGE THEIR SPECIFIC LIVED EXPERIENCES. WE NEED TO PUT THE VOICES OF ALL WOMEN, ESPECIALLY THOSE FROM MARGINALIZED GROUPS, AT THE CENTER OF THE GLOBAL ORDER AND BREAK DOWN THE STRUCTURAL BARRIERS THAT STILL KEEP THEM FROM HAVING A SAY.

THE RISING INFLUENCE OF WOMEN IN GLOBAL DIPLOMACY

~ HARSHIT PATHAK

***“EDUCATE A WOMAN AND YOU EDUCATE HER FAMILY.
EDUCATE A GIRL AND YOU CHANGE THE FUTURE.”
BY-RANIA AL ABDULLAH***

PAST TRAJECTORY

THOUGH BECOMING MORE VISIBLE IN THE PAST FEW DECADES, THE HISTORY OF WOMEN IN DIPLOMACY ACTUALLY HAS A MOST INTERESTING AND LITTLE DISCUSSED BACKGROUND. THE HISTORY OF THE DIPLOMATIC SPHERE WAS, BY FAR, MALE-DOMINATED, WHERE NORMS OF SOCIETY FORCED WOMEN TO STAY AT HOME, REFLECTING CENTURIES OF OPPRESSION. NEVERTHELESS, WOMEN BECAME ABLE TO INFLUENCE EVEN IN THESE RESTRICTIONS.

STRONG WOMEN SUCH AS QUEENS AND REGENTS, DURING THE ANCIENT AND MEDIEVAL PERIODS, OFTEN INDULGED IN WHAT CAN BE TERMED AS EARLY FORM OF DIPLOMACY. THE INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS WERE DEALT WITH DIRECTLY THROUGH THEIR STRATEGIC MARRIAGES, DYNASTIC MARRIAGES, AND PEACE NEGOTIATIONS, ALTHOUGH THEIR SERVICES DID NOT OCCUR IN THE CAPACITY OF FORMALIZED DIPLOMATS. PEOPLE LIKE HATSHEPSUT OR ELEANOR OF AQUITAINE RECOGNIZED THAT THE STRENGTH OF THE POLITICAL CONNECTIONS WAS AS IMPORTANT AS THE POLITICAL STATUS AND THEY USED THEIR POLITICAL POSITION TO ESTABLISH IMPORTANT INTERNATIONAL RELATIONSHIPS.

INFLUENCED BY MODERN NATION-STATES AND PROFESSIONAL DIPLOMACY IN THE 17TH AND 18TH CENTURIES, THE PROFESSION BECAME MORE FORMATTED AND A PRESERVE OF MEN ONLY. POLICIES TOWARD WOMEN: MOST FOREIGN MINISTRIES, AND DIPLOMATIC INSTITUTIONS OF LEARNING, DID NOT PROVIDE THE LEVEL OF ACCESS TO WOMEN AND THIS ASSIGNED THE ROLE OF A DIPLOMATIC WIVES TO WOMEN, WHO SERVED AS THE SOCIAL SUPPORT TO THEIR HUSBANDS IN A NON-SUBSTANTIVE WAY.

YET, THE LATE 19TH AND EARLY 20TH CENTURIES WERE MARKED BY MAJOR CHANGES. WOMEN SUFFRAGE MOVEMENTS THREATENED THE TRADITIONAL GENDER ROLES AND THERE WAS A GRADUAL OPENING UP. WOMEN BEING THROWN INTO WORK DUE TO THE WORLD WARS FURTHER INCREASED THE PACE OF THIS RE-EVALUATION AS THEY WERE REQUIRED TO RUN THE JOBS THAT MEN USED TO RUN.

THE PERIOD AFTER WORLD WAR II WAS A TURNING POINT. WITH THE FORMATION OF THE UNITED NATIONS AS AN ADVOCATE OF EQUALITY, ANOTHER PLATFORM WAS OPENED. SUCH WOMEN, PIONEERS AS VIJAYA LAKSHMI PANDIT, AN AMBASSADOR AND THE FIRST WOMAN PRESIDENT OF THE UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY IN INDIA, HAVE BROKEN MAJOR GROUNDS.

THERE IS STILL UNDERREPRESENTATION PERSISTS DESPITE EVIDENCE DEMONSTRATING THE BENEFITS OF WOMEN'S INCLUSION IN DECISION-MAKING PROCESSES. RESEARCH INDICATES THAT WHEN WOMEN SERVE IN DIPLOMATIC ROLES, THEY ADVANCE POLICIES THAT PROMOTE SOCIAL COHESION, ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY, AND EQUITABLE DEVELOPMENT.



CONTEMPORARY INFLUENCE

WOMEN ARE RISING TO SIGNIFICANT CONTRIBUTIONS IN MODERN DIPLOMACY; THERE ARE STILL CHALLENGES. ALTHOUGH THE PROFESSION USED TO BE A RESERVED MALE DOMAIN, THE 21ST CENTURY HAS WITNESSED AN INCREASE OF WOMEN TAKING UP SENIOR RANKS IN DIPLOMACY, AS FOREIGN MINISTERS, HEADS OF MISSIONS, AND MAJOR NEGOTIATORS. THE CHANGE IS FUELLED BY A REALIZATION THAT DIVERSITY OF THOUGHT WILL MAKE INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS MORE EFFECTIVE.

DIPLOMATIC WOMEN ARE NOW PLAYING A SIGNIFICANT ROLE IN INTERNATIONAL POLICY IN A VERY BROAD SPECTRUM OF TOPICS. THEY OFTEN LEAD THE DEBATE ON HUMAN RIGHTS, GENDER EQUALITY, SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT, AND CLIMATE CHANGE WITH A MORE FLESHED OUT BUT OFTENTIMES MORE SENSITIZED APPROACH TO THESE MULTIFACETED ISSUES. THE PEACE PROCESSES THAT INCLUDE WOMEN ALWAYS RECORD HIGH CHANCES OF SUCCESSFUL AGREEMENTS, WHICH DEMONSTRATES THEIR SIGNIFICANT ROLE IN CONFLICT RESOLUTION AND PEACEBUILDING. THE TURN TO MULTIPOLAR WORLD IS FAVOURING THEIR COLLABORATIVE APPROACHES TO LEADERSHIP AND THEIR LONGER-TERM PLANNING IN BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS.

