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Women of the world meet in Spain to smash glass ceiling

BARCELONA, Spain — Six hundred women from 76 countries met in Barcelona yesterday to talk about how to increase the economic power of women in a male-dominated world.

The "Global Summit of Women" has been described as a "Davos for women," after the high-powered meetings of the world's mostly

male movers and shakers at the Swiss ski resort of Davos.

The number of delegates is the largest since the first meeting in Montreal 12 years ago, said summit director Irene Natividad.

"The purpose is to bring women's leaders together to talk about increasing women's economic clout," Natividad said.

Natividad has her own Washington public affairs firm and has been in charge

of the conference since it began. She said she would try to impress on the delegates that women already had power, but needed to learn how to use it.

Women owned 30 per cent of small businesses... (Turn to P.13)

...in the United States, Canada and the European Union and made up 40 per cent of the paid labour force worldwide, Natividad said.

"It's a miracle women have been able to achieve as much as they have in spite of the difficulties they face," she said, citing obstacles that ranged from obtaining credit to the "glass ceiling" that prevents some women from getting top jobs.

The meeting focuses on practical skills to help women to do business better, such as negotiating and developing effective Web sites, Natividad said.

It also deals with increasing cross-border business. Natividad said the conference would not adopt resolutions when it ends to-

morrow, but instead hopes to achieve practical objectives such as establishing business links and alliances.

The meeting brings together politicians and businesswomen from around the world including Belgian Deputy Prime Minister Laurette Onkelinx, Gambian Vice-President Isatou Njie Saidu and Costa Rican First Vice-President Astrid

Fischel.

Chief executive officer of IBM Spain Amparo Moraleda and Bank of Melbourne chief executive Ann Sherry will be among the business leaders.

HIV/AIDS will also feature on the agenda of the summit which overlaps with a world AIDS conference in Barcelona. Delegates will look at the way health crises, such as the AIDS epidemic, hit the business community.

"What happens to the economy when you lose your workers?" Natividad asked.

A World Health Organisation official warned this week that some African countries could lose a quarter of their workforce to AIDS in the next 20 years. — REUTERS/VNS