



Madam President Sonja Ledl-Rossmann,

Minister Andrä Rupprechter,

Councillor Beate Palfrader

Distinguished guests, dear colleagues

It is a special honor – and to some extent a challenge – to address this conference on the role of women in mountain regions. I am representing the Alpine Convention; an international treaty between the eight Alpine Countries and the European Union, established for the protection and the sustainable development of the Alps and for the people living in the Alpine Territory. In preparation for this speech today I noticed that our Alps are actually female in all four Alpine languages, Slovenian, Italian, German and French – Alpe, Le Alpi, Die Alpen, les Alpes! Also the Alpine Convention is female: Alpska konvencija, Die Alpenkonvention, La Convenzione delle Alpi, La Convention Alpine.

Statistically speaking, there are more women than men living in the Alps: slightly over 50%. This female-male ratio is also mirrored at the level of ministers: more than 50% of the ministers responsible for the Alpine Convention are female. I think that this is, indeed, remarkable. If we take a look at the overall representation of women in the political process, the ratios do not come together: women are still under-represented – sometimes dramatically so. Against this background, it is all the more relevant to consider the role of women in mountain areas at an international conference here in Alpbach – a place that for many decades now has established itself as a center for international interaction and dialogue.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Neither the Alpine Convention nor its protocols specifically mention gender issues or differences. I tend to believe that this shows that the people living in the Alps are

considered equal and with equal needs and also equal potentials to contribute to sustainable development.

In 2013-2014 we undertook a major study on demography in our region, called the fifth Report on the state of the Alps on Demographic changes. One lesson became clear at the very outset: The roles of different groups of people, actors or stakeholders are of key importance: be it farmers, entrepreneurs or new highlanders, their input needs to be heard and their needs have to be addressed. And that is what we strive for in the Alpine Convention. Without wanting to sound, let alone be patronizing, I dare say that one of the largest stakeholder groups in the Alps are and should be women. Collectively, we need to reflect the expectations, needs and potentials of women for the Alps and this conference provides a valuable opportunity to do so. Today and tomorrow, we will be addressing the role of women in different aspects of life in the mountains of the world and their roles as advocates and agents for change, sustainable development and protection of nature.

The Report on the State of the Alps has shown that in major parts of the Alps there are more women than men with completed university degrees, which demonstrates that women are very much equipped to be the forerunners of sustainable development and innovation and can be counted on as being crucial for the future of the Alps. However, at the same time there is a higher percentage of women in part-time work or not being active in the work-force at all.

This situation is dissatisfying on many accounts: first for the women individually, secondly for the societies as a whole, as it means that ample potentials remain untapped.

I also want to highlight the role of women as key players in their communities and in protecting the cultural heritage of our region: be it through the passion for the traditional knowledge and activities or cherishing the stories from the past or working in education. The Alpine Culture and heritage is very rich and deserves protection, while at the same time recognizing, if not overcoming the gender imbalance that is still embedded in some traditions.

Let me also stress a more hands-on example of the role of women: Especially in times of climate change, we need to enhance our efforts to managing natural disasters. As we did for

Demographic change in 2013-2014, in the upcoming two years we will be preparing a new Report on the state of the Alps on Natural Risks Management in the Alps. This is one of the topics where women do play a very important role and I am confident that this knowledge will be included in the report as well. Especially considering that we have a special network in the Alps dealing with this topic: Women for Disaster Risk Reduction.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Coming back briefly to the question of representation of women in the political process. Just two weeks ago the Youth Parliament of the Alpine Convention met bringing some 100 high-school students from all over the Alps to Innsbruck. Two things about the Youth Parliament were truly remarkable: 1) the enthusiasm and energy with which the students engaged in the debates and 2) the fact that participation was evenly split between young men and women. In fact, there were slightly more female than male students attending. I was also very happy to note, that you, Madam President LEDL-ROSSMANN, visited the Youth Parliament, and I am convinced that you share my sentiments. And yes, we should take the Youth Parliament and its gender balance as a good example to be followed!

Ladies and Gentlemen,

On a personal level, I would like to add that as one of the very few male members of UN Women Austria, it is a pleasure and an honor for me to support the so-called "He for She campaign" that was launched in 2014. The reason for this is actually quite straightforward: gender equality is not only a basic human right, but its achievement is in the interest of everyone, women and men alike! So here, today, I would like to invite all men present at this conference to show their support for the He for She campaign, to show their support for gender equality!

Ladies and gentlemen,

I look forward to the debates in the next two days, the questions we determine, the solutions we find and the outcomes that we need to carry on together. Or as Malala Yousafzai has said very pointedly: "We cannot all succeed when half of us are held back."

Thank you for your attention, hvala lepa, merci beacoup, mille grazie, Dankeschön.