EVEN WITH THIS, THERE ARE STILL HUGE GAPS. WOMEN REMAIN THE MINORITY OF AMBASSADORS WORLDWIDE, AND ESPECIALLY IN DESIRABLE AND HIGH-END ASSIGNMENTS OR THOSE INVOLVING HARD SECURITY PROBLEMS. THEY CAN EASILY EXPERIENCE SOME FORM OF SYSTEMIC DISCRIMINATION, SUCH AS THE PRESSURE TO JUGGLE CHALLENGING CAREERS WITH OUTSIZED CARE DUTIES, OR CAN FIND THEMSELVES FACING THE PROVERBIAL GLASS WALL THAT GUIDES THEM INTO LESS CONSEQUENTIAL PORTFOLIOS WITHIN DEPARTMENTS.

NEVERTHELESS, GENDER CAMPAIGNS INCLUDING FEMINIST FOREIGN POLICIES BY VARIOUS COUNTRIES ARE BEING PROMOTED TO FURTHER PROVIDE WOMEN RIGHTS AND REPRESENTATION TO EVERY ASPECT OF FOREIGN POLICY. THE WAVE OF WOMEN REPRESENTATION IN MULTILATERAL ORGANIZATIONS AND THEIR NOTICEABLE CONTRIBUTIONS IN THE WORLDWIDE FORUMS IS INDICATIVE OF A REVOLUTIONARY CHANGE. THEY ARE NOT JUST TOKEN PLAYERS WHOSE ROLE WITHIN THE PROCESS OF GLOBAL GOVERNANCE IS SYMBOLIC; THEY ARE MAKING A DIRECT TRANSFORMATION TOWARDS A MORE ORGANISED AND OPEN PROCESS OF GLOBAL GOVERNANCE, WITH ITS NATIONAL INTERESTS AND ITS INTERNATIONAL CO-OPERATION JOINING TO TACKLE THE MOST SIGNIFICANT PROBLEMS THE WORLD IS CURRENTLY FACING.

KEY CHALLENGES

ALTHOUGH NOWADAYS THEIR UTILITY IS INCREASINGLY ACKNOWLEDGED, WOMEN IN DIPLOMACY CONTINUE TO FACE SERIOUS SETBACKS THAT SUPPRESS THEIR PARTICIPATION AND PROGRESS TO TOTAL ENGAGEMENT. GENDER BIASNESS AND STEREOTYPES ARE ONE OF THE PROBLEMS THAT RUN RAMPANT. THERE IS A TENDENCY TO ASSIGN WOMEN IN "SOFTER" PORTFOLIOS SUCH AS HUMAN RIGHTS, CULTURE OR DEVELOPMENT WHEREAS HIGH-STAKED DEEP SECURITY PORTFOLIOS OR LEADING ROLES IN HIGH-STAKES AREA ALONG ECONOMIC FORUMS ARE CONSIDERED MALE-ONLY. THIS TYPECASTING SEES THEM MISSING OUT ON MAJOR NEGOTIATIONS AND STRATEGIC DECISION-MAKING HAVING CAREER IMPLICATIONS.

INADEQUATE REPRESENTATION AT TOP MANAGEMENT IS HARSH REALITY. ALTHOUGH MANY WOMEN ARE BEING APPOINTED TO THE LOWER RANKS OF DIPLOMATIC ACTIVITIES THERE IS A TENDENCY OF INSIGNIFICANT PRESENCE AS THEY OCCUPY THE DIPLOMATIC RANKS AND THE HIGH ECHELONS OF THE MINISTERIAL RANKS. THIS LEAKY PIPELINE CAN BE COMMONLY EXPLAINED BY SYSTEMIC IMPEDIMENTS IN FOREIGN MINISTRIES SUCH AS NON-TRANSPARENT PROMOTION, ABSENCE OF MENTORSHIP OR MALE-DOMINATED INFORMAL NETWORK INACCESSIBLE TO WOMEN.

TRADITIONALLY DIPLOMATIC LIFESTYLES CAN BE QUITE TAXING WITH MANY INTERNATIONAL TRANSFERS AND UNPREDICTABLE WORKING HOURS MAKING IT RATHER DIFFICULT TO MAINTAIN A WORK-LIFE BALANCE. THE WOMEN WHO TEND TO BULK A GREATER BURDEN OF CARE GIVING TEND TO STRUGGLE WITH THE DEMANDS OF WORKING AND PROMOTING THEIR CAREER. THESE CHALLENGES ARE MADE WORSE BY THE FACT THAT THERE IS A LACK OF INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT IN THE AREA OF CHILDCARE, ASSISTING THE SPOUSE IN EMPLOYMENT, AND FLEXIBLE WORKING ARRANGEMENTS, WHICH DRIVES SOME OF THE FEMALE POPULATION TO THE POINT WHERE THEY CAN EITHER PURSUE A CAREER OR FAMILY, BUT NOT BOTH.

