



## UAE women thrive in leadership positions

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ABU DHABI // Compared to countries such as the US, the UAE is "far ahead" in terms of including women in leadership positions, experts said yesterday.

The country has embraced diversity by including a high number of women in its aerospace and political industries but experts said it was essential to level opportunity between men and women.

"In the UAE, it's compulsory for all public and private sector organisations to include a woman representative on their board of directors," said Mary Petryszyn, vice president, international, for Northrop Grumman Aerospace Systems in California. "That is quite far ahead of where the US is in that regard."

She was addressing an audience of women working for Mubadala Aerospace, Northrop Grumman, Strata Manufacturing, Raytheon, Tawazun Economic Council and the American Chamber of Commerce during a roundtable event entitled "Women in Aerospace", organised by the Defence Services Marketing Council in Abu Dhabi.

"Much has been said in recent times about women in [such] careers and with good reason," she said. "All of us live in a time where the value of diversity within our organisation is being recognised and embraced. Diversity is increasingly being seen as key to optimal performance of teams."

A recent study published in the Harvard Business Review found that the single most important factor in making a team more successful was the presence of additional women.

"The qualities that women bring to the table like listening, sharing criticism constructively, having an open mind and being democratic, were increasing the collective intelligence," Ms Petryszyn said. "In 2013, 50 per cent of the most senior leaders in the top US defence companies were female."

The UAE is setting the example for the West. In 2012, only two of the UK's top 100 companies listed on the FTSE 100 were run by women, while the UAE had at least four, including twofour54, Tecom Business Park and Dubai's Jebel Ali Free Zone Authority.

"The country has several female Cabinet ministers, a number of Federal National Council members and many more women working in numerous leadership positions across the country," she said. "And while women are making inroads to leadership in the military, aerospace and defence industries in the US, they only hold 4.6 per cent of positions in Fortune 500 companies

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"But I encourage the gradual change of consciousness in many parts of our professional and personal lives that is affecting and will continue to affect us."

Hind Al Falasi, a 27-year-old Emirati who has worked in aerospace for more than two years, said women made up more than 60 per cent of the workforce in her company.

"It's something I'm proud of," she said. "More women are getting interested in this field and the good thing about the UAE is that no one questions your career choice because it's all new to everyone."

Her sister is an electrical engineer in Al Ain.

"UAE women are open-minded in a way that they know what they want and they pursue it," she said. "They don't look at challenges and they go for it. You set your boundaries in whatever work you do so women should give themselves the chance to do so."

Dababa Alkhyeli, a 27-year-old Emirati project coordinator, said the aerospace industry has a vital future in the UAE.

"It will increase the country's economic growth and there's a lot of evidence that Emirati women can lead and manage positions in this industry and others," said Ms Alkhyeli, an information systems and engineering management graduate. "Our Government supports us and, although I'm the only one in my family working in this industry, more women are joining. I hope to become a project manager in aerospace. I love handling challenges and there are many in this area."

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