SPECIAL SUPPLEMENT

WOMEN IN DIPLOMACY

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY FEATURING



H.E. Tamara Lisi Villanueva Fernández (Chile)



H.E. Lisbet Quesada Luna (Cuba)



H.E. Judit Pach (Hungary)



H.E. Gabrielle Anne Rush (New Zealand)



H.E. Rabia Shafiq (Pakistan)



H.E. Madiepetsane Charlotte Lobe (South Africa)



H.E. Ureerat Chareontoh (Thailand)



H.E. Kateryna Zelenko (Ukraine)



H.E. Jessica Maria Lopez Pina (Venezuela)

AMBASSADORS OF CHANGE



Corinna Lim (AWARE)



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Contents



WOMEN IN DIPLOMACY INTERVIEWS

2 5 Chile New Zealand

3 6 Cuba Pakistan

4 7 Hungary South Africa



8 10 Thailand Venezuela

9 11Ukraine Aware



12 NTUC Publisher Sun Media Pte Ltd

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CHILE

As a woman in diplomacy, I strive to challenge the notion that leadership is inherently masculine and to promote a more inclusive approach. Says

H.E. TAMARA LISI VILLANUEVA FERNÁNDEZ

AMBASSADOR OF CHILE TO SINGAPORE

How do you think women's participation in diplomacy has evolved over the years, and what more needs to be done?

Diplomacy has long been a maledominated field, and while women's participation has evolved significantly, progress remains slow and uneven. Historically, female diplomats were excluded from decision-making roles and relegated to support functions. However, advocacy by women in diplomacy and global gender equality movements has increasingly highlighted the importance of their participation in shaping policy and international relations. Female diplomats have been instrumental in advancing issues such as climate justice, gender equality, and the rights of marginalised communities.

Today, there is greater recognition of the value of women's perspectives in peacebuilding, human rights, and global governance, yet structural barriers persist. Limited access to leadership roles, institutional biases, and restrictive cultural norms continue



to hinder progress. Addressing these challenges requires intentional efforts to create spaces for women in decision-making and support their leadership development.

What do you hope your legacy will be, both as a diplomat and as a woman leader?

As a diplomat, my foremost duty is to represent Chile, contributing to its development, improving the quality of life for our people, and advancing our national interests. As a woman in diplomacy, I strive to challenge the notion that leadership is inherently masculine and to promote a more inclusive approach. I am committed to leading through active listening, valuing diversity, and recognising the contributions of the entire team. My goal is to help shape a leadership model that is collaborative, equitable, and reflective of a broader vision.

What advice would you give to young girls and women who are interested in pursuing careers in diplomacy or international relations?

Diplomacy thrives on diverse voices, cultural understanding, and empathy—qualities that women bring in abundance. Their unique insights are vital for shaping a more inclusive world. Stay curious and informed, and develop strong communication and negotiation skills. Take risks, pursue knowledge, and embrace perseverance and confidence. Progress may be gradual, but every step forward strengthens women's representation and respect in diplomacy. Believe in your ability to make a difference, and never let gender define your potential!



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CUBA

The international community must prioritise gender equality in every conversation and forum, making it a central pillar of global development agendas. Says

H.E. LISBET QUESADA LUNA

AMBASSADOR OF CUBA TO SINGAPORE

Can you share a moment when you felt like you were breaking new ground for women in diplomacy?

As Cuban diplomats, breaking patterns is inherent in our process as we challenge global norms and prioritise women's empowerment nationally and internationally. With 30% of ambassadors being women and over 120 missions reflecting our achievements, we continuously push boundaries through our diplomatic work. Most importantly, we strive to guide new generations to surpass our accomplishments and continue this progress.

Who are some of the women who have inspired you throughout your career, and what qualities do you admire about them?

A: Vilma Espín. A revolutionary leader and prominent figure in Cuba's fight for independence and social justice, Vilma Espín played a crucial role in the Cuban Revolution. As an advocate for women's rights, she founded the Cuban Federation of Women (FMC), which worked to promote gender equality in the country. I deeply admire her

resilience, dedication to social transformation, and her ability to balance her activism with her role as a mother and wife.

