

# Valedictory Speech of WMA President

**Distinguished colleagues, honored guests, and friends,**

I remember one day, my daughter Yasmin, just five months old, was the reason for a major security alert at the United Nations headquarters in New York. We were there for the multi stakeholder consultation on universal health coverage and at the gate, the UN security force had everything ready for Michele, my husband, who would be taking care of Yasmin while I was on stage, but they didn't have a digital pass for my baby. "We're not used to having babies in the UN premises," they said, as if my tiny Yasmin could pose a security threat to the building. After a lot of back-and-forth, and a few chuckles, we finally made it inside. The whole situation caused quite a stir, but in the end, everyone smiled as they saw her.

I remember breastfeeding her in the nursing room, a surreal but tender reminder that even amidst complex negotiations and international discourse, the most simple and profound moments of care are what connect us all.

This incident serves as a metaphor for my time as president of the World Medical Association: the barriers, the persistence, and, ultimately, the joy that comes when we break through boundaries. It reminds me that as physicians, as leaders, and as advocates for health, we must continuously challenge the systems that do not accommodate everyone—especially the vulnerable—and demand that they do so with no discrimination.

## Reflections on Achievements and Challenges

Throughout my tenure, I have seen both incredible progress and daunting challenges. I take pride in the *Leadership Through Mentorship* initiative that connects members of our Junior Doctors Network with the experience of our Past Leaders Network, bridging generations to create a continuum of learning and growth. We also made great strides through the *Women-in-Medicine Luncheon*, creating a space for mentorship, peer learning, and celebrating women leaders in organized medicine.

However, our advocacy did not stop there. We raised our collective voices through open letters—one to safeguard healthcare personnel during conflicts and another to urge fossil fuel divestment. These were not mere formalities; they were calls for action, for safeguarding lives, and for upholding our ethical duty to future generations.

But the journey hasn't been without its struggles. Navigating the inherent gender imbalance within our organization—one that is still very male-dominated—was challenging. As only the fifth woman president of the WMA, I was deeply aware of the honour and responsibility of representing so many others who still lack a seat at the table. Balancing my duties as a mother and as president was not always easy.

We faced resistance in implementing some of these initiatives, but it was through resilience, collaboration, and unwavering belief in our mission that we overcame these obstacles. These challenges only strengthened our resolve to create a more inclusive and equitable environment.

## **Achievements and Challenges Faced**

To truly make leadership accessible for women and mothers, we need to create support structures that accommodate their unique challenges. I recommend establishing more flexible meeting arrangements, providing childcare support during key events, and creating mentorship opportunities specifically targeted at young female physicians. These steps can ensure that the voices of women are not just heard but are leading the conversation.

## **Current State of Global Healthcare and Progress**

The challenges facing global healthcare today are immense. Conflicts rage, climate change, economic crises, and violations of human rights continue. We haven't learned enough from the devastations of the past, and the world is more fragmented than ever. Despite the shared experience of COVID-19, we have yet to reach a pandemic accord, and we still lag behind on the Paris Agreement, Sustainable Development Goals including Universal Health Coverage.

This year, healthcare has faced immense dangers, with over 980 attacks reported by the WHO surveillance system in conflict areas such as Lebanon, Ukraine, Sudan, and Gaza.

Doctors from Kenya to Korea, the UK to India, are taking to the streets demanding safer working environments. These are not isolated incidents; they are cries for systemic change, for respect, and for their right to serve their moral duty.

During my tenure, we successfully brought together stakeholders to discuss safer working environments for healthcare personnel, ensuring healthcare system resilience to climate change, and bringing important voices to demand actions to combat antimicrobial resistance. We also played a role in fostering international collaboration to advance the goals of all the SDGs particularly the Universal Health Coverage, ensuring that health remains a right, not a privilege.

## **Core Reflections and Moral Duty**

As physicians, our duty is not just to our patients but to the health and well-being of all. No matter how bleak the world may seem, we must not lose our passion for this duty. This GA is historic. Following a long and extensive review process, we have an updated draft of the Declaration of Helsinki for your approval. This document embodies our commitment to integrity, respect, and the highest standards in medical ethics, reminding us that our duty extends beyond individual patients to the broader advancement of health, and we eagerly await its adoption.

Speaking today, with representatives from over 50 countries gathered here in the form of NMAs, I see a symbol of unity—a reminder of what the world should strive to be. Our strength lies in our shared commitment, in our unity, and in our determination to act, regardless of the political complexities involved.

## **Future Plans and Support for Incoming Leadership**

I am not done yet. I will continue advocating for gender equality, for the health and climate agenda, and for the rights of health for all and the rights of physicians everywhere. You will still see me around—because there is still much work to be done, and I am far from finished.

To the incoming president, I offer my wholehearted support. This is not a solitary journey; it is one that we walk together.

## **Acknowledgments and Thanks**

I want to take a moment to thank those who have been instrumental during my presidency.

To the Executive Council, to our Secretary General, and to the Secretariat members—your dedication and support have been the backbone of our achievements.

To the National Medical Associations (NMAs), thank you for your unwavering support and for being the pillars of our global efforts.

To my family, my friends, and especially my mother, who is here with me in Helsinki to care for Yasmin, thank you for your unending love and strength.

And to Michele, my husband, and Yasmin—my travel companions and my heart

Michele, thank you for being my rock and all the sacrifices you made to help me fulfill my role.

And to Yasmin, thank you for being my little source of joy and for your patience and presence throughout this journey.

## **Calls to Action for Global Health**

We live in a troubled world, with more conflicts now than at any time since 1944. The importance of our call for peace cannot be overstated. Let us continue to fight—for the right to health, for the right to a healthy and safe environment, and for the dignity of every individual. The WMA must take the lead in this fight by actively engaging with national governments, advocating for stronger health protections, and building international partnerships that prioritize peace and health. Let us be the voice that speaks for those who cannot, and the hands that heal those who are forgotten.

Thank you.