



15 January 2015 – Looking to promote change in how men and boys think and talk about women’s empowerment and gender equality, the United Nations is hosting at its New York Headquarters a two-day high-level “Barbershop” event.

“This Barbershop Conference aims to jolt our thinking, to make us dispel clichés, and in the end, of course, to change behaviour. Basically, it is about making gender equality as much a cause for men as it is for women,”

Deputy Secretary-General Jan Eliasson said, emphasizing that today’s discourse came at an opportune time to “jolt our thinking” as the world prepares to mark the 20th anniversary of the Beijing World Conference on Women, held in 1995.

The Barbershop Conference aimed at reflecting the casual setting in which men get their hair cut, while delving deeper into gender stereotypes perpetuated by social norms, and helping dispel the fallacy that women and girls cannot be equals in the economic, social or political life.

The event also highlighted that while historically women and girls have led the fight against gender inequality, discrimination and gender-based violence, the recent UN HeforShe initiative encourages men and boys to stand at forefront of the global discourse.

“Today’s Conference is a creative way of moving the dialogue into uncharted territory,” said Sam Kutesa, President of the UN General Assembly, who was joined at the event by UN Deputy Secretary-General Jan Eliasson, Executive-Director of UN Women Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, several UN Ambassadors, Ministers, civil society representatives, journalists, and activists, as well as entertainers.

Delivering today’s welcoming remarks were Gunnar Bragi Sveinsson, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Iceland, and Ismanto Adna, Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs of Suriname – both co-conveners of the event. “All the male ministers in Iceland have signed up for HeforShe initiative,” said Mr. Sveinsson, Iceland’s Foreign Minister.

On a personal note, he added: “As a father of five boys, I’m conscious of making them useful and productive in society...that means [showing that] being a real man does not mean being a wild man...it is about establishing healthy relationships with women and even other men.”

“You may wonder why two such different countries have joined forces to combat violence and gender inequality. We say: why not? It is a testament to the fundamental issue at hand. We see the common cause and are prepared to work for it,” said Mr. Adna, the Minister of Suriname.

Closing the first day of the conference, the head of UN Women, Ms. Mlambo-Ngcuka, said today’s Barbershop is about breaking social norms that oppress women and restrict men and boys. And the HeforShe campaign is about both men and women getting outside of their comfort zone.

“It is not enough to be a good boy and a good man in a bad system. Our challenge is to change the system because a bad system will always bring a good man down,” she said.

“We’re in this for the long-haul.” Ms. Mlambo-Ngcuka said, underscoring that the post 2015-framework must create a world that will be totally different by 2030.

“We are asking you to stand up and speak out so that you can create more Barbershop conversations of this nature.”

Photo: The Ministers of Suriname and Iceland getting their complimentary haircuts during the Barbershop Conference.