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A Call to Action for Gender Equality Conference at United Nations Headquarters in New York City Launches New Foundation for Gender Equality

***Grammy Nominated Singer Jewel and Academy Award Winner
Sharmeen Obaid-Chinoy Advocate for Gender Equality at UN Conference***

May 19, 2016, NEW YORK CITY: Four-time Grammy award nominee **Jewel** and Academy Award winner **Sharmeen Obaid-Chinoy** joined forces with United Nations experts and high-profile global advocates to call for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls at a major day-long conference held at UN Headquarters in New York City on May 17, 2016. The conference launched a new, groundbreaking, long-term advocacy initiative to empower women and girls: **The Foundation for Gender Equality** (www.genderequalityfoundation.org).

Foundation President Richard A. Fitzburgh said, “The launch of the Foundation for Gender Equality is a step forward in moving to a world where women can achieve their dreams without facing gender discrimination. Our hope for the Foundation is that it will be a catalyst for positive change globally.”

The high-profile conference was opened by Lakshmi Puri, Assistant Secretary General of the UN and Deputy Executive Director of UN Women, who served as host for the conference on behalf of UN Women. Loreen Arbus, President of the Loreen Arbus Foundation, delivered the first keynote address on an important issue for gender equality: *Violence Against Females with Disabilities*. Professor Nadia Badawi, leading neonatologist and recipient of the Order of Australia Medal for her work at the Cerebral Palsy Alliance Research Foundation, spoke on a related topic: *From Destitution to Hope: Empowering Mothers of Children with Disabilities*.

After the conference day session, Grammy award nominated singer Jewel interrupted her *Picking Up the Pieces* national tour to give a heartfelt keynote address and powerful on-stage performance at the gala dinner, sponsored by the Foundation. Jewel, who went public to describe her own history of overcoming domestic abuse in her 2015 memoir, *Never Broken: Songs Are Only Half the Story*, spoke about her life, her music and her commitment to empowering women.

In recognition of her outstanding support for gender equality and the empowerment of women, Jewel was recognized by Ms. Lakshmi Puri, Assistant Secretary General of the United Nations and Deputy Executive Director of UN Women as a *Planet 50-50 Global Champion* at the conference.

Ms. Puri said, “As a Champion, Jewel will stand with us and deliver her message of empathy and support to women and girls. She is an outstanding advocate for gender equality.”

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Jewel said, “I am honored to stand with UN Women as a Champion for gender equality. I believe women are rising to the challenge, and they won’t only rise, they will also raise their community along with them. If we want meaningful change in the world for the better, we must empower women.”

Golden Globe-nominated gender equality advocate Maria Bello delivered her keynote address during the special fundraising lunch put on by the Foundation in the UN Delegates Dining Room. She spoke about the lack of gender equality currently present in her work world in media and film, shared highlights from her experiences in Hollywood, and summarized current research on the continuing effort to achieve greater gender equality in American media and film.

Two-time Academy Award and Emmy Award winner Sharmeen Obaid-Chinoy presented the conference’s closing keynote address. Obaid-Chinoy won a first Academy Award for her documentary *Saving Face* (2012), which addressed acid attacks on Pakistani women. Her most recent Academy Award came for her documentary *A Girl in the River: The Price of Forgiveness* (2015). Monica Singh, a member of UN Women’s Planet 50-50 Youth Activists and survivor of an acid attack introduced Obaid-Chinoy.

Roya Mahboob, CEO of the Afghan Citadel Software Company and one of *Time* magazine’s 100 Most Influential People In The World for 2013 attended as a special guest and made remarks during the evening program. Also speaking was Daleela Farina, founder of Care for Kenya, a New York-based non-profit organization that empowers Kenyan women to create sustainable, life-changing improvements for them and their families.

Google provided significant support, including two panel sessions on provocative topics such as: *Broadening Participation in Computing Fields: Bringing About Gender Parity*, moderated by Kathryn Minshew, founder of The Muse, a career development platform. Sepehr Hejazi Moghadam, Google’s Head of Research and Development, K-12 Education participated in this panel discussion. Google is committed to increasing computer science opportunities for all – regardless of gender, ethnicity, geography, or socio-economic level.

The benefit gala dinner also included a Google-sponsored panel discussing *Gender Equality On & Off Screen* that was moderated by Google’s Head of Computer Science in Media, Julie Ann Crommett. This panel featured Independent Film Producer Effie T. Brown (*Dear White People*); the CEO of the Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media, Madeline DiNonno; Producer/Screenwriter David Goyer (*Man of Steel*, *The Dark Knight*); actress Adepero Oduye (*The Big Short*, *12 Years a Slave*); and actress Andrea Navedo (*Jane the Virgin*).

The conference also brought together individual champions, gender equality advocates and grass-roots organizations. Their diverse viewpoints brought to life the major gender equality themes and needs under discussion: ending violence and abuse for women and girls; economic disparity and empowerment for women; reliable access to quality healthcare for women; education for women; and the role of boys and men in gender equality.

High-profile attendees at the conference included: Two-time Olympic Gold Medalist, *FIFA Women’s World Cup* Champion Abby Wambach; Lara Logan, Correspondent for *60 Minutes*; Cathy Malloy, First Lady of Connecticut; Fairfield, CT Police Chief Gary MacNamara (who has established an impressive record of support and outreach in his region). Gender equality experts such as Casey Gwinn, co-founder, National Family Justice Center Alliance and Debra Greenwood, CEO, The Family Justice Center, attended along with many others, including youth presenters.

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The Foundation for Gender Equality

The Foundation for Gender Equality is the realization of a dream of its founder and president, Richard A. Fitzburgh, Senior Vice President of Wealth Management at RBC. The Foundation was conceived in 2014 as a new platform that would focus solely on the eradication of issues created and exacerbated by gender discrimination worldwide. The Foundation's strategy is set by a Steering Committee of volunteers and supported by a NextGen Committee composed of passionate, committed young leaders. *A Call to Action for Gender Equality* was the Foundation's inaugural event. The conference planning team was led by Jill Fitzburgh, Head, Speakers and Panelists, Terry Boylan, Head, Communications and Lilian Raji, Project Manager.

For more information about *A Call to Action for Gender Equality* or the Foundation for Gender Equality, please visit www.genderequalityfoundation.org, or contact Terry Boylan, Communications Head, or Lilian Raji, Communications Director using the contact information provided above. Information on the conference, UN Women and the Foundation are also available on Twitter at @Equality5050, and @UN_Women; and on Facebook at *The Foundation for Gender Equality* and *UN Women*.

For more information on UN Women and on the *A Call to Action for Gender Equality* conference, please visit www.unwomen.org. The conference was made available as a live webcast, and an archived copy of this webcast can be viewed [here](#) for the morning session and [here](#) for the afternoon session.

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