

Speech Khadija El Morabit INLW-diner 2026 – Female Freedom Renewed

Ladies and Gentlemen. Good evening,

First of all, I would like to thank the **VVD Liberaal Vrouwen Network** and **the International Network of Liberal Women Netherlands Chapter** for the invitation. **Thank you, Nathalie**, for hosting me and **thank you Maria** for making this happen. I am very honored to be here this evening, to talk about women's rights and the theme of **Female Freedom Renewed: Liberal Democracy in a Changing World**.

When I hear "**Female Freedom Renewed**," I hear a simple but urgent question:

1. How do we protect women's freedom in a world that is changing faster than ever?

For me, women's **freedom** is not only about having **rights on paper**. It is about whether women can **actually exercise those rights**, to **learn**, to **work**, to **speak**, to **participate** in politics, to **make decisions** about their own **lives**, and to **live** free from violence.

We have seen important **progress globally** (in many countries and regions of the world). But progress can **never be taken for granted**. In Morocco, as elsewhere, women continue to face **barriers** in **economic participation**, **political representation**, **violence** and the unequal burden of **unpaid care**.

And across many regions, we see **how different the challenges can be**.

In **Afghanistan**, girls are being denied education and women are being pushed out of public life.

In **Iran**, women who demand the basic freedom to decide how they live and dress have faced repression.

In **Sudan**, war has exposed women and girls to horrific sexual violence, displacement and hunger, while essential services for survivors are disappearing because of funding shortages.

In **Iraq and Pakistan**, we have seen recently the killing of women influencers and youtubers due to social norms and religion, and family revenge.

In the **enclave of Ceuta**, we see illegal minors' migrants' girls and women raped and sexually harassed, denied food and shelter. These young girls and women jumped on the Mediterranean Sea, risked their own lives to reach the other side looking for a better and decent life.

In **Ukraine**, women are carrying communities through **war** while also facing displacement, economic insecurity and increased gender-based violence.

In **Latin America and many parts of the world**, we see another challenge: women have made important gains in political participation, but violence against women including **violence against women in public life** still prevent women from exercising that freedom fully.

Across **Africa**, women contribute enormously to their countries' economies, yet millions remain trapped in **informal, unprotected, and insecure work**, often without **social protection, financial security, or basic rights**. Many women carry the **economic responsibility** of entire families while simultaneously facing **domestic violence** including **financial and economic violence** that limits their independence and control over the resources they earn.

And the **inequality begins even earlier for girls**. Too many are still deprived of **basic needs**, denied **equal access to education** and **digital opportunities**, and subjected to practices such as **female genital mutilation**, often justified as cultural or societal traditions passed down through generations, leaving **profound physical and psychological consequences** that can last a lifetime.

These few examples teach us something important:

Women's freedom can be taken away not only by discriminatory laws, but also by social norms, religious beliefs and practices, war, poverty, authoritarianism, the collapse of institutions and climate change.

These are not simply women's issues. They are human rights issues, development issues, and ultimately issues of justice and dignity.

These realities remind us that we cannot simply speak about women's rights, we must create the spaces where women can speak for themselves, be heard, and influence the decisions that affect their lives.

This is precisely why networks such as the **International Network of Liberal Women (INLW)** are so important. Through our engagement at the **United Nations Commission on the Status of Women** in New York and the **UN Human Rights Council in Geneva**, through our statements, declarations, conferences, advocacy on issues such as **women's leadership, political representation, violence against women, and legal reform**, and international partnerships, we bring **women's voices** and concerns to the spaces where **global policies and human rights agendas** are shaped. For example: **INLW** organized or co-organised with different partners round tables with speakers from the US, Asia, Europe, Africa, MENA, speakers from Ukraine, Taiwan, Iran, Cambodia, South Korea, indigenous women, women fleeing war, women refugees and women in exile, and so on. **INLW** issued solely or jointly with our partners including Liberal International Human Rights Committee, statements and declarations on the alarming situation of women in Sudan, on women freedom fighters' detainees in Cambodia, on women in Tindouf Camps in Algeria, on women in Gaza Palestine, and the list is so long. We also **celebrate women courage**, their sacrifice and fights for freedom, democracy, justice, and dignity.

