



**GENDERHOPES**  
WORKING TO END GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

**Interview of the Month  
Miriam Gonzalez Durantez  
Lawyer & Chair of « Inspiring Girls»  
April 2017**

**1. GenderHopes: You are the chair of Inspiring Girls. Can you tell us about this initiative and how it aims to impact the lives of girls?**

Miriam Gonzalez: Inspiring Girls connects female role models and girls around the world with two objectives: a) to expose them to all the different options they might have in life if they work hard, and b) to eradicate gender stereotypes that still affect young girls and limit their aspirations.

We only ask volunteers to give 1 hour per year (everybody can do it!) to go back to school and talk to girls about their jobs, their career, their ups and downs, and their life in general.

We don't try to impose any models to the girls. We simply aim to tell them that they should feel free to make their own choices and we encourage them to aim high in whatever they want to do.

**2. What advice would you give to teachers and parents to raise strong confident girls and give them the best chance to pursue the career of their dreams?**

I am the mother of three sons so I am hardly qualified to give advice to parents of girls! But on the campaign, in the UK and in other countries, I have seen many girls who suffer from lack of self-confidence and they feel that they are not good enough to pursue certain careers. Children, at a very early age – as early as 6 years old! - start identifying jobs as male and female jobs. That is the result of society and it is the duty of all of us, parents, teachers, media and employers to do something about it. It is not on that in the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, half of the children population still feels behind simply because of their gender.

**3. As a mother of three sons, what does gender equality mean to you? How have your beliefs influenced the ways in which you and your husband have been raising boys?**

Gender equality simply means that men and women are free to make their

own choices. Surely we have made a lot of progress in the Western world. First, we got gender equality before the law – something that is easy to overlook, but many women still suffer abuses in many places around the world that go undenounced and unaddressed. Then we got gender equality at work – though again we should not forget that many female employees are not treated the same as their male colleagues. But what is still pending pretty much everywhere around the world is gender equality at home.

I am very fortunate to be married to a man who is as much of a feminist as I am. We raise our boys in the belief that both, men and women have the same rights. Actually, my children are super enthusiastic about the Inspiring Girls campaign and are always helping me with new ideas!

**4. In 2013, you were quoted in the Evening Standard on your thoughts on women and fashion, stating: “There is no reason why somebody who is very clever and determined can’t care about fashion”. Do you think however, that for women like yourself, the media focuses too much on the fashion choices made by women in the public eye? For example, women such as Michelle Obama and Amal Clooney are two highly successful, intellectual women, yet are routinely reduced by the press to solely style icons. What message does that send out to young women and is this something you have experienced in your career thus far?**

I think it is unfair when women are judged solely or primarily by what they wear. Having said that, all women in the public eye should be aware of the fact that when they wear certain clothes in work related occasions they are going to foster comments on fashion choices. While this is unfortunate, they may be contributing with those actions to girls thinking that clothes are more important than brains when it comes to success.

**5. What advice would you give to a young woman who wants to pursue a career in a male-dominated environment?**

Just do it! We only have male-dominated jobs because of tradition and because young women have been very often discouraged to work in certain fields, but not because we are less intelligent or capable than men. I always tell girls that they need to pursue their dreams, no matter what. Luck plays a role in life and nothing guarantees that we are going to achieve everything we want, but at least we need to work hard and try. And when you feel that you can’t get to your goal, just reach out to some other women who were able to make it and ask for help.

**6. As a successful lawyer and a partner at Dechert, have there been times when your husband’s career has overshadowed your own, simply because he’s the man? Did you ever feel pressure, from inner or outer circles to reduce your work in order to focus on being a wife and a mother?**

Of course! Not once, but many times. When I said that my husband and I shared the school run in the mornings I was told in pretty clear terms by the conservative media that I should do it myself. And my value as a wife, but also as a mother, has been put into question by them openly many times. The important thing though is for you to decide what you want to be regardless of what others - especially those who do not share your values - tell you, whether publicly or not. At the end of the day, if the editor of the Daily Mail disagrees with how you as a woman lead your life you are probably on the right track!

But regardless of the pressure from any particular part of the media, I am very grateful for the public exposure that I had while Nick was Deputy Prime Minister, because it allowed me to start the Inspiring Women campaign in this country, which in turn led to me launching this wonderful project of Inspiring Girls worldwide.

**7. What is your vision for the future for women? What are some of the steps you would wish to take or hope to see taken to ensure gender equality for all?**

I am very optimistic about the next generations. Everywhere I go with the Inspiring Girls campaign, I meet lots of very clever and driven girls – and boys - who are willing to work for a world free from gender stereotypes.

However, I am worried the wave of mediocrity that has taken over politics in so many countries and the rise of leaders who (out of design or incompetence) can take us to a more divided society, both at a general level, and also in terms of gender equality. It is important that we remind ourselves that the rights we have - not just as women, but as individuals - cannot be taken for granted and that we need to keep working for them and speaking out for our values, no matter the effort and the criticism, because if we are not attentive, those rights can easily be reversed.

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***Miriam González** is a partner of international law firm Dechert LLP where she is co-chair of the firm's International Trade and Government Regulation practice, focusing on international and EU trade law and policy.*

*Prior to joining Dechert, Miriam led the trade practice of another major international law firm. She previously served seven years as a Senior Member of the Cabinet for EU External Relations Commissioners Chris Patten and Benita Ferrero-Waldner, where she had responsibility for EU relations and trade with the Middle East, the U.S. and Latin America, as well as a FCO adviser during the UK Presidency of the European Union.*

*After studying law at the University of Valladolid, Miriam was awarded a postgraduate scholarship, which allowed her to carry on her studies at the*

*College of Europe, in Bruges, Belgium. She was also a Senior Associate Member of St Antony's in Oxford. Miriam is a Non-Executive Member of the Board and Chair of the Audit Committee of UBS Limited. She is also the Honorary President of Canning House and a member of the International Advisory Board of the Instituto de Empresa in Spain.*

*Miriam is also the Founder and Chair of "Inspiring Girls", a charity dedicated to raising the aspirations of young girls around world by connecting girls and female role models.*