Ladies and gentlemen.

A very warm welcome to you all!

I am very happy to see so many of you here today.

I don´t think I have attended a gender equality event before where most participants are men.

But that is the case today!

Traditionally, women have led the fight for gender equality, with men too often missing from the debate. The aim of the Barbershop talks is to raise awareness among men, to stress their role, responsibilities as well as opportunities. Its purpose is to motivate men and boys to commit to upholding gender equality and discuss how men instead can become agents of change.

And why is it so important to encourage men and boys to become actively engaged in promoting gender equality?

Because inequality not only harms women and girls, but society as a whole. Gender equality is something that matters to all of us – boys, girls, men, women, young, old, businesses, government and communities.

Achieving gender equality is in our common interest and we all must work together to reach that goal.

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Dear guests,

I firmly believe that gender equality is a matter of democracy. Of human rights. Of social development.

Various studies show that more gender equality equals a happier and healthier life for everyone. Societies where men and women are equal are more prosperous. They are healthier, their economies are doing better, and they are better educated.

Let me stress that gender equality cannot be achieved without men and boys. We all need to work together. Men and boys are central to contributing to an equal sharing of parental duties, influence, finances, education and pay.

I would like to say something about fathers.

Many successful women I have talked to seem to have one thing in common: a supportive father who believed in his daughter. That is not to diminish the role of mothers. But sometimes we forget how much it means to have a father who refuses to accept that his daughter should not have the same opportunities as a boy.

Ladies and gentlemen.

Four years ago, when my Government took office the skewed gender demographics were among the greatest challenges facing the Faroe Islands.

For that reason, my coalition has taken the challenge of the age and gender composition of society very seriously. We have invested in youth, education, culture and families with young children. The conditions of students and single providers has also improved considerably.

The result of this policy is clear.

The deficit of women has decreased and the general population is historically high.

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Dear guests,

Gender issues are already in our DNA in the Nordic countries.

The Nordic countries are known to invest in gender equality – for example, solutions for parental leave, childcare, work flexibility and equity in leadership – and we promote economic and social benefits of gender equality at work.

I am very proud to be leading a Faroese Government, where there for the first time ever is gender equality – to be exact four female ministers and four male ministers. It also makes me proud that my government this term has extended the parental leave considerably, where a few weeks are earmarked to the father.

I am delighted that the world’s leaders have now committed to gender equality through the UN Sustainable Development Goals, but concrete action is needed to accelerate the progress.

UN Women leads this issue internationally and the Nordic countries can offer good practices in this regard. Both the public and private sector have come a long way in addressing gender discrimination and work-life balance to men and women alike.

Still, there is room for improvement. And to close the gap, the entire society needs to be involved.

It is my strong belief that the inclusion of men is essential. If men are largely missing from the debate on equality, we are playing with only half the team.

These Barbershop events are a step in the right direction. They encourage

men and boys to better understand how gender equality enables individuals and communities to reach their full economic and social potential.

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Ladies and gentlemen.

A barbershop is the stereotypical safe haven for men, in our culture perhaps comparable to a locker room in Sports- a place for honest conversation and trust – and I may add a good place to bring up tough topics. Let us hope that is the case today and tomorrow.

I very much look forward to this imaginative - and challenging – concept and conference.

I am sure this conference will broaden and deepen the debate on gender equality.

I hope all of you will find the different sessions enjoyable and informative.

With these words, I hereby declare the Barbershop event in Tórshavn open

Thank you for your attention!

Aksel V. Johannesen

Prime Minister