

**PRESS RELEASE: Commonwealth gathering urges countries to make this ‘the decade of gender equality’**



The Commonwealth

Press Release

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For immediate release

A Commonwealth gathering has called for an end to gender inequality by 2030 so every girl can have the same opportunities as boys.

Ahead of International Women’s Day, Commonwealth Secretary-General Patricia Scotland joined a gathering of leaders, celebrities, academics and activists in London to discuss ways to accelerate the progress.

Despite decades of activism and reforms, only six countries in the world give women and men equal rights to work in their law books - an increase from none about 10 years ago.



The Secretary-General said: “Our Commonwealth Charter speaks of gender equality and women’s empowerment as being essential components of human development and basic human rights.

“Advancing women’s rights, the education of girls and their participation in the workforce are critical prerequisites for effective and sustainable development.

“For instance, on average, for every £1 invested in a business, those with all-male boards show a loss of two per cent, while those with two or more women yield a return of six per cent.

“But many countries need help to make it happen. So today, we are consulting on a toolkit that will support country-level efforts with training programmes and campaigns to accelerate gender equality.”

She declared this March as Commonwealth Gender Equality Month to “sharpen the focus on the need to accelerate the rate at which action is taken by our member nations to achieve gender equality”.

Delegates watched a new film that follows Livia Firth, co-founder of Eco-Age, to Botswana. In the film, she listens to women who have improved their living standards by working in Botswana’s diamond industry.

Over 80 cents of each dollar from Botswana’s diamonds go to funding measures to reduce poverty, empower women, deliver quality education and provide free health care.

Livia said: “In Botswana, I have seen a picture of what can happen when businesses operate in partnership with the government and civil society, and where long-term investments are made in collaboration with local communities to ensure that the benefits are truly shared with those on the ground.”

An expert panel discussed how diamonds have contributed to the sustainable development of Botswana uplifting communities and protecting the environment.

Panellists included The First lady of Botswana Neo Masisi, Patricia Scotland, Livia Firth, Baroness Lola Young, and three women featured in the film: Pat Dambe, Naseem Lahri and Kgalalelo Mokgweetsi.

Neo Masisi said: “Botswana’s economy transformed from one of the poorest countries in the world to a middle-income country in Africa where the discovery of diamonds has played a pivotal role in creating sustainable growth and development in Botswana’s livelihoods.

“Botswana has managed where many others have failed to translate the potential resources below ground into enduring value above ground.”

The panel presented a list of progressive practices, which had helped close the gender gap in the Botswanan workforce. These include engaging women in the development sector, investing equally in women and men and getting women into male-dominated industries.

The Secretary-General launched a toolkit, developed in partnership with the NO MORE Foundation, that will help implement the sustainable development goal five for gender equality.

The toolkit aims to provide guidance on devising culturally sensitive training programmes, bystanders intervention initiatives and motivational campaigns to bring about positive change more swiftly, including challenging gender-based violence.

International Women's Day is a global event that celebrates women achievers in every field while calling for gender equality.

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