

# Females to the fore

Top executives and business leaders descended on Berlin for the fifth annual Global Female Leaders summit to share insights, provoke discussion and shape the future.

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After entering the grand entrance of Berlin's famed Hotel Adlon Kempinski and making their way to the hotel's Palais Foyer, attendees at the 2018 Global Female Leaders summit were greeted by a small but mighty girl: the Fearless Girl statue. Originally erected opposite the Raging Bull statue in New York in March 2017, the iconic Fearless Girl was commissioned by State Street Global Advisors to promote the need for more women in leadership positions. Replicas of the statue are now travelling the globe to spread the message, and her place at the summit – dubbed the 'female Davos' – was a powerful symbol to the 300-plus senior executives, leaders and experts in attendance.

The theme of the fifth annual summit was 'The Values of Leadership in Times of Transformation, Disruption and Artificial Intelligence'. It's a lengthy and in-depth topic for what was a jam-packed and diverse program held over two-and-a-half days from 3–5 June.

The economic forum for female executives included more than 60 speakers. Among these were Afghani tech CEO Roya Mahboob; HE Anne-Marie Descôtes, the Ambassador of France to Germany; SAP SE's Tamara Braun; and Vice President of Unilever Francophone Africa, Ivory Coast, Maidie Arkutu (pictured, right).

Along with plenty of networking opportunities and a glamorous gala dinner, there were inspiring TED-style presentations, panel discussions, keynotes and Think Tank Academy workshop sessions for small group learning.

In her opening address, Management Circle CEO Sigrid Bauschert spoke of the importance of exchanging ideas, sharing



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FEMALE LEADERS



visions and creating community, particularly in this era of rapid change, and amid concerns about the political and economic environment. "As leaders, we must know the answers earlier," she said. "Strong leadership is values-based leadership."

The summit commenced with a global economic outlook from Lori Heinel, Deputy Global Chief Investment Officer for State Street Global Advisors, followed by a big-picture discussion on the global economy. Globalisation, populism on the rise, Trump, trade wars... it was an engaging start with an executive panel conversation that gave warning and begged us all to consider our responsibility, not as consumers, female leaders, or businesses – but as citizens. "Question yourself. Are you doing enough as a citizen every day?" urged Dr Constanze Stelzenmüller, Robert Bosch Senior Fellow, Brookings Institution, US.

The importance of digital literacy, the future of work, and the changing nature of organisations in the face of new technology such as AI and blockchain was another central theme. Among the interesting insights into what this future might look like, a number of speakers highlighted the need for strong leadership in the age of disruption.

Creative leadership is essential, said KPMG Australia's Susan Ferrier, who also spoke of the 21st century employee as someone who values meaning, authenticity and choice. What does this mean for business? Leadership is now a mindset for shared success and, remember, you hire people, not employees, she pointed out.

Presentations by inspiring female founders were a popular part of the program. Jordanian Rasha Oudeh, CEO of pharmaceutical company CEDEM, earned a standing ovation. She shared her moving personal journey, her struggles as a businesswoman in the Middle East, and her achievements. President of Digital Citizen Fund Roya Mahboob's keynote at the pre-summit reception at the exclusive China Club was a highlight for many. As a female in Afghanistan, Roya went against the grain to earn a degree in computer science and founded her own IT company at age 23. If you ever feel like giving up, a deeper look at either of these women's stories is a reminder to persevere.

Energy solution, sustainability and smart cities were also among the topics raised. We heard about innovative business Considerate Hoteliers, which is helping to make the tourism industry more sustainable. And a fascinating panel discussion

questioned whether innovation could reverse the effects of climate change. IKEA Group's Alejandro Castro Pérez maintained a positive view – the technology is there for us to move to 100 per cent renewable energy, but we need the will of stakeholders. Fiza Farhan, clean tech entrepreneur and member of the UN Secretary-General's High-Level Panel on Women Empowerment, added that the next step will take place once everyone sees it makes commercial sense.

The comprehensive few days raised important questions in a setting of brilliant minds fit for discussing and sharing their knowledge and insights. The topics were diverse and fascinating, covering everything from blockchain technology and VR-trained doctors to the impact of multilateralism.

So, as the summit theme posits, what are the values of leadership in this age of transformation, disruption and AI? And how we can ensure we succeed and prosper when faced with these challenges?

Many of the necessary leadership values, from humility to curiosity, were made clear during the summit, and moderator and Chief Correspondent of Deutsche Welle TV Dr Melinda Crane pointed out they are all qualities found, typically strongly, in women. There was an overarching atmosphere of optimism – we possess the right qualities to meet these challenges. ■

**The Global Female Leaders summit will return to Berlin in 2019. For more information visit [globalfemaleleaders.com](http://globalfemaleleaders.com)**