How do you think the international community can work together to address issues like gender-based violence, equal pay, and women's representation in leadership?

Globally, one in 10 women lives in extreme poverty; five women and girls are killed every hour by a member of their own family; and women, on average, earn 20% less than men for work of equal value. The international community must prioritize gender equality in every conversation and forum, making it a central pillar of global development agendas. This means stronger legislation, better enforcement of existing laws, and the promotion of women's rights through education, employment, and leadership opportunities. Countries must also be held accountable for their progress or lack thereof in achieving gender equality. Collaboration between

governments, international organizations, and grassroots movements is critical for change.

What advice would you give to women who are just starting in their careers and are looking for inspiration and guidance?

Be bold, patient, and don't be afraid to take risks. Most importantly, stay true to your values. The world needs women who are confident in their abilities and who are willing to push boundaries and innovate.



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HUNGARY

It starts with acknowledging that these are not just "women's issues" but global priorities that affect economies and societies as a whole. Says

H.E. JUDIT PACH

HUNGARY'S AMBASSADOR TO SINGAPORE

What initiatives has Hungary taken to promote women's rights and empowerment, both domestically and internationally?

Hungary has initiatives supporting female entrepreneurship, STEM education for girls, and workplace policies that promote gender equality. Internationally, Hungary supports UN programs aimed at women's empowerment and is active in fostering cooperation on gender equality within the EU and other diplomatic frameworks.

How do you think the international community can work together to address issues like gender-based violence, equal pay, and women's representation in leadership?

It starts with acknowledging that these are not just "women's issues" but global priorities that affect economies and societies as a whole. Countries need to enforce policies on equal pay, increase women's presence in decision-making roles, and take a zero-tolerance approach to gender-based violence. More collaboration between governments, businesses, and civil society is crucial.



Who are some of the women who have inspired you throughout your career, and what qualities do you admire about them?

There are many, but Pinky Lilani stands out for her work in uplifting women and celebrating kindness as a leadership strength. I also admire female diplomats who have paved the way in tough environments—those who have shown resilience, intellect, and the ability to lead with authenticity.

What do you hope your legacy will be, both as a diplomat and as a woman leader?

I hope to be remembered as someone who built meaningful connections, broke barriers, and empowered others to do the same. If I've contributed to making diplomacy more inclusive and impactful, that's a legacy worth leaving.

What advice would you give to women who are just starting out in their careers and are looking for inspiration and guidance?

Don't wait for permission to take up space. Find mentors, but also trust your instincts. Challenges will come, but how you respond to them defines your path. And most importantly, never lose sight of your own values—authenticity is your greatest strength.



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NEW ZEALAND

Education is critical. Without a track record of academic excellence, the doors to diplomacy are not open. Says

H.E. GABRIELLE ANNE RUSH

NEW ZEALAND'S HIGH COMMISSIONER TO SINGAPORE

As a woman in a traditionally male-dominated field, what challenges did you face in your early career, and how did you overcome them?

I practised law before joining the New Zealand foreign service. While there were women in both professions, I did feel back then that I was held to a different standard than my male colleagues. If my male colleagues made mistakes or behaved badly at after-work drinks, it was laughed off. If I did, it was because I was bad or a woman. Being super-prepared, and willing to do whatever was asked while being neither too modest nor too "pushy" was a constant line to be walked. And I walked that line as we all did back then. Things are much better now but these things can still arise there is no room for complacency.

Can you share a moment when you felt like you were breaking new ground for women in diplomacy?

I remember being asked to Chair a session at a Global Oceans conference while I was a junior diplomat on my first posting. It was terrifying but I knew that by stepping into the opportunity, I would help make the inclusion of women, including younger women as chairs and panellists more familiar and accept-

ed as normal and important.

