

EAMF 2018

Panel Session 7

Evolution of morality: where do we find our new values?

Vladimir Rerikh, Kazakh journalist moderating Session 7, invited **Elaine Conkievich**, the UN's Women Representative to Kazakhstan, to set the scene for the final discussion on women's rights and other moral values.

Ms Conkievich said the world still had different standards about what was right for a man and a woman. This needed to be corrected, otherwise we were not respecting girls and women as human beings. We also needed more women in management and decision making positions. The world and humanity would be better off and it was the biggest challenge of the 21st century to make this happen.

Russian politician and TV host **Ksenia Sobchak** said it was not long since women had had the right to own property and vote. It was good that there was less preaching and judgment today and that most people were free to live their private lives the way they wanted, so long as the criminal law was respected.

From the chair, Vladimir Rerikh said he had seen Ksenia pursuing her political career against men on television and found her very talented and attractive and was very pleased to see her here – was that harassment?

Ksenia replied, "I don't think you understand what harassment is. It is not giving a woman a job because she does not want to go to a restaurant with you at night."

US based film director **Evgeny Afineesky** said what had happened to the women abused by Harvey Weinstein was a crime. Such men would have to realise we were now living in a different society where they could not abuse their power.

Vladimir asked the panel what their attitude was to men who had been incorrectly accused?

British broadcaster **MaryAnn Sieghart** said she was sure 95% of the allegations were correct but there should be the same burden of proof as in a criminal court. She knew Zelda Perkins who was only 23 when she was Harvey Weinstein's assistant. When Perkins had confronted him after a young actress told her Weinstein had raped her, Weinstein told her that he would wreck her career if she pursued the matter. When she left the company shortly afterwards she had added to the written parting agreement that if such an allegation were to surface again the company would take action – but nothing happened.

Indonesian **Sophia Hage**, Campaign Director of Lentera Sintas, said that one thing that needed to be made clear about sexual harassment was that if a woman did not say 'yes', it was not 'yes.' There were no grey areas. It was an abuse of power. If a woman talked about an incident 20 years ago where proof was no longer possible, her word should be taken without attempt to blame the victim.

Santosh Shah, President of *Today's Youth Asia* in Nepal said predatory sexual harassment should be treated as a disease like TB or cholera, yet not a single political party anywhere in the world was researching or financing an answer. "Let us treat it like a disease, not a cultural problem."

Mary Ann Sieghart said another important new value was the legalisation and acceptance of homosexuality. It had been a painless transition in the United Kingdom over the last 30 years. Same sex marriages were accepted with a sense of joy by straight as well as gay people.

Sophia Hage said her country, Indonesia, was going backwards on homosexuality and introducing new legislation against it. Unfortunately there still were societies and countries where anything other than a heterosexual relationship was considered wrong.

Elaine Conkievich said attitudes to homosexuality were like the attitudes to AIDs victims. Once people stopped seeing it as a threat they could accept it.

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