LASTLY, A WOMAN DIPLOMAT CAN ENCOUNTER SEXISM AND HARASSMENT, BOTH EXPLICIT AND IMPLICIT, IN THEIR WORKPLACES. THIS MAY BE ANYTHING BETWEEN MICROAGGRESSIONS TO MORE SEVERE DISCRIMINATION THAT MAKES UP AN UNFRIENDLY ENVIRONMENT. THEY ARE ALSO MORE PUBLICLY EXPOSED TO SCRUTINY AND INTERNET BULLYING, WHICH DISCOURAGE OTHERS TO TAKE FULL ADVANTAGE AND REACH GREATER HEIGHTS IN DIPLOMACY. TO OVERCOME THESE COMPLEX CHALLENGES, THE COMBINATION OF POLICY CHANGE, CULTURAL CHANGE AT INSTITUTIONAL LEVELS AND ACTIVE MALE ALLY SHIP WILL BE CRUCIAL IN ORDER TO REALIZE THE FULL POTENTIAL OF WOMEN IN GLOBAL DIPLOMACY.



IMPACT ON GLOBAL POLICIES & FUTURE OUTLOOK

THE FACT THAT MORE WOMEN ARE PURSUING A CAREER IN DIPLOMACY IS DIRECTLY AFFECTING WORLD POLICIES AND HAS BRIGHT BUT STILL THE ROUGH FUTURE. WOMEN DIPLOMATS ARE REDEFINING INTERNATIONAL RELATIONSHIPS BY INTRODUCING A VARIETY OF IDEAS AND INTERESTS ON THE AGENDA, AND THEIR RESULTS ARE MORE HOLISTIC AND DURABLE. THE ENLISTMENT USUALLY EXTENDS THE RANGE OF NEGOTIATIONS, INCLUDING SUCH IMPORTANT ASPECTS AS HUMAN RIGHTS, GENDER EQUALITY, AND CLIMATE JUSTICE AS A MORE SIGNIFICANT PART OF FOREIGN POLICIES. IT HAS CONTINUOUSLY BEEN REVEALED IN WORKS BY AUTHORS THAT PEACE NEGOTIATIONS INCLUDING THE CONTRIBUTION OF WOMEN ARE MUCH MORE LIKELY TO HAVE SUSTAINABLE AGREEMENTS PRODUCED, AND THAT WOMEN ALSO MAKE UNIQUE CONTRIBUTIONS TO CONFLICT RESOLUTION AND PEACEBUILDING WHICH INVOLVES COLLABORATIVE EFFORTS AND ATTEMPTS AT UNDERSTANDING THE OTHER. THIS CHANGE CAN BE SEEN THROUGH THE EMERGENCE OF SO-CALLED FEMINIST FOREIGN POLICIES IN VARIOUS COUNTRIES TODAY THAT SEEK TO INCORPORATE FEMININE EQUALITY INTO EVERY ASPECT OF THEIR INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS.



NATIONAL INITIATIVES, SUCH AS THE INDIAN FOREIGN SERVICE'S THERE HAVE BEEN A SIGNIFICANT INCREASE OF 6.6 PERCENT IN FEMALE DIPLOMATS OVER A NINE-YEAR PERIOD FROM 2014 TO 2022.

HOWEVER, THE LONG-TERM FUTURE OF WOMEN IN DIPLOMACY IS NOT FREE OF CHALLENGES. MORE WOMEN ARE FINDING THEIR WAY INTO THE DIPLOMATIC SERVICES AT LOWER RANKS BUT THERE IS WHAT IS KNOWN AS A GLASS CEILING WHICH HAS LIMITED THEIR PROGRESS TO TOP POSITIONS OF THE SERVICE SUCH AS AMBASSADORSHIP AND POSITIONS AS MINISTERS OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS. SYSTEMATIC DISCRIMINATION AND IMPLICIT STEREOTYPES, AS WELL AS THE CHALLENGING ASPECT OF WORK-LIFE BALANCE SO NATURAL TO DIPLOMATIC SERVICE, STILL REMAIN MAJOR OBSTACLES. THESE WOMEN ARE USUALLY EXPECTED TO MEET PROFESSIONAL DEMANDS AND OFFER DISPROPORTIONATE CAREGIVING WHEN THEY DO NOT HAVE THE REQUIRED INSTITUTIONAL HELP. ALSO, SUBTLE AND VIOLENT MANIFESTATIONS OF SEXISM AND HARASSMENT MAY BE UNFRIENDLY.



CONCLUSION

THE TREND IS INCREASING TOWARD INCLUSION. THE UN-DESIGNATED INTERNATIONAL DAY OF WOMEN IN DIPLOMACY IS A SIGN OF A GLOBAL PROMISE TO EQUALIZE THESE IMBALANCES. THE FUTURE OF DIPLOMACY DEPENDS ON A SUCCESSFUL PATH TOWARDS FULL, EQUAL, MEANINGFUL PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN, NOT JUST BECAUSE IT MUST BE FAIR, BUT BECAUSE IT IS ALSO A STRATEGIC IMPERATIVE TO A MORE PEACEFUL, PROSPEROUS, AND JUST WORLD. IT WILL TAKE MORE THAN MERE TOKENISM, MORE THAN THE SYMBOLIC ACTS, IT WILL NECESSITATE PRACTICAL MEASURES AND PRACTICES, SUCH AS A TRANSFORMATION OF POLICY, HARD MENTORSHIP SCHEMES, AND A MODIFICATION OF CULTURE IN FOREIGN MINISTRIES ALL OVER THE WORLD.

SOFT POWER, STRONG WILL: THE LEGACY OF VIGDÍS FINNBOGADÓTTIR

~ KRISHA SAHAY

VIGDÍS FINNBOGADÓTTIR DIDN'T ENTER POLITICS WITH FANFARE OR FLASHY CAMPAIGNS. HER JOURNEY BEGAN WITH SOMETHING QUIETER, BUT JUST AS POWERFUL: A PROTEST FUELED BY SHARED FRUSTRATION AND STEADY HOPE. THE ICELAND WE KNOW TODAY, OFTEN SEEN AS THE MOST GENDER-EQUAL COUNTRY IN THE WORLD, DIDN'T START OUT THAT WAY.

