Dear Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen

Although I was born into a political household, anyone who claims I was predestined for a life in politics or as mayor of Switzerland's biggest city, could not be more wrong. After all, in those days a woman would not have been able to become a mayor in the first place. Women's right to vote had not been introduced in Switzerland until I was eleven years old – that was in 1971.

I became political in the environmental and women's rights movement: I collected signatures and took part in demonstrations with the long-term goal of achieving a just and fair society.

Looking at Swiss society ten years after the introduction of women's right to vote, the picture has turned a bit brighter: in 1981, the equality of men and women was incorporated into Switzerland's constitution.

The 1990s – I was 30 years of age back then – were a very fruitful decade with regard to the equality of women in Swiss politics. The representation of women increased in all political institutions. The national women's strike of June 14, 1991 created an atmosphere that mobilized and motivated many women. Myself included.

But that didn't mean the concept of equality had found its way into the heads of one and all. In fact, some traditional (male) structures persist to this day. When Zurich's citizens elected me as the city's first female mayor in 2009, the reports that followed at first did often not focus on my goals or achievements, but rather on my appearance, the color of my clothes and my hairstyle. That would not have happened to a man. At the same time, I was measured against the «typically manly» characteristics of a «mayor», of a male mayor of course. Legal equality is still far from meaning actual equality.

Of course, attitudes have changed for the better in Swiss society. And: Our system of direct democracy can be helpful in this regard.

The representation of women in political office of the social democratic and green parties has risen to 35-45 per cent. This result is in part due to the consistent implementation of electoral lists where men and women take up alternating positions. Or where women are placed in the foremost positions. But political parties must also
want to nominate women for office and women must want to stand up and candidate. And what is in many cases also of great importance is an encouraging and supporting personal environment. Not all women have the same preconditions in this respect. We really need to keep the pressure up. The representation of women in parliaments and governments has been in decline since 2007.

Today, equality work is back-breaking. It requires more background and structural work than demonstrations. In the City of Zurich, we work hard every day, taking small steps towards more equality. One instrument is our action plan that actively involves everyone in the town administration who is concerned.

And: any man or woman who has made it to the top is also responsible for equality. At least, that is what I demand and expect of myself. As mayor, I have room for maneuver. As mayor, I have a certain power of definition. I need to make use of that in the name of gender equality.

The city's government recently decided to extend the city's action plan for another four years. The action plan includes a target rate of 35% for executive positions in the city's administration held by women. In recent years, I have actively achieved a fifty–fifty representation of female and male executives in my department.

A fair amount has been achieved with regard to the representation of women in Swiss politics. Today, Switzerland counts among the top third of European countries, even though it did not introduce women's right to vote until 1971. Some steps are done. However, the demand for the political and actual equality of women remains as yet unfulfilled. We women are needed more than ever. Not because we are better at politics, but because politics in general are better when everyone is involved. And because it is our right.

(Es gilt das gesprochene Wort.)