As a woman in a high-pressure role, how do

you balance your personal and professional life?

It is not easy, but I try to set aside sometime each day for my partner and catch up with my adult children, my sisters, and my friends. I survived a serious illness 15 years ago so I see exercise as a not-negotiable rather than nice-to-have. I try to swim several mornings a week plus walking and Pilates.

What support systems do you have in place to help you manage the demands of your job?

I have an incredibly supportive partner who understands the demands of my job and goes out of his way to help me; an amazing EA; fantastic team and a network of close friends, many of whom have been in my life for decades.

How did your education prepare you for a career in diplomacy, and what role



do you think education plays in empowering women?

Education is critical. Without a track record of academic excellence, the doors to diplomacy are not open so looking at measures that support and encourage more women in higher education is a necessary prerequisite. lawyer without having studied it. While many subjects are relevant in diplomacy, an understanding of history, psychology, and law, however learned, is essential. It is true that those who fail to learn from history are doomed to repeat it.



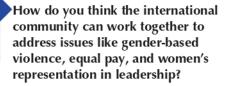
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PAKISTAN

The international community should promote laws and frameworks that ensure women's rights are protected and that they are given equal opportunities in all spheres. Says,

H.E. RABIA SHAFIQ

PAKISTAN'S HIGH COMMISSIONER TO SINGAPORE



We must be vigilant in tackling issues such as gender-based violence, unequal pay, and the underrepresentation of women in leadership. The international community should promote laws and frameworks that ensure women's rights are protected and that they are given equal opportunities in all spheres. It's encouraging to see the recognition of women's leadership roles, especially during March, as it serves as a reminder to all that we still have lots of work to do in fostering equality and creating a society free from violence.

As a woman in a high-pressure role, how do you balance your personal and professional life?

Diplomacy is a challenging profession, and at times, balancing personal and professional life takes a toll. My family is based in Pakistan, and there are



periods when I am unable to visit for several months. When we do have the chance to be together, we prioritise quality time. My husband, who is also a senior bureaucrat, often faces challenges with postings in different locations. Moreover, having strong social connections and doing some meditation also helps.

What advice would you give to young girls and women who are interested in pursuing careers in diplomacy or international relations?

Foreign Service is a demanding career that requires a balance between professional and personal life. Women in this field must be resilient and forward-thinking but also adaptable to the pressures that come with the job. In addition to building professional competence, women must also look after their mental and emotional health to manage multiple demands. I would also urge families to offer their support, as diplomats often face long hours, time away from family, and unique challenges due to their roles. A supportive home environment is

key to managing the demands of this profession.

What do you hope your legacy will be, both as a diplomat and as a woman leader?

I hope my legacy will reflect the idea that women, when given a level playing field, can excel in any field. I strive to set an example that reinforces the importance of foresight, hard work, and service. I would like to be remembered as someone who not only contributed to diplomacy but also helped pave the way for other women to follow, ensuring that merit and dedication always outweigh gender.



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SOUTH AFRICA

Today, about 44% of South Africa's 93 Heads of Missions are women. Despite this, systemic barriers rooted in historical power structures continues, says,

H.E. MADIEPETSANE CHARLOTTE LOBE

SOUTH AFRICA HIGH COMMISSIONER TO SINGAPORE

PHow do you think women's participation in diplomacy has evolved over the years, and what more needs to be done?

In 2021, the Global Multi-Stakeholder Steering Committee on the Generation Equality Forum (GEF), of which I was a part, adopted the Global Acceleration Plan for Gender Equality. The GEF was established in 2018 following UN Women's launch of the multigenerational advocacy campaign, Generation Equality: Realizing Women's Rights for an Equal Future. This initiative aimed to unite emerging women's rights activists with the gender equality advocates who played a key role in shaping the Beijing Platform for Action. The Steering Committee provided strategic guidance on the conceptualisation and implementation of the GEF, ensuring an intersectional and intergenerational approach. It included civil society, UN Member States (Mexico, France, Canada, Costa Rica, South Africa, Sweden, and Tunisia), the private sector, academia, philanthropic organisations, and international bodies.



