

## **DRAFT SPEECH**

**Official Opening & Keynote Address by the  
Deputy Minister of Women, Family and Community Development Malaysia,  
YB Puan Hanna Yeoh Tseow Suan,  
*“Preparing women for digital age and the Fourth Industrial Revolution”***

**Represented by Datuk Yatimah Sarjiman  
Director General, Department of Women Development, Ministry of Women,  
Family and Community Development Malaysia.**

**#WOMEN IN TECH**

**18 September 2018 ~ Sime Darby Convention Centre, Kuala Lumpur**

### **Salutations:**

YBhg Tan Sri Dato' Dr Michael Yeoh, President of the International Strategy Institute (ISI)

Mr Cheah Chyuan Yong, Chairman of the International Strategy Institute (ISI)

### **Introduction:**

Thomas Edison, Alexander Graham Bell, Steve Jobs – Are these names familiar to you? Of course, they all contributed to technology by inventing something that changed the way the whole world lives and works today.

Now, do you know Margaret Knight, Grace Hopper, and Stephanie Kwolek? As I thought so. While you know they are all female names – they also happen to be names of women who have equally made an impact in our lives as the men mentioned previously.

Margaret invented the paper bag machine which is used by all shoppers today. Grace invented programming language for computers which led to the development of COBOL, an early high-level programming language still used today, while Stephanie created kevlar, a material which is widely used today in protective vests as well as in boats, airplanes, tyres, cables, among others.

Women have evidently come a long way ever since the first Industrial Revolution in the 18th century. Back then, women industrial workers were often paid much less than men, usually half of what the men earned – which showed that women were not valued the same as men in the workplace.

But the three large Industrial Revolutions in the world also saw a great shift in society happening, where women who were once homemakers were liberated and started entering the workforce. Not only that, they also found their voice, protested and fought for equal rights, especially for workplace equality.

Today, we are at the beginning of a revolution that is fundamentally changing the way we live and even challenging ideas about what it means to be human – the Fourth Industrial Revolution or IR4.0 – where man and machine will work together.

IR4.0 has welcomed an array of new technologies that fuses the physical, digital and biological worlds, which will greatly impact economies and industries.

Yet, last year it was reported that fewer Malaysian women are graduating from the Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) fields due to gender stereotyping. We also do know that women still lag behind men in the STEM fields.

STEM is one of the catalysts for transforming Malaysia into a developed nation by 2020. So, how will women seize new, exciting opportunities in store for them and adapt to this revolution? Will women be able to overcome self-doubt, long-time stereotypes and thrive in STEM fields to be equally valued as their male counterparts?

## **Body:**

Ladies and gentlemen,

I am standing here, giving you a speech at the #Women in Tech summit as Deputy Women, Family and Community Development Minister. But let me enlighten you that my journey up to this point was not one without braving through stereotypes and scepticisms about my age or inexperience.

I registered myself as a voter in 2007 because I wanted to fight for my rights. Tony Pua set up a DAP branch in PJ and needed 15 young professionals – so I signed up. And up to 2008, my only exposure in the party was to arrange for food and drinks for the opening of his service centre. But fast forward to 2013, at the age of 34, I made history and became the first female speaker, as well as the youngest.

Never have I imagined this opportunity for myself, a person without any political background to soar this high and fight for the change that I wish to see for our country. Having said that, I believe, YES! Women will rise above technological advances, create history and break through the glass ceiling.

Women can bring about a change. We can enhance the digital economy, artificial intelligence (AI), the Internet of things (IoT), big data, cross border e-commerce, among others, and help humanity progress because we are problem solvers and our compassionate nature will make us want to see through a difference in this world.

In fact, Malaysia has given birth to female geniuses that contributed to science and technology like engineer Robiah Ibrahim, who left her mark in the world with her scientific breakthrough in 1995. Robiah, became the first woman in 200 years to develop a new lightning prediction – and that placed her among the world’s renowned scientists.