The **International Network of Liberal Women** is a **full member of Liberal International**, connecting women's voices to the global liberal movement. Through this partnership, **INLW** participates in international congresses, **contributes to resolutions and policy discussions**, and works with liberal parties and leaders worldwide to advance women's political participation, gender equality, freedom, and human rights, co-organize women workshops and mentoring programs like the one planned in October in Istanbul in collaboration with **D66 International** and **IFLRY – International Federation of Liberal Youth**.

But our role **goes beyond the United Nations and Liberal International**. Through the **INLW Youth Section** and **our chapters across different regions including Asia Pacific, Europe, Africa, and the MENA**, we are building an open and safe platform where women from different countries, cultures, and backgrounds can speak openly about the realities they face, share experiences, challenge injustice, and learn from one another.

We also invest in **capacity building and empowerment** in collaboration with our international partners, through training on civic engagement, economic empowerment and entrepreneurship, political participation and leadership, and diplomacy. Last year I went to South Korea to sign a Partnership with **IWPG, the International Women Peace Group**, on peace education, peacebuilding and mediation programs. Because giving women a voice means little if we do not also give them the knowledge, skills, networks, and opportunities to turn that voice into action. INLW has also signed a global petition called “no peace without women” initiated by Ms Patricia Elias, an international lawyer, peace advocate.

But there is a fundamental question we must ask: how can women’s organizations continue to do this vital work if the resources needed to sustain them are disappearing?

2. **And this brings me to another crisis we urgently need to talk about: the shrinking of international development funding.**

UN Women has reported that 90% of women’s organizations working in **44 crisis settings** have been financially affected by **aid cuts**, with almost **half** fearing they could close within **six months**.

It is horrifying.!

Because behind every funding figure is a human being.

A **funding cut** can mean a **safe space closes**. A **survivor of violence** loses access to support. A **pregnant woman** cannot reach a midwife. A **girl loses access** to education. A **women’s organization** that has spent years building trust within a community may **simply no longer be able to open its doors**.

And this is why the fight for women's rights cannot be separated from the fight to sustain the organizations that defend those rights.

International solidarity is not charity. It is not an act of generosity. It is an investment in human dignity, equality, freedom, and peace.

When we invest in women and in the organizations that stand beside them, we are not simply helping women survive, we are helping them lead, participate, and shape the future of their communities and their countries.

3. At the same time, I don't want us to speak about women only as victims.

From Africa, to MENA Region, to Asia and across the world, **women are leading businesses, communities, civil-society organizations, peace initiatives and political movements.**

The question is not whether women have the resilience to overcome these challenges.

They do.

The question is whether we will give them **the resources, opportunities and political space to succeed.**

And this is where **liberal democracy matters.**

Because democracy is not simply about having women in the room. It is about creating the conditions in which women can enter that room on equal terms, speak freely, compete fairly, and have their voices genuinely heard.

This is something we have been exploring through the work of the **INLW Morocco Chapter**, whom I am the founder, together with VVD International, the WoMena Initiative of AHLN (Alhuriya Arab Liberal Network) and SILC the Swedish International Liberal Center.

This year, we brought together young Moroccan women from different regions, backgrounds, and circumstances from major cities to rural communities as well as women members of Moroccan political parties, and asked them a simple but profound question:

What does democracy mean to you?

As expected, each woman had her own perspective.

But one message came through clearly: democracy is not only about elections. It is about the rule of law, freedom of expression, equality, accountability, and the ability of every citizen to participate.

A democracy cannot be fully free if half of its population cannot participate equally.

And this brings me to something that touched my heart.

During my flight yesterday from Casablanca to Amsterdam, I found myself thinking about the many Moroccan women who have been betrayed, not only by their political parties, but by a political system that claims to promote women's empowerment while, in practice, denying them equal opportunities.