The Generation Equality Action Coalitions mobilised governments, women's and youth-led organisations, international bodies, and the private sector to drive collective action, foster intergenerational dialogue, increase public and private investment, and advance gender equality globally. These coalitions focused on six key themes: (i) Gender-Based Violence; (ii) Economic Justice and Rights; (iii) Bodily Autonomy and Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR); (iv) Feminist Action for Climate Justice; (v) Technology and Innovation for Gender Equality; and (vi) Feminist Movements and Leadership. Through these efforts, the GEF sought to create tangible progress for women and girls across generations.

How do you think women's participation in diplomacy has evolved over the years, and what more needs to be done?

The 1994 democratic breakthrough in South Africa marked a turning point in the struggle for women's

emancipation, leading to significant progress in various sectors, including diplomacy. Today, about 44% of South Africa's 93 Heads of Missions are women—a remarkable achievement considering that in 1994, there were only two female Heads of Missions. However, despite this progress, systemic barriers rooted in historical power structures, gender stereotypes, and cultural norms continue to marginalize women. The matrices of power that shaped the triple oppression of women remain intact, making the fight for true gender equality an ongoing struggle.



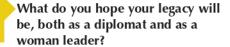
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THAILAND

Global challenges require global cooperation. The international community must strengthen legal protections, invest in education, and create economic opportunities for women. Says,

H.E. UREERAT CHAREONTOH

THAILAND'S AMBASSADOR TO SINGAPORE



I hope my legacy is one of opportunity and impact, where merit-not gender-defines success. I want to inspire more women to lead with confidence in diplomacy and beyond. Most importantly, I want to be remembered for creating pathways for others, proving that leadership is about making a difference, not just holding a title. As I step away from my official role, I hope my journey inspires young women to pursue leadership fearlessly. If I leave behind a legacy of empowering women in diplomacy, then I will consider my career truly rewarding.

Who are some of the women who have inspired you throughout your career, and what qualities do you admire about them?

My greatest inspiration is my mother, Chantana Chareontoh, who is also a civil servant. She is Thailand's first female Director of the Central



Women's Correctional Institution and a former Deputy Director-General of the Department of Corrections. She represents Thai women with resilience, vision, and passion. At a time when women were rarely in senior positions, and with a strong support of my father, she has proven that a woman can excel in both career and family life. She taught me that leadership is not about power but about making a difference.

How do you think the international community can work together to address issues like gender-based violence, equal pay, and women's representation in leadership?

Global challenges require global cooperation. The international community must strengthen legal protections, invest in education, and create economic opportunities for women. Equal pay and leadership representation should not just be aspirational goals, they should be realities.

What support systems do you have in place to help you manage the demands of your job?

Diplomacy is not a solo effort. Throughout my career, I have relied on strong teams, trusted colleagues, and family support. Balancing a high-pressure career and personal life requires understanding, flexibility, and time management. Thailand's Ministry of Foreign Affairs has also developed more inclusive policies to ensure that both men and women have the resources they need to thrive.



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UKRAINE

Happy womendiplomats are the best at being resilient to challenges and making the world a better place for everyone. Says, H.E. KATERYNA

UKRAINE AMBASSADOR TO SINGAPORE

ZELENKO

PHow do you think women's participation in diplomacy has evolved over the years, and what more needs to be done?

Ukrainian society has traditionally been tolerant of gender and respectful towards women. However, in the 1990s and early 2000s, diplomacy was maledominated, reflecting Soviet-era beliefs about balancing career and household duties. Over the past 10-15 years, this has changed significantly. By 2019, women made up over a third of MFA employees, with more in decisionmaking roles. In 2021, they comprised 45.3% of MFA headquarters staff and 34.3% of those posted abroad. By March 2025, as the war entered its fourth year, women made up 49% of MFA HQ, with near-equal numbers of men and women. While embassy representation remains steady, leadership is committed to further progress. Ensuring equal opportunities strengthens Ukraine's diplomacy and global presence.

