

## **Welcome speech for VC**

(Outside Fielding Johnson 11am)

Distinguished guests and everyone

We are here today at the University of Leicester to welcome our new partners from the United Nations. This is the launch of the United Nations HeForShe UK universities tour and to the launch of HeForShe Leicester. For those largely unacquainted with HeForShe it is the UN Women's solidarity movement for gender equality that welcomes men across the world into a conversation that has been largely driven by women. You will hear more detail about this later this morning.

Just by way of background, it is surprising on the one hand that legislation to fundamentally address gender equality was only introduced in the UK in the 1970s. For example, the Equal Pay Act was only introduced in 1970 and the Sex Discrimination Act in 1975. To many it may seem surprising that the introduction of such legislation happened only a generation or so ago, but it is perhaps more surprising still that despite these legal changes 40 years ago there is still so far to go in order to achieve gender equality here in the UK, and around the world.

It could be argued that one reason for this is that despite all the hard work it has largely been women who have taken a lead in advancing gender equality. It cannot be delivered by half of any given population. That is why I was so struck by the significance of the UN's decision to launch a worldwide movement that addresses the problem using a fresh and new approach.

Of course, the University sees gender equality as a fundamental right and vital to ensuring our students and staff are able to make choices and experience opportunities free from gender bias. We ask for instance: why it is that while 40% of Government Special Advisors are women, only 23% of members of Parliament are women; only 17% of FTSE 100 companies are women; only 8% of surgical consultants in the National Health Service are women. And, in our patch, why less than 20% of Professors in the UK are women and only 14% of Vice Chancellors are women. These figures do not reflect the relative talent of men and women in these various occupations, but it is clear that gendered decisions are restricting the opportunities of some and denying society the benefit of talented people in vital roles.

As one of only ten partner universities worldwide who are taking a lead in the United Nations movement we have set out challenging commitments designed to advance gender equality in our institution. We see this as a symbolic moment and look forward to making significant progress. You can also get involved and together we should aim to deliver fundamental change within a generation.

I would now like to hand over to Elisabeth, Senior Advisor to the Executive Director of UN Women and Head of HeForShe to say a few words. Please do join us for the main event which will start at one o'clock in the Peter Williams lecture theatre where we will discuss these issues at length.