As you know, **Morocco's legislative elections** are taking place in 3 weeks' time, on September 23rd. Over the past week, Moroccan media and social media have been filled with stories of women resigning from their political parties or speaking out against what they describe as unethical practices in the selection of female candidates for the women's quota list across Morocco's 12 regions.

We hear allegations of **nepotism and clientelism**: wives, daughters, friends, and family members being prioritized. We also hear allegations that some women have been asked to **pay significant amounts of money** to their parties in order to be eligible to run for Parliament in the regional quota list. Some have described these payments according to the political parties as an "advance contribution" toward the party's expenses during their five-year mandate.

And what happens to the women who dare to speak?

Some have had their membership frozen. Others are facing disciplinary measures, and some are even being threatened with legal action by their own political parties, accused of defamation and making false allegations.

And the pressure does not stop there.

Some of these women are now also facing online harassment, intimidation, threats, and personal attacks simply for speaking publicly about their experiences and raising questions about political practices.

Think about what that means.

A woman stands up and speaks about what she believes is wrong and instead of being heard, she can find herself punished, silenced, attacked, and intimidated both inside her political party and in the digital public space, defamation, fake news, and all other sorts of bullying and abuse that **jeopardize** their reputation, destabilize their family life and affect their work and business.

You know! This brings me back to history! I was there at some point of my life, when I was the president of the women wing of a Moroccan political party and a member of the party-political bureau, demanding equal opportunities for women in the party, denouncing lack of internal democracy.

It's true that I resigned from the party and from all my positions but I didn't resign from public life, **I chose to win, I chose not to fail by wearing the victim hat, I choose to fight for other women to raise their voices**, to be **included at the table**, in **decision making positions**, in **shaping policies around the world**. At that point I got invited by the **belated Madeline Albright the chairwoman of the National Democratic Institute** – NDI to participate at the launch of **NDI “not the Cost” Campaign against violence towards women in politics** at the United Nations in New York. This was a booster to my advocacy path, to making a difference and been an actor of change.

Nowadays, I share my experience with young women, teach them leadership and resilience, like the **School of Democracy women's programs** that **VVD International** champion in **Morocco** with other Dutch political parties, where I am a volunteer lead trainer.

SO! This should concern every one of us.

Are women in Morocco and the MENA Region, and Africa and other parts of the world being selected as a candidate because of their political

commitment, competence, experience, and years of activism? Or because of their wealth, their families, and their connections?

Because a woman entering Parliament should not be chosen for what she can give to a political party. **She should be chosen for what she can give to her country.**

She should be there to legislate, to serve on committees, to defend citizens' rights, and to fight for the causes she believes in.

Not for her money. Not for her family name. Not for her connections.

And as a woman and an activist, I have to say this openly: **I feel ashamed.**

Where is democracy?

Where are equal opportunities?

Where is accountability?

Where is political integrity?

And above all, **where are women's rights?**

The **quota system in Morocco**, may, in itself, be seen as a form of preferential treatment, but today it remains the one only effective gateway for women to enter Parliament. Without it, many women would struggle to compete directly because of unequal access to financial resources, political networks, and opportunities and, quite simply, because men are not readily giving up the seats they already occupy.

The quota was created to help overcome these structural barriers, not to create new ones.

Because a quota without equal opportunity is not empowerment. And representation without fairness is not democracy.

Moroccan women deserve better. They deserve to be judged by their merit, their integrity, their competence, and their commitment to their country not by the size of their bank account or the strength of their connections.

4. So what can each of us do?

We can start small.

Give a woman a voice when she is being overlooked. Mentor a young woman. Challenge discrimination when we see it. Support women's organizations. And, most importantly, listen to women whose experiences are different from our own.

Because renewing female freedom is not about protecting something that belongs to women alone.

It is about renewing the promise of democracy itself.

If we want a freer world for the next generation, we cannot simply defend women's rights when they are under attack.

We must build the political, social and economic conditions that make those rights impossible to ignore and much harder to take away.

Thank you for your attention. I look forward to your questions and our discussion.