What advice would you give to women who are just starting in their careers and are looking for inspiration and guidance?



There are plenty of role models, but be yourself; don't compare yourself to others because it's not a competition. Set your goals and leverage your balances between your career and family. Happy women-diplomats are the best at being resilient to challenges and making the world a better place for everyone. It might not be easy. And it will not be quick. But make no mistake about it: you can do this. Success is about 5% talent, 5% luck, and 90% never giving up.

What do you hope your legacy will be, both as a diplomat and as a woman leader?

I am a team player and believe in the joint legacy of nations, communities, and active groups of people who stand up for our common humanity. On the global level, it is a fight for the peaceful co-existence of nations and a rules-based order. On a personal level, it is the success of every person whom I could at some point be helpful with a piece of advice, could support their ideas or make them stronger and happier.

How do you think the international community can work together to address issues like gender-based violence, equal pay, and women's representation in leadership?

Internationally, gender equality is addressed by the UN Commission on the Status of Women (UN Women) and its various fora, including its 69th Session in New York (10-21 March 2025), where Ukraine is represented by the Governmental Commissioner for Gender Equality Policy, Ms Kateryna Levchenko. In 2023, she visited Singapore for discussions with women leaders across government, business, civil society, and diplomacy. Soft power also plays a key role in advancing gender equality and other social issues.



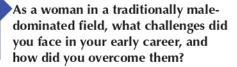
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VENEZUELA

Diplomacy requires not only knowledge and preparation but also empathy, resilience, and a genuine commitment to building bridges through mutual understanding and the promotion of culture and heritage. Says,

H.E. JESSICA MARIA LOPEZ PINA

AMBASSADOR OF THE BOLIVARIAN REPUBLIC OF VENEZUELA TO SINGAPORE



Certainly, diplomacy has historically been a male-dominated field, but we are now in an era where gender parity is of great relevance. This progress is largely due to the efforts of pioneering women who have set high standards in leadership and efficiency, as well as countless others who continue to fight for equal rights in even the most remote parts of the world, often at great personal cost. One of the main challenges I have faced from a young age has been overcoming preconceived notions about women's leadership and their representation in high-level decision-making spaces. However, I have not encountered significant resistance, as I belong to a generation in the country I represent that has made remarkable progress in this area. This advancement is not only from a human perspectiveacknowledging and valuing our ancestral roots-but also in the development of a political and state



structure that actively promotes and encourages women's participation in national life, paving the way for a more inclusive future in diplomacy.

How did your education prepare you for a career in diplomacy, and what role do you think education plays in empowering women?

My education in Political Science in Venezuela provided a strong foundation in international relations, political theory, and diplomacy, equipping me to navigate the complexities of global politics and advocate for our nation's interests on the world stage. Education is a transformative force for real inclusion, particularly for women, as it breaks barriers, ensures access to opportunities, and promotes equality.

What advice would you give to young girls and women who are interested in pursuing careers in diplomacy or international relations?

First and foremost, to young women and those aspiring to pursue a career

in diplomacy, international relations, or any other field, my message is to believe in themselves, the endless possibilities, and the positive impact that vision, creation, and promotion from a female perspective can have on the world. Secondly, never underestimate the importance of interpersonal skills such as active listening, negotiation, and emotional intelligence—essential qualities for fostering dialogue and cooperation in international settings. Diplomacy requires not only knowledge and preparation but also empathy, resilience, and a genuine commitment to building bridges through mutual understanding and the promotion of culture and heritage.



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AWARE

AWARE has played a key role in advocating for women's rights. Through research, policy recommendations, and public education, the organisation has worked towards dismantling systemic barriers to gender equality in Singapore.

CORINNA LIM

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF AWARE (ASSOCIATION OF WOMEN FOR ACTION AND RESEARCH)

Do you believe every woman is an ambassador of change, and how can we empower them to become agents of positive transformation?

