

**Welcoming Speech by Penang State EXCO for Women and Family
Development, Gender Inclusiveness and Non-Islamic Religious
Affairs, and Chairperson for the Board of Directors of PWDC, The
Honorable Madam Chong Eng on the occasion of “Women in
Economy: Rethinking Entrepreneurship for Today’s Women”
Conference dated 24 September 2018**

[Salutations]

It gives me great pleasure to welcome all of you here to this conference this morning and we are very honoured to have our Deputy Prime Minister, who is also the Minister of Women, Family and Community Development, Yang Amat Berhormat Dato’ Seri Dr. Wan Azizah Wan Ismail, as our first keynote speakers. On behalf of the Penang State Government, welcome to Penang and congratulations for being the first woman Deputy Prime Minister of Malaysia!

Ladies and Gentlemen,

When the idea for the Women in Economy Conference was conceived, I had no doubt that this conference would be a much-anticipated

conference where successful entrepreneurs come together and share their narratives in the real world of entrepreneurship.

It is therefore the objective of this conference to open the conversation on what economy means to women, and to explore from that vantage point, how to expand existing businesses, pursue new initiatives or form new partnerships to capture even better income generating opportunities.

Through this platform here today, we should be able to identify the gaps and challenges, and then formulate strategies to overcome these barriers to enable even more women to succeed in procuring equity in the economy. Equip ourselves with necessary tools and best practices so that we can short-circuit our learning curve to entrepreneurship success.

It is my hope that this conference - organised by the Penang Women's Development Corporation (PWDC), in partnership with Bahagian Perancang Ekonomi Pulau Pinang (BPEN), City Council of Penang (MBPP), Seberang Jaya Municipal Council (MPSP), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Penang Institute (PI), Women BizSENSE and Sunshine Wholesale Mart Sdn. Bhd., and in collaboration with National Association of Women Entrepreneurs Malaysia (NAWEM)

and Junior Chamber of Commerce (JCI) Pearl – will effectively chart the course to uplift women into financial independence. For this, my sincere appreciation to our strategic partners and collaborators.

This conference would not have been possible, without our dedicated panel of speakers, moderators and facilitators who had put in time and effort to be with us. I would like to extend my heartfelt thank you. May you be the shining examples and role models for our delegates.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

According to the 2015 economic census by Department of Statistics Malaysia, one in five companies are owned by women, but many are micro-enterprises with limited capital. Societal perceptions of the traditional roles' women play as homemakers, lack of resources made available to women, and being tied down with unpaid care work remain the main inhibitors for women to participate actively in the economy. Gender disparities impact women negatively, limit their entrepreneurial activities and depress economic growth. Unleashing the economic power of women is key to achieving growth, sustainability, and gender equality.

This huge mission of ensuring gender equity is guided by the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals where Goal No. 5 is to “achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls” and Goal No. 8 which is to “promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all.”

For women to succeed and for us to achieve gender equality, men must be willing to give their support. Like what they always say, beside every successful man is a supportive woman, and likewise, beside every successful woman is a supportive man. With this in mind, I would like to take this opportunity to thank our Chief Minister of Penang, for being gender-sensitive and fully supportive towards women initiatives in the state.

[applause]

In fact, the Penang State Government is committed to realizing gender equality and had recently set up the Gender Inclusiveness portfolio. This commitment is also envisioned in Penang 2030: “A Family-focussed Green and Smart State that Inspires the Nation”. Family as the basic unit of society remains central in everything we do.

The women in many families have created job opportunities when there was none. Even without education, some have started selling Nasi Lemak or even babysitting at home. Women are versatile; they constantly create and think out of the box, most of the time, out of necessity.

Greater gender parity can be achieved in the family when women are able to have their own source of income. This in turn enables women to have a bigger role in household decision making, including what to do with household income, how to invest with surplus, and how to ensure their children's education is taken care of. It has a profound impact on well-being of the family and increase per capita household expenditure. Engaging in economic activities allow women to step out from their homes and have a bigger social support and network, that bring positive impact to their self-confidence, self-esteem and outlook. This is the strongest form of empowerment.

With these thoughts, let us spend the next two days together to share and learn from each other. Get ready to discuss new ideas, suggestions, examples, hopes and aspirations to achieve our common goal of “Rethinking Entrepreneurship for Today's Women.”

For many of us, the theme of the conference will help us reflect and adjust our own way of thinking and working for us to be more open, responsive and creative in our collaborations and entrepreneur pursuit.

I hope that through this conference, you are able to build and strengthen your network and form lasting partnerships with the different organisations and business people here.

Let us have a wonderful two days of productive and motivating conference.

Thank you.