LONG BEFORE VIGDÍS EVER RAN FOR OFFICE, ICELANDIC WOMEN HAD BEEN PUSHING FOR CHANGE. IN 1882, SINGLE WOMEN AND WIDOWS GAINED THE RIGHT TO VOTE IN LOCAL ELECTIONS. MARRIED WOMEN FOLLOWED IN 1908. NATIONAL VOTING RIGHTS CAME IN 1915, BUT ONLY FOR WOMEN OVER 40, WHILE MEN COULD VOTE AT 25. FULL VOTING EQUALITY CAME IN 1920. FROM THAT POINT ON, ICELANDIC WOMEN SHOWED UP AT THE POLLS IN HUGE NUMBERS, HELPING SHAPE THE COUNTRY'S DEMOCRACY WITH PURPOSE AND PERSISTENCE.

BUT VOTING WAS ONLY THE BEGINNING.

ON OCTOBER 24, 1975, WOMEN ACROSS ICELAND TOOK A STAND. THEY WALKED OUT OF THEIR JOBS AND HOMES, REFUSING TO WORK FOR A DAY. IT WAS A PROTEST AGAINST UNFAIR PAY, INVISIBLE LABOUR, AND LACK OF REPRESENTATION. THE COUNTRY NEARLY SHUT DOWN AND, IN THAT SILENCE, THE POWER OF WOMEN'S PRESENCE BECAME IMPOSSIBLE TO IGNORE.

THE RESPONSE CAME QUICKLY. IN 1976, THE PARLIAMENT PASSED A LAW GUARANTEEING EQUAL RIGHTS FOR MEN AND WOMEN. IT DIDN'T SOLVE EVERYTHING. THE WAGE GAP AND STRUCTURAL INEQUALITIES REMAINED. BUT IT WAS A TURNING POINT. THE STRIKE HAD WORKED. IT SHOWED THAT WOMEN WERE CENTRAL TO EVERY PART OF ICELANDIC LIFE AND DESERVED TO BE TREATED THAT WAY.

THAT SHIFT IN PUBLIC CONSCIOUSNESS OPENED THE DOOR FOR VIGDÍS. INSPIRED BY THE ENERGY OF THE FEMINIST MOVEMENT AND A COUNTRY READY FOR CHANGE, SHE RAN FOR PRESIDENT. IN 1980, SHE WON, BECOMING THE FIRST WOMAN IN THE WORLD TO BE DEMOCRATICALLY ELECTED AS A HEAD OF STATE. HER VICTORY WASN'T JUST PERSONAL. IT SIGNALLED A NEW KIND OF LEADERSHIP, ONE WHERE DIPLOMACY AND POLITICS WEREN'T RESERVED FOR MEN.

THE WOMAN THAT SHE IS

THE ROLE OF ICELAND'S PRESIDENT IS NOT OVERTLY POLITICAL; IT RESEMBLES THAT OF A CONSTITUTIONAL MONARCH—SYMBOLIC, CEREMONIAL, AND LARGELY ABOVE THE FRAY OF PARTY POLITICS. BUT VIGDÍS FINNBOGADÓTTIR NEVER SAW SYMBOLISM AS PASSIVE. WITH QUIET AUTHORITY AND A GLOBALIST VISION, SHE TRANSFORMED HER OFFICE INTO A PLATFORM FOR DIPLOMACY, CULTURE, AND PEACEBUILDING. SHE REDEFINED WHAT SOFT POWER COULD MEAN FOR A SMALL NATION.

ONE OF THE MOST STRIKING MOMENTS OF HER PRESIDENCY CAME IN 1986, WHEN ICELAND HOSTED THE REYKJAVÍK SUMMIT. IT BROUGHT TOGETHER U.S. PRESIDENT RONALD REAGAN AND SOVIET LEADER MIKHAIL GORBACHEV FOR TALKS THAT HELPED EASE COLD WAR TENSIONS. THOUGH THE SUMMIT DIDN'T PRODUCE A FORMAL AGREEMENT, IT REVIVED ARMS NEGOTIATIONS AND LAID THE GROUNDWORK FOR THE INF AND START TREATIES.

FOR VIGDÍS, THIS WAS A QUIET TRIUMPH. SHE HAD HELPED PUT ICELAND ON THE MAP AS A TRUSTED PLACE FOR DIALOGUE. SHE SHOWED THAT EVEN A SMALL COUNTRY COULD HOST BIG CONVERSATIONS, AND THAT DIPLOMACY DIDN'T HAVE TO COME FROM POWER ALONE. IT COULD ALSO COME FROM CALM, CREDIBILITY, AND CARE.

YET VIGDÍS'S COMMITMENT TO GLOBAL DIPLOMACY EXTENDED FAR BEYOND COLD WAR DETENTE. A LIFELONG ADVOCATE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS, SHE USED HER INTERNATIONAL STANDING TO SPEAK OUT ON ISSUES THAT TRANSCENDED BORDERS. AS PRESIDENT, SHE PROMOTED GENDER EQUALITY NOT ONLY AS A NATIONAL VALUE BUT AS A GLOBAL IMPERATIVE, ARGUING THAT TRUE DEMOCRACY COULD NOT EXIST WITHOUT THE FULL PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN. SHE FREQUENTLY EMPHASIZED EDUCATION, PARTICULARLY OF GIRLS AND MARGINALIZED COMMUNITIES, AS THE CORNERSTONE OF PEACE AND DEVELOPMENT.