Absolutely. Change isn't just about big moments—it's in the everyday choices we make. Maybe you've seen it in a woman who speaks up about an unfair policy at work, who teaches her son to respect his girlfriends, or who refuses to stay silent about harassment. That's what being an ambassador of change looks like.

But real empowerment goes beyond individual actions. It's about breaking down the barriers that still hold women back—like unfair caregiving expectations, workplace biases, and outdated ideas about leadership. If we want true equality, we need policies and cultures that support it.

What are the most significant challenges faced by women in Singapore today, and how can women's advocacy organisations address them?



While Singapore has made progress, gender norms still limit women in leadership, the workplace, and at home. Women remain underrepresented in decision-making, bear a heavier caregiving load, and face workplace biases that slow their advancement.

The motherhood penalty, pay gaps, and workplace harassment persist, while survivors of violence still struggle with stigma and systemic hurdles. Advocacy organisations like ours address these through research, policy recommendations, support services, and public education to shift societal norms.

How can Singapore progress further in promoting gender equality, and what role can global collaborations play in achieving this goal?

Singapore has made significant strides in gender equality, but there is still work to be done, particularly in strengthening legal protections against workplace discrimination, improving caregiving policies, and addressing biases that limit leadership opportunities. Global collaborations, especially Singapore's engagement with CEDAW (the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women), play an important role in this progress. As a signatory, Singapore reports regularly on its advancements and receives recommendations for improvement, with groups like AWARE highlighting gaps and advocating for stronger policies. Past CEDAW recommendations have contributed to better workplace protections, improved paternity leave, and enhanced support for survivors of gender-based violence. By aligning local policies with international best practices, Singapore can continue to drive meaningful progress toward gender equality.



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NTUC

Empowering Women in the Workplace: NTUC U Women & Family's Vision for a More Inclusive Future

YEO WAN LING

NTUC ASSISTANT SECRETARY-GENERAL AND DIRECTOR FOR U WOMEN AND FAMILY (WAF) & U SME

What is the mission and vision of NTUC U Women & Family, and how does it aim to support women and families in Singapore?

NTUC U Women & Family (WAF), an initiative of the Singapore National Trades Union Congress (NTUC), serves as the voice for working women and families. It champions women's career aspirations by advocating for a positive and inclusive work environment that is both flexible and fair while leveraging the Labour Movement network and partnerships to support their career, family, and caregiving needs.

Can you share some of the key initiatives and programs that NTUC U Women & Family has launched to support women's empowerment and family well-being?

WAF has launched several key initiatives to support women's empowerment and family well-being. Project Liquid Gold, introduced in 2013, advocated for better support for breastfeeding mothers at work



and has since evolved into the Better Workplace Campaign, promoting flexible work arrangements and workplace harmony. The Women Supporting Women Mentorship Programme, launched in 2020, provides one-on-one mentorship with women leaders, while the SHE Supports Friendship Circles, introduced in 2024, offers a broader network-based mentorship model, engaging 30,000 women.

To support working caregivers, the C U Back @ Work (CUB) Programme, launched in 2023, helps women reenter the workforce with flexible work and training options, benefitting nearly 1,000 participants. Additionally, the To-Gather: Power of Women initiative strengthens employer-MDW relationships through regular events, fostering a supportive caregiving ecosystem for families in Singapore.

How does NTUC U Women & Family collaborate with other organizations and stakeholders to advance its mission?

WAF collaborates with the People's Action Party Women's Wing research group to address key workplace challenges affecting women, such as flexible work arrangements, financial burdens, caregiving resources, and concerns about retirement and reemployment. Through research and pilot initiatives, WAF helps develop solutions that support women in balancing their careers and personal responsibilities.

Additionally, WAF works closely with Tripartite Partners - comprising the Government, Unions, and Businesses - to influence policies and implement concrete action plans, such as the 2024 Tripartite Guidelines on Flexible Work Arrangement Requests (TG-FWAR).



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