In 2016, a Kelantanese, Hafizah Noor Isa, proved Albert Einstein's theory of gravitational waves. Last year, at age 27, Dr Lam Shu Jie discovered a solution to antibiotic-resistant bacteria – she combined health information technologies and clinical research for her scientific breakthrough.

This year, Dr Siti Khayriyyah, who teaches medical microbiology and microscopy, was crowned the World’s Best Science Communicator after presenting on diagnosing infectious diseases using biomarkers.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Though technology is adding more value to our lives and will change our future, according to the World Economic Forum (WEF), the IR4.0 will see the widening of the employment gender gap, especially in industries like manufacturing and production.

Due to under-representation of women in such industries, women will lose five jobs for every job gained, while men will lose three jobs for every job gained.

Hence, it’s time for women to start embracing technology by getting into STEM professions. It’s time for women to show their prowess, rise to new challenges, stop inequality from further growing, and ensure the IR4.0 will be inclusive to benefit all.

Women must overcome the barriers and get involved instead of being side-lined. Ladies, let’s start moving forward and use technology for the good of the people!

Ladies and gentlemen,

Malaysia’s transformation into IR4.0 has already begun with the launch of the Digital Free Trade Zone (DFTZ) last year, but women still need to grow and their roles need to be recognised in STEM fields.

There will be significant impact in the job market, as existing jobs will be eliminated and new jobs which requires specialist skills will be created. Therefore, we need women to expand their horizons and fill the gender employment gap.

As IR4.0 is coming about at a fast pace, the government will develop digital local talent and enhance skills, launch new initiatives as well as training, to equip our nation with the advancements of this new industrial revolution age.

To cultivate a culture that values STEM, education plays a crucial role. We need the right education system to train students to nurture soft skills, impart deeper learning

and underline short and long-term measures for our students, so they will be able to face the future and thrive in the IR4.0, as they join the future workforce.

We are currently preparing students for IR4.0 by formulating a roadmap, to ensure our younger generation will become highly-skilled workers in the future, and put Malaysia on a level playing field to compete with other developed countries in the IR4.0.

But more institutions, employers, non-profits and policymakers need to get on board to embrace this revolution as well. Because if we do not learn about technology, we will be at a loss, and shut ourselves from the entire world.

With increased digitisation and interconnection, the government is not only looking into upgrading manpower skills, but producing more innovative and entrepreneurial individuals who will play a pivotal role to meet society's needs and satisfy business objectives in IR4.0.

To date, 98.5 per cent of business establishments in Malaysia are made up of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs). But only 20.6 per cent of SMEs are women-owned.

Though this number has grown over the past decade, I assure you, with the National Policy on women, the ministry will put high priority in encouraging women's participation in the workforce and in the process of embracing the IR4.0.

We will make sure that women will not shy away from technology and have a hand in the exciting future of our country. But remember ladies, it is up to you to break all stereotypes, embrace technology and take the leap.

This is your time to say, "Hey, I can do this!"

I may not be an expert in STEM like Robiah, Noorhafizah, Dr Lam or Dr Siti. But I will say this, what we all have in common is we took a leap of faith – and that led us to where we are today.

### **Conclusion:**

Before I end my speech, I would like to applaud the International Strategy Institute (ISI) for shining the spotlight on this important subject, and say thank you for inviting me.

It's good to see all of you here in this summit. There is a great line up of speakers and interesting programmes in store for you. So, I hope each one of you will take this opportunity to learn, be inspired and welcome the IR4.0 with open arms.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Although this summit focuses on Women In Tech, I would like to stress that both men and women have important roles to play in the IR4.0.

Lastly, let me remind you, it's never a competition between genders. We all have our strengths and weaknesses, and we are all equally human beings.

Technology is genderless, and it doesn't discriminate. That is why regardless our gender, together, we must embrace this revolution as a nation, so we can achieve amazing things to reach our potential!

Thank you.