**RING THE BELL FOR GENDER EQUALITY**

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Hello,

I am honoured to have been invited to participate in this Ring the Bell for Gender Equality, organised by BME and the Global Compact Spanish Network since 2018, and in which more than 100 exchanges from around the world participate simultaneously.

Today, as everyone knows, is International Women's Day. And I would like to talk about the role of women, as well as about the challenges that technology is adding to those that we have already had before us for decades.

We are lucky to be in a country, Spain, that ranks eighth in the world when it comes to gender equality. The progress made is undeniable, in which listed companies have undoubtedly played a significant role.

According to the IX Report on Women in the IBEX-35, carried out by IESE and Atrevia in 2020, the IBEX-35 reached the objective established by the Spanish stock market supervisor –CNMV- of reaching 30% of women on the boards of directors. Furthermore, although less numerous than men, women have acquired considerable weight and responsibility at the head of the key board committees, such as appointments and remuneration; audit and control or sustainability and Good Governance.

For listed companies as a whole, the presence of women exceeds 20%, but this is still very short of the new target of 40% set for next year after the recent review of the Code of Good Governance. Nor does it seem that we are managing to increase the weight of women sitting on management committees or who report to the board from a meagre 16%.

It therefore seems that, despite the progress we have made, there is still a long way to go. And tackling it is not going to be any easier than in the past. According to the World Economic Forum, the greatest achievements in terms of equality are concentrated in the highest sections of professional careers, whereas there have been setbacks in relation to the economic remuneration and opportunities offered to women in other social and professional groups. Among the reasons that seem to explain such a decline, I would like to highlight two: Firstly, women have a greater weight in jobs that are being automated, thus becoming more exposed to being replaced by robots or artificial intelligence; secondly, women have a smaller presence in professions where salary growth is becoming more pronounced, such as those directly associated with technological development.

As in many other areas, technology plays a central role when reflecting on how to advance in terms of equality.

There are positive aspects, of course. The public references are changing substantially. There are films starring female superheroes (and doing very well at the box office, by the way). There are also film directors who win Golden Globes and television series where women play roles far removed from those seen just a couple of decades ago. They are also beginning to see themselves better represented and gaining more television minutes in elite sports. Definitely, the public's view of the role of women in society has radically improved, which is a huge advance for the normalisation of this role in reality. I celebrate it for my daughter, who has seen films since she was little in which the protagonists were not princesses searching for a man to save or protect them, but rather ones who decided their own destiny.

What does not seem so obvious is that what the new generations cannot find as easily in the cinema - and even less so on social media - are examples of those they want to be like in the field of science or technology. The media are doing a great job of showing their achievements, but the figures show that female representation in technical careers and jobs is still in the minority.

As I said at the beginning, the achievements in the field of equality are evident. However, new challenges are emerging, many of them associated with the technology itself. That reality could even be exacerbated by the development of artificial intelligence.

Technology confronts us with new gender challenges for many reasons. In the first place, because there is a tendency to think that machines are objective and rational; second, because in many cases the algorithms are "black boxes", in which, by definition, biases are more difficult to identify; third, because the biases present in artificial intelligence systems can have rapid and large-scale effects.

For example, we have examples of how algorithms petrify past behaviours, incorporating them seamlessly into professional selection processes. In 2018, Amazon faced the problem that the algorithm used in those processes showed a clear bias against women. This bias has again been highlighted in a recent study by the University of Melbourne on the effects of using of artificial intelligence when hiring people.

But that is not the only problem emerging. The risks of bias can also appear in facial recognition systems, in Internet search systems or in social media. And what about the fact that all virtual assistants, associated with support tasks, have female names and voices (Siri, Cortana, Alexa). This is in stark contrast to the fact that supercomputers, intended to generate value or change the interpretation of data, have masculine ones (Watson).

Would this bias continue to occur in a technology development environment in which women were more evenly represented at all levels in the organisations that design and implement these systems?

It is evident that we still have a long way to go in promoting equality and technological development in our country, while advancing in a better understanding of the opportunities and challenges that we face. It is a process as necessary as it is unstoppable.

In recent decades the change has been as profound as it has been perceptible; we are not being left behind, neither from a technological point of view, nor in the progress to close the inequality gap that still persists.

It will not be easy, but, as Beatriz pointed out in the presentation of this event, our companies, universities and societies cannot be absent from technological changes, nor can they afford to set the enormous talent of half the population to one side.

Thank you very much.