IT IS EVIDENT THAT VIGDÍS'S VISION OF DIPLOMACY EXTENDED BEYOND GEOPOLITICS. SHE UNDERSTOOD THAT TRUE SOVEREIGNTY WAS ALSO CULTURAL, AND THAT LANGUAGE IS THE SOUL OF A NATION. THROUGHOUT HER PRESIDENCY AND LONG AFTER, SHE CHAMPIONED THE PRESERVATION OF LINGUISTIC AND CULTURAL HERITAGE, NOT JUST FOR ICELAND, BUT FOR ALL SMALL NATIONS AND MINORITY COMMUNITIES WORLDWIDE. SHE FIERCELY DEFENDED THE ICELANDIC LANGUAGE IN THE FACE OF GLOBALIZATION, PROMOTING ITS USE IN SCIENCE, EDUCATION, AND MEDIA TO ENSURE ITS SURVIVAL IN A RAPIDLY HOMOGENIZING WORLD. HER COMMITMENT WASN'T MERELY NATIONALISTIC; IT WAS GROUNDED IN THE BELIEF THAT LINGUISTIC DIVERSITY IS A FUNDAMENTAL HUMAN RIGHT AND A CORNERSTONE OF CULTURAL IDENTITY.

THE CONTINUING LEGACY

VIGDÍS STEPPED DOWN IN 1996 AFTER FOUR TERMS, BUT SHE DIDN'T STOP LEADING. IF ANYTHING, HER INFLUENCE ONLY DEEPENED. SHE BECAME A GLOBAL SYMBOL OF THOUGHTFUL LEADERSHIP, CULTURAL PRIDE, AND FEMINIST DIPLOMACY.

IN 1998, SHE BECAME UNESCO'S GOODWILL AMBASSADOR FOR LANGUAGES. SHE THREW HERSELF INTO THE WORK, PUSHING THE IDEA THAT LANGUAGE AND CULTURE AREN'T SIDE ISSUES, IN FACT, THEY'RE CENTRAL TO DIPLOMACY AND INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION. SHE BELIEVED THAT PROTECTING LANGUAGES COULD HELP BUILD TOLERANCE AND PEACE IN AN INCREASINGLY CONNECTED BUT DIVIDED WORLD. SHE ALSO HELPED CREATE THE COUNCIL OF WOMEN WORLD LEADERS, A GLOBAL NETWORK PROMOTING WOMEN IN POLITICAL LEADERSHIP. EVEN AFTER LEAVING OFFICE, SHE KEPT OPENING DOORS FOR OTHERS.

TODAY, ICELAND STILL CARRIES HER LEGACY. THE COUNTRY CONTINUES TO LEAD IN GENDER EQUALITY, WITH STRONG PROTECTIONS FOR QUAL PAY AND WIDESPREAD POLITICAL REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN AND LGBTQ+ LEADERS. THESE AREN'T JUST POLICY MILESTONES, THEY'RE THE RESULT OF YEARS OF WORK BY PEOPLE LIKE VIGDÍS AND THE GENERATIONS SHE INSPIRED.

VIGDÍS FINNBOGADÓTTIR'S LIFE STANDS AS PROOF THAT LEADERSHIP IS NOT MEASURED BY FORCE OR VISIBILITY ALONE. IT IS MEASURED BY THE COURAGE TO LISTEN, TO PRESERVE, AND TO OPEN DOORS SO THAT OTHERS MAY WALK THROUGH.



STRUCTURAL BARRIERS TO WOMEN’S PARTICIPATION IN GLOBAL

~ SUMIT KUMAR

INTRODUCTION

FOR AGES, GENDER EQUALITY HAS BEEN A UNIVERSAL CONCERN SPANNING MILLENNIA, ROOTED IN ANCIENT CIVILIZATIONS, CODIFIED THROUGH LEGAL AND SOCIAL NORMS, AND EVOLVING IN PACE WITH SOCIETAL CHANGES. WITH THE PASSAGE OF TIME AND EXPANSION OF FEMINIST IDEALS IDEALS OF FEMINISM, THIS POSITION HAS BEEN SOMEWHAT RESTORED TO IN EQUILIBRIUM AS PROPOSED BY THE LAW OF NATURE. STILL, SEVERAL MAJOR HURDLES REMAIN EVEN TODAY IN THE 21ST CENTURY. GOVERNANCE IS ONE OF SUCH IMPEDIMENTS TO ACHIEVING THE NOTION OF GENDER EQUALITY, AS THE WOMEN’S FEMALE PARTICIPATION IN DOMESTIC AS WELL AS GLOBAL GOVERNANCE DOES NOT PAINT A PROMISING PICTURE. THIS PERSIST AND ALL THIS HAPPENS EVEN THOUGH WOMEN ARE EXCELLENT LEADERS, AS PROVEN BY PROMINENT HEADS OF STATE, LEADERS OF INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS, AND MULTINATIONAL COMPANIES. ALTHOUGH THE IGNITED FEMINIST MOVEMENT HAS GIVEN UNPRECEDENTED VISIBILITY TO FEMINIST PERSPECTIVES IN INTERNATIONAL POLITICAL CIRCLES, THIS ISSUE, EVEN TODAY, REMAINS RELEVANT EVEN TODAY DUE TO BARRIERS POSED TO WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN MATTERS OF GOVERNANCE. THERE ARE VARIOUS IMPEDIMENTS TO SUCH A SCENARIO WHERE THE RIGHTS OF WOMEN ARE VOCIFEROUSLY NEGLECTED.



CONTEMPORARY POSITION OF WOMEN’S PARTICIPATION IN GLOBAL GOVERNANCE

GLOBAL GOVERNANCE, IN ESSENCE, ENCOMPASSES FUNDAMENTAL ASPECTS SUCH AS AUTHORITY AND HIERARCHY, WHICH ALLOW CERTAIN GROUPS TO PRESENT CRITICAL ISSUES AT THE CENTRE OF INTERNATIONAL DEBATE. THE EXPRESSION “GLOBAL GOVERNANCE” REFERS TO INSTRUMENTS OF CONDUCT AND ANALYSIS THAT TRANSCEND THE BOUNDARIES OF COUNTRIES. THE MAJOR INSTITUTIONS EMBODYING SUCH A CONCEPT ARE THE UNITED NATIONS (UN), THE INTERNATIONAL MONETARY FUND (IMF), AND THE WORLD BANK (WB). THE IDEA IS THAT GOVERNANCE EXTENDS BEYOND IS NOT RESTRICTED TO THE MANAGERIAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE ASPECTS OF THE STATE (PUBLIC MACHINE) OR GOOD BUSINESS MANAGEMENT PRACTICES, AS IT IS NOTED THAT IT HAS A COMPREHENSIVE DEFINITION AND CAN BE PRACTICED BY DIFFERENT INSTITUTIONS. HOWEVER, THE TERM GENDER REMAINS ONE OF THE MOST SLIPPERY CONCEPTS IN GLOBAL GOVERNANCE, PERSISTENTLY INVISIBLE ON MANY OCCASIONS AND SURREPTITIOUSLY REMOVED FROM DISCUSSIONS.

THE RECOGNISED RIGHTS OF WOMEN TO TAKE PART IN PUBLIC AND POLITICAL LIFE ARE INTRINSIC FOR SEEKING GENDER EQUALITY AND INCLUSIVE SOCIETIES. THE HISTORIC CONVENTION ON THE ELIMINATION OF ALL FORMS OF DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN (CEDAW), 1979, CALLS FOR EQUALITY FOR WOMEN CONCERNING RIGHTS IN VOTING, CONTESTING, AND HOLDING PUBLIC OFFICES. THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS CALL FOR ENSURING WOMEN'S FULL PARTICIPATION AND EQUAL LEADERSHIP OPPORTUNITIES IN POLITICAL, ECONOMIC, AND PUBLIC LIFE. EVEN AFTER SUCH INTERNATIONAL STANDARDS, THE FLAWED POWER DISTRIBUTION WITH RESPECT TO MEN AND WOMEN STILL EXISTS AT ALL LEVELS OF GOVERNANCE. (CANADA, 2023) HISTORICALLY, INTERNATIONAL GOVERNANCE, INCLUDING DIPLOMACY, HAS BEEN THE PRESERVE OF MEN. AS PER A REPORT, ONLY 28 HEAD OF STATE POSITIONS, 27% OF PARLIAMENTARY SEATS, 23.3% OF MINISTERIAL POSITIONS, AND 35.5% OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT SEATS ARE OCCUPIED BY WOMEN IN 2024 (INTER-PARLIAMENTARY UNION, 2023). THIS SIGNIFIES THE NATURE OF GENDER INEQUALITY THAT IS STILL FOUND IN THE 21ST CENTURY.

STRUCTURAL BARRIERS TO WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION

WOMEN GENERALLY FACE VARIOUS STRUCTURAL BARRIERS IN THE PARTICIPATION PROCESS OF GOVERNANCE, BOTH AS VOTERS AND AS CANDIDATES. AS VOTERS, THEIR VOTING RIGHTS ARE NOT EFFECTIVELY EXERCISED DUE TO SOCIAL OUTLOOK, ILLITERACY, AND INEFFECTIVE IMPLICATIVE OF LAWS AND CONVENTIONS. SIMILARLY, IN THE ROLE OF CANDIDATES, THE ROLE OF WOMEN IS UNDERMINED AND UNDERAPPRECIATED DUE TO INSTITUTIONAL INFLUENCES, SOCIETAL STEREOTYPES, AND ECONOMIC VULNERABILITIES.

A. LEGAL OR INSTITUTIONAL INERTIA

THE INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK IS THE PRIMARY SOURCE OF REGULATIONS IN INTERNATIONAL GOVERNANCE. GLOBAL AGREEMENTS SUCH AS THE CONVENTION ON THE POLITICAL RIGHTS OF WOMEN, CEDAW (CONVENTION ON ELIMINATION OF DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN), ETC., SEEK TO PROMOTE THE RIGHTS OF WOMEN IN CASE OF GOVERNANCE TO MAKE GOVERNANCE A GENDER NEUTRAL PLAYING FIELD. DESPITE THE LOFTY PROVISIONS, THE LACK OF AN ENFORCEABLE MANDATE ATTACHED TO SUCH INSTRUMENTS RENDERS THEM IMPERFECT DUE TO THEIR NON-BINDING NATURE.

GLOBAL AND NATIONAL-LEVEL ORGANIZATIONS HAVE BEEN MALE-DOMINATED ACROSS CENTURIES. THEY OFTEN RESIST SYSTEMATIC CHANGES THAT COULD VARY THE FUNDAMENTAL INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK. EVEN AFTER FEMINIST MOVEMENTS, AND CALLS FOR GENDER EQUALITY, WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION ALSO REMAINED A PROBLEMATIC AREA. FOR INSTANCE, WOMEN COMPRISED ONLY 13% OF NEGOTIATORS AND 6% OF MEDIATORS IN GLOBAL PEACE PROCESSES FROM 1992 TO 2019 (COUNCIL ON FOREIGN RELATIONS, 2024). FIGURES OF APPOINTMENT HAVE INCREASED IN THE RECENT DECADE, BUT POWER DISTRIBUTION REMAINS SKEWED.

PROMINENT ORGANIZATIONS SUCH AS THE UN, WORLD BANK, WTO, WHO, ETC. REMAIN MALE- DOMINATEDMALE-DOMINATED AS THE GENERALIZED PROPORTION OF WOMEN HOLDING SENIOR POSITIONS IN THESE INSTITUTIONS IS A MERE 30% WHICH IS QUITE LOW COMPARED TO THE HIGH AMBITIONS SET BY SUCH BODIES FOR ACHIEVING GENDER EQUALITY (UN WOMEN, 2023A). INSTITUTIONAL CULTURES OFTEN REINFORCE "GLASS CEILINGS", BLOCKING WOMEN AT MIDDLE AND SENIOR LEVELS. EVEN IN CASES OF HOLDING IMPORTANT AUTHORITIES, WOMEN OFTEN FACE CHALLENGES IN TERMS OF UNDERVALUATION OR QUESTIONING OF THEIR AUTHORITY.

SOMETIMES, INDUCTION OF WOMEN INTO LEADERSHIP POSITIONS ISN'TISN'T ENOUGH BECAUSE WOMEN ARE ENTRUSTED WITH „SOFT" PORTFOLIO ROLES SUCH AS SOCIAL AFFAIRS, HEALTH, EDUCATION, ETC., WHILE EXCLUDED FROM CORE IMPORTANT ROLES SUCH AS FINANCE, TRADE, OR DEFENCE. INITIATIVES LIKE GENDER-RESPONSIVE BUDGETING AND QUOTAS FACE INTERNAL PUSHBACK, ESPECIALLY FROM ENTRENCHED LEADERSHIP, LEADING TO THE ABSENCE OF REAL INFLUENCE.

B. SOCIO-CULTURAL CONSTRAINTS

GENDER STEREOTYPES ARE THE LONG-STANDING AND PERSISTENT SOCIAL AND CULTURAL ATTITUDES AND ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT THE DIFFERENT CHARACTERISTICS AND ROLES THAT WOMEN AND MEN ARE PERCEIVED TO HAVE BECAUSE OF THEIR GENDER. POLITICS IS GENERALLY PERCEIVED AS A DOMAIN OF MEN, BARRING WOMEN OF FROM ANY CONTRIBUTION. STATUS THE STATUS AND ROLE OF FEMALES ARE DOWNGRADED IN SIGNIFICANCE, ESPECIALLY IN POLITICAL AND SOCIAL TERMS, WHICH AFFECT AFFECTS THEIR GOVERNANCE AMBITIONS (KORIR & AMUNGA, 2021).

IN ADDITION, PARTY POLITICS TENDS TO BE DOMINATED BY MEN, MAKING IT MORE DIFFICULT FOR WOMEN TO GET ON NOMINATIONS. THE „RADICAL FEMINISM THEORY OF PATRIARCHY" ADDRESSES THIS ISSUE BY CALLING FOR THE CLOSE EXAMINATION OF THE FOUNDATIONAL STRUCTURES OF GLOBAL GOVERNANCE AS NATURALLY DOMINATED BY MEN. THE THEORY MAKES A DEMAND FOR A RADICAL RESTRUCTURING OF INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTIONS TO DISMANTLE THESE POWER IMBALANCES TO TRULY ACHIEVE GENDER EQUALITY.

PATRIARCHAL BIAS HAS CONFINED WOMEN TO THE PERIPHERIES OF LEADERSHIP, WHERE A WOMAN WHO VENTURES INTO GOVERNANCE CONTESTS IS MORE LIKELY TO RECEIVE A BACKLASH OR, IN THE WORST-CASE SCENARIO, EVEN BE ASSAULTED PHYSICALLY. SINCE GLOBAL GOVERNANCE IS CONSIDERED AN ACTIVITY IN THE PUBLIC SPHERE, THE INHERENT IMBALANCE OF POWER DYNAMICS IS REFLECTED IN WOMEN'S LIMITED INFLUENCE DUE TO THE MALE DOMINANCE IN THE PUBLIC SPHERE.

SUCH TERMS HAVE LED TO THE OPPRESSION OF WOMEN AND FUELLED GENDER BASE INEQUALITIES WHEN OBSERVED FROM A SOCIAL DOMINANCE PERSPECTIVE (WILKISTER, S. M, 2022). THE CUSTOMS, LAWS, AND EVEN RELIGIOUS PRACTICES HAVE ALSO BEEN USED TO JUSTIFY AND PERPETUATE THESE DIFFERENTIAL ROLES TO THE EXTENT THAT SOME WOMEN THEMSELVES SEEM TO HAVE ACCEPTED AND INTERNALIZED THEM. THIS MEAGRE POSITION OF WOMEN IS COMPLEMENTED BY THE THREAT OF HARASSMENT, PHYSICAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL, DETERRING THEIR PROGRESS TOWARDS AN INCLUSIVE APPROACH TO GOVERNANCE.



C. ECONOMIC BARRIERS

CHALLENGES, INCLUDING THE COST OF CAMPAIGNS, UNEQUAL ACCESS TO FINANCIAL NETWORKS, AND GENDER DISPARITIES IN POLITICAL GIVING, ARE FREQUENTLY CITED HURDLES TO WOMEN AIMING FOR PUBLIC OFFICE. ONE OF THE REALITY CHECKS FOR GOVERNANCE AMBITIONS FOR WOMEN IS INSUFFICIENT FUNDING AND CAPITAL (RINGERA, 2017). AS COMPARED TO MEN, WOMEN WHO ARE HIGHLY MOTIVATED TO CONTEST POLITICAL AND PUBLIC OFFICES ARE BARRED FROM SHARING THE SAME SOURCES OF FUNDING.

WOMEN TYPICALLY LACK ACCESS TO PERSONAL WEALTH AND DONOR NETWORKS, MAKING IT HARDER TO MOUNT COMPETITIVE CAMPAIGNS. PUBLIC AND PRIVATE DISCOURSE OFTEN JUDGES WOMEN IN PUBLIC OFFICE MORE HARSHLY—SCRUTINIZING APPEARANCE, FAMILY ROLES, AND PERSONAL LIFE. ECONOMIC MARGINALIZATION (E.G., LAND, ASSETS, EDUCATION) ALSO UNDERMINES WOMEN'S AUTONOMY AND ELIGIBILITY FOR LEADERSHIP ROLES.

D. FAMILY CONSTRAINTS

MEN ARE MUCH MORE LIKELY TO HOLD TRADITIONAL IDEAS ABOUT GENDER AND WORK AND ACT AS THE MAJOR DETERRENT TO WOMEN'S POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT. MEN ARE FAR MORE LIKELY TO SAY THAT IT IS PRIMARILY A WOMAN'S RESPONSIBILITY TO CARE FOR HER FAMILY, AND THAT THIS ROLE IS MORE APPRECIATED. WOMEN ARE MORE LIKELY TO HAVE A CARING ROLE AND THEREFORE HAVE FEWER OPPORTUNITIES TO TAKE PART IN POLITICAL LIFE. THE DISTURBANCE CAUSED BY THE LENGTH OF CAMPAIGNS, DISTANT GOVERNANCE LOCATIONS, LONG WORKING HOURS, AND OTHER GOVERNANCE DEMANDS, POSES CONCRETE CHALLENGES TO HOLDING OFFICE BY WOMEN.

POLITICAL AND GOVERNANCE LIFE OFTEN REQUIRES LONG HOURS SPENT AWAY FROM THE HOME, AND THAT IS NOT COMPATIBLE WITH CARING AND FAMILY RESPONSIBILITIES. MARRIED WOMEN ARE THE MOST DISADVANTAGED IN THIS MANNER, AS MANY OF THEM ARE INTERESTED IN VYING FOR POLITICAL POSITIONS ARE FORCED TO CHOOSE BETWEEN THE LEADERSHIP AND THEIR FAMILIES DUE TO THEIR FAMILY RESPONSIBILITIES.

RECOMMENDARY MEASURES

DESPITE GLOBAL COMMITMENTS TO GENDER EQUALITY, WOMEN REMAIN SIGNIFICANTLY UNDERREPRESENTED IN DIPLOMACY AND POLITICAL LEADERSHIP DUE TO DELAYS OBSERVED IN TAKING CONCRETE STEPS TO FULLY COMPREHEND THE ABSTRACT NOTIONS OF EQUALITY IN PRACTICE. THIS OFTEN RESULTS IN REDUCED DEMOCRATIC QUALITY AS THE UNDER-REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN UNDERMINES DEMOCRATIC DEPTH AND RESILIENCE. INCLUSION OF WOMEN IN THE POLITICAL STREAM IS ESSENTIALLY A NOTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND A FACET OF AN INCLUSIVE SOCIETY. THE ACTIVE PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN, ON EQUAL FOOTING WITH MEN, AT ALL LEVELS OF DECISION-MAKING, LEADS TO THE REALISATION OF EQUALITY AND PRINCIPLES OF DEMOCRACY IN GOVERNANCE. WOMEN ARE SIGNIFICANT WITH RESPECT TO VARIOUS ISSUES SUCH AS HUMAN RIGHTS, ENVIRONMENT, PEACE MOVEMENTS, ETC, THAT DEMAND SENSITIVITY AND A HUMAN TOUCH FOR THE RESOLUTION CONCEPT OF PEACE BUILDING TO THE PROCESS OF PEACE BUILDING, WITH THEIR ROLES BEING ESSENTIAL IN ACHIEVING SECURITY, DEVELOPMENT, AND ENSURING HUMAN RIGHTS. THEIR EXPERIENCES AND INSIGHTS CAN LEAD TO MORE GENDER-SENSITIVE POLICIES AND INITIATIVES, ADDRESSING ISSUES THAT MIGHT OTHERWISE BE OVERLOOKED.

THE CREATION OF AN EQUAL PLATFORM FOR WOMEN IN THE SCHEME OF GLOBAL GOVERNANCE WOULD ULTIMATELY PROVIDE BETTER IMPETUS TO THE VOICE FOR GENDER EQUALITY ACROSS THE GLOBE. BOLD ACTION IS NEEDED FROM IMPLEMENTING QUOTAS AND LEADERSHIP APPOINTMENTS TO MENTORSHIP AND ANTI- HARASSMENT MEASURES TO ACHIEVE MEANINGFUL, EQUAL REPRESENTATION. THE INTEGRATION OF THE FEMINIST AGENDA HAS SHED LIGHT ON THIS ISSUE, BUT PERSISTENT COLLECTIVE EFFORTS AND EFFECTIVE IMPLEMENTATION ARE NEEDED TO REMOVE THE BARRIERS FOR WOMEN IN INTERNATIONAL GOVERNANCE.

CONCLUSION

INTERNATIONAL STANDARDS PROVIDE A ROBUST FRAMEWORK FOR GOVERNMENTS, POLICYMAKERS, CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS, AND OTHER STAKEHOLDERS TO PROMOTE AND PROTECT WOMEN'S RIGHTS TO PARTICIPATE IN POLITICAL AND PUBLIC LIFE, BUT THEIR IMPLEMENTATION LAGS. POLICY NEGLECT, BIAS, AND PERSISTING GENDER IMBALANCES LEAD TO A SKEWED SOCIETY THAT HARSHLY IMPACTS THE OVERALL DEVELOPMENT. BY THE PROPER IMPLEMENTATION OF INTERNATIONAL COVENANTS, CHANGING THE SOCIETAL PERCEPTION OF POLITICS.

EMPOWERING WOMEN ECONOMICALLY AND ENSURING MEASURES FOR THE SMOOTH TRANSITION OF WOMEN INTO THE ROLE OF POLICYMAKER CAN UNLOCK THE FULL POTENTIAL OF HALF OF THEIR POPULATION, LEADING TO GOOD GOVERNANCE. OVERCOMING THE BARRIERS THAT LIMIT WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION REQUIRES CONCERTED EFFORTS AT ALL LEVELS, FROM LOCAL COMMUNITIES TO GLOBAL INSTITUTIONS. SUPPORTING WOMEN IS NOT ONLY JUST A QUESTION OF FAIRNESS AND EQUAL RIGHTS, BUT ALSO A CRUCIAL STRATEGY FOR SUSTAINABLE PROGRESS AND ACHIEVING AN INCLUSIVE SOCIETY.



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