

*TB Women & Stop Tb Partnership
March, 8th, 2021
Celebration of Women in TB
Gisela Scaglia*

Good afternoon everyone (even if it's morning here in South America!).

I am Gisela Scaglia, I'm a Congresswoman for Argentina and I also serve as Co-Chair for Latin America at the Global TB Caucus.

I'm glad to be here.

I would like to thank the team of Stop TB Partnership for the kind invitation to be part of this online event. Special thanks to Lucica Ditiu.

I'm here / to be inspired by you, /
/ women with different roles in their communities and from different parts of the world.

We are here, ! /after the very unusual 2020./ A year defined by vulnerability and uncertainty. **A year** where **everything** changed due to the new coronavirus. **A year** that turned our lives upside down and that forced us to assume unknown perspectives. **A year** that reminded us the importance of caring for others.

Today we have a peculiar Women's Day: / we are following on live, so to say, the development of new vaccines against this new infectious disease. / That brings us **HOPE !**, **hope** in science and **hope** that one day this pandemic will be over.

But at the same time, as the distribution of vaccines began, we had to deal, once again, with the maintenance of inequalities among countries.

In our nations **WE are important voices** to claim for the immunization of healthcare workers and those at highest risk of being infected with COVID-19; / among them, people who are affected by TB disease.

The threat COVID-19 poses is a remarkably difficult and serious one for those, like you and I, have been working for years in public policy responses to other infectious diseases like tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS. // Not only these diseases are a threat for the health of our populations. We also keep fighting, as the years go by, against stigmas related to infectious diseases and against bad healthcare services for vulnerable populations.

During the 2020 and these first months of 2021 women showed to be stronger than ever.

Women are making critical contributions **every day: they are** front-line responders, health professionals or community volunteers, **they are** scientists and logistics managers. What is more: the majority of caregivers, both at home and in our communities, **are women**.

We should not forget that women are at increased risk of infection and loss of livelihood. We also have data about less access to sexual and reproductive health and rise in domestic violence in 2020.

Women who are affected by TB disease had to cope with more difficulties of access to health services and as governments reallocated resources to fight against the new coronavirus people with TB were in some countries left unattended.

For women and girls, increased stigma associated with TB and the lack of integration between TB services and other reproductive, maternal and child health services can be an impediment to seek treatment.

I am proud to be able to use my political position to bring the light in this important issue, on this important day, and would like **to invite you to see** this crisis as an opportunity **for us, / women of the world**. There is a well known saying that teaches us that “**It is better to light a candle than curse the darkness**”.

With that in mind, I would like to invite you today **to light** as many candles as we can, in order to build a better tomorrow for ourselves and the generations to come.

Let's light a candle for education and universal access to health services for the girls of our communities. Let's encourage and engage our girls. Together, we can empower the next generation of leaders!

Let's light a candle for never forgetting the people beneath the statistics. In 2021 we know a lot about TB but it can be hard to look through the data to see the real people beneath. I invite you today to focus on real people of your local communities.

Let's light a candle for investments in pandemic and epidemics preparedness. We have to work hard to increase domestic as well as international resources.

A clear and strong political message should be passed by us, women leaders of our communities, stating that the people who are affected by TB disease and our target of ending TB by 2030 are not forgotten nor will be left behind.¹ **We need more women** championing

¹ See SDG Target 3.3: By 2030, end the epidemics of AIDS, TB, malaria and neglected tropical diseases, and combat hepatitis, water-borne diseases and other communicable diseases: https://www.paho.org/hq/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=13134:target-33-end-communicable-diseases&Itemid=42308&lang=en

gender-based policies and **more women championing** TB in parliaments around the globe as part of that.

I would like to share with you today some important recommendations:

- We should never be forced to decide between the management of the COVID-19 crisis or the strengthening of our health systems. To invest in TB programs will leave stronger health systems as a legacy to our countries.
- Funding must be urgently increased for essential TB services including the health workforce. We know that women are the majority of the healthcare workforce and the majority of caretakers in general.
- We have to advance universal health coverage to ensure **all people with TB** have access to affordable quality care.
- We always have to promote human rights and combat **stigma and discrimination**.
- Many women who are not financially independent might have difficulties to access treatment due to the costs it represents. In some settings, women's health may not be considered as important as that of other male family members.

I want to call you today ! to remember the importance of being there for others. **It is time** to create networks and to share our knowledge.

I am very **positive** about it: / the **future** of humanity lies in connection and cooperation.

The **role** of female leaders will be more necessary than **ever**. We must combine being supportive and empathetic toward other women while including women in decision-making. // **Women are better off today**, / but we are still far from equality. There is so much more to do together! And this initiative of bringing the light to the importance of gender discussions in the fight against TB is a step towards that. **TB Women is a much needed network in the response to TB and I am proud to be part of it.**

As women we have a big task ahead: to build together a better world. **We are strong** because we know we are vulnerable, such a paradox!

We are suffering a global crisis due to a new virus and its hard consequences, but we could also see how the world woke up, we could experience the importance of love and of caring for others. We were **given** the chance to change, the **chance** to see how to live a meaningful life. **Let's dream and build together** a world with less darkness and more candles of hope. As a woman, a Congresswoman and Co-Chair of the Americas TB Caucus, **I am an ally of TBWomen**, let's work together.