

A happy and prosperous life. For all.

**President, your excellencies, ladies, gentlemen,
all other people present,**

A **happy** and **prosperous** life. That is what my parents wished for me. My mother was a trained nurse who stopped working and became a housewife 2 years after her marriage in 1959. Back then that was what was expected of her in Dutch society. My father was a mechanic, disabled at the age of 50, after many years of hard physical labour. Now, 46 years old myself, I realize how fortunate I am to have lived and to be living the kind of life my parents wished for me.

A prosperous life.

As the youngest child of five and their only girl after four boys, **I** was the child with brains, and thus the first in my family to visit grammar school and go to university. After graduating, my career slowly but certainly unfolded into a broad entrepreneurship. I became a professional singer, event organizer, writer, professional speaker and... a human rights' advocate.

I simply **have** to step up for others whose cultural, religious or social surroundings are so unsafe, that they must remain silent. That's why I feel so privileged that the women of The Netherlands have chosen me to be this year's women's representative and, in that, their spokesperson.

On September 27 over 80 world leaders reconfirmed their recommitment to the Beijing Platform for Action and the call to step up for gender equality so that we have "substantive equality by 2030". Regarding the advancement of women, we definitely encounter huge issues like ending gender biased violence, enforcing their right to free control over body, life and love, without any forms of discrimination or stigma. [1]

Of course these issues aren't limited to just women and girls.

When we discuss human rights for all and if all present really want to "Step it Up", then the human rights and equal rights for people who identify as lesbian, gay, trans, bisexual or intersex - LGBTI in short - have to be named and included.

On September 29 I was utterly thrilled to hear of the historic statement made by 12 United Nations entities, including UN Women, to call on states to act urgently to end violence and discrimination against LGBTI adults, adolescents and children. [2]

After all, we are now in a situation that within a world population of over 7 billion people, almost 2.8 billion people live in countries where traditions, religions, values, customs and culture are put before human rights. Where being LGBTI could lead to imprisonment and corporal punishment. Such is

the case in 76 countries. Or even the death penalty, which is true for 7 countries.

This is hardly the life one would wish for their loved ones. Dear delegates you wouldn't, would you? For your child, your sibling, your friend... for yourself?

- Violence against LBT women and Intersex people has been reported widely in all regions of the world. Men raping women assumed to be lesbian on the pretext of trying to 'cure' their victims of homosexuality. [3]
- In many states, even in the Netherlands, intersex children are subjected to unnecessary surgical and other procedures for the purpose of trying to make their appearance conform to binary sex stereotypes 'boy' or 'girl'. [4]
- Trans women face a higher risk of HIV infection. Due to stigma and discrimination they are often unemployed, and have to resort to sex work. Limited health care access and negative health care encounters: both are common among trans people. [5]

In order for people to lead a prosperous life, they need to be in a safe environment, to be treated equally whatever their gender identity or sexual orientation in order to reach their full potential both privately and professionally.

A happy life.

When I found out I was more likely to fall in love with women than men, I received support from my parents, my brothers and... well, I can't even think of even one single person who turned me down for being a lesbian. If a hate crime were to happen to me, the law would be on my side. The police would stand with me, the mayor would stand with me, the prime minister, the government. I feel protected, safe and happy.

NOW is the time for all of us to "Step It Up" for the advancement of all women, whether they be heterosexual, lesbian, bisexual, transgender or intersex. Let them feel protected and safe, to be able to lead happy and prosperous lives.

I'm sure that that's the kind of sustainable development goal we **all** would like to reach. Where no-one is left behind. And preferably soon, but certainly no later than 2030.

Thank you.

Statement by Irene Hemelaar, Dutch Women's representative in the Netherlands delegation to the UNGA 2015.

Would you like to get in touch? Please reach me at irenehemelaar@gmail.com or +31650567256

**In fond and loving memory of my parents
Will Zonneveld and Chiel Hemelaar.**

*"Keep a heart filled with warmth and love in your chest
But remember, you rule on your square meter.
Whatever you're looking for, you'll have to fend for yourself
Man, dare to live!"*

*"Hou een hart vol van warmte en van liefde in je borst,
Maar wees op je vierkante meter een vorst.
Wat je zoekt, kan geen ander je geven.
Mensch, durf te leven!"*

Dirk Witte, 1917

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Thanks to all of you, as well to everybody whose names aren't mentioned here, for standing with me and showing your faith in me to bring this huge task to a good ending.

Your love, friendship, wisdom, understanding and guidance make my life a prosperous one and you all make me so very very very happy (I feel a song coming up). <3

- (1) <http://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2015/9/closing-remarks-global-leaders-meeting>
- (2) http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Discrimination/Joint_LGBTI_Statement_ENG.PDF
- (3) https://www.unfe.org/system/unfe-5-UN_Fact_Sheets_v6_-_Homophobic_and_transphobic_violence.pdf
- (4) https://www.unfe.org/system/unfe-65-Intersex_Factsheet_ENGLISH.pdf
- (5) <http://www.cdc.gov/hiv/group/gender/transgender/>