



WOMEN DIPLOMATS, Hidden Figures

“Ahead of a man's steps
are always the steps of a woman”
-Elena Garro

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***Ambassador Alicia G. Kerber Palma**
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The significant challenges on today's international agenda demand the deployment of diplomatic efforts to confront them. Attention to the devastating consequences of climate change, the global dynamics of human mobility, the aftermath of the pandemic, the food crisis, and the questioning of the effectiveness of the multilateral system require effective and high-level actions from government representatives.

Throughout history, diplomacy has been wrongly conceived as a profession exclusive to men while women occupied the roles of assistants or advisors to ambassadors.

The power structures that existed before the feminist movement of the sixties reinforced gender inequalities and discriminatory practices, making it difficult for women to access decision-making positions, including the diplomatic field.

According to UN data, only two out of ten jobs in fields such as science, technology, and engineering are held by women and two-thirds of the global female population still lack reading and writing skills. Despite the progress made in the inclusion of women in political roles, their representation in parliamentary seats barely reaches 23.7% and they occupy less than a third of management positions at middle and upper levels globally.

In the international arena, the underrepresentation of women in the diplomatic field is evident in international organizations, where men occupy more than 80% of the presidencies of these bodies, many of which have never been headed by a woman, such as the UN, the OAS, the ILO, and the IDB.

Additionally, in the great majority of the governing bodies of international organizations, where resolutions are approved and decisions of general interest are made, governments tend to favor the appointment of male diplomats as their representatives.

In the bilateral sphere, even though there has been an increase in the consolidation of relations between countries in recent years, the underrepresentation of women as ambassadors remains a constant fact.



Canada and Norway, which have adopted feminist foreign policies, are distinguished for having almost 50% of women as head of their embassies. In contrast, in the regions of Asia and the Middle East, where some countries with the largest diplomatic corps in the world are located, only 5% of their representations have a female diplomat at the forefront. Beyond mere statistics, these figures shed a disturbing light on the profound influence of cultural, political, and social contexts on gender representation in diplomacy.

In terms of the current geopolitical context, we can confirm that those regions that are experiencing armed conflicts involve countries with the lowest number of women within their diplomatic corps.

Belonging to the career diplomatic corps of any country is synonymous with hard work, effort, and a vocation for service. For women, this path has been even more challenging as they have had to overcome obstacles inherent to a patriarchal system that has historically favored the male presence and consolidated gender stereotypes and cultural barriers.

Therefore, to talk about female diplomats is to talk about resilience, sisterhood, and intersectionality, and it is precisely this approach that prompted the Mexican Foreign Ministry to launch a program in 2024 that, based on specific affirmative actions, seeks to accelerate equality to facilitate the rise of women in leadership positions within the Mexican Foreign Service.

There is undoubtedly much more to be done, but to achieve gender equality, national actions are not enough. The commitment to gender equality must be translated into concrete and sustainable actions within international structures and must guarantee, for the benefit of world peace, that female diplomats are able to occupy strategic positions within governing bodies and international organizations.

Those of us who have embraced the diplomatic career as a way of life have faced situations throughout our careers that have limited or even threatened our career prospects. In this sense, the support of other women in the profession is essential to dismantling patriarchal and/or discriminatory patterns and allowing us to decisively advance an inclusive and equal gender-focused agenda to break the glass ceiling once and for all.

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