

Berliner Morgenpost

ACHIEVERS WITHOUT ALOOFNESS

A Global Women's Leadership Award: "Please don't be so modest"

07/07/2025,

By Iris May

District Reporter Mitte



First Lady Elke Büdenbender at the table with US feminist Irene Natividad at the Global Women's Leadership Awards Dinner at the JW Marriott Hotel Berlin.

Berlin. On Friday, the Global Women's Leadership Award was presented to two women. The evening was a testament to lived women's power.

On Friday, the Global Women's Leadership Award was presented to the head of the European Central Bank Christine Lagarde and quota advocate Monika Schulz-Strelow at the JW Marriott in Berlin-Mitte. First Lady Elke Büdenbender and feminist Irene Natividad were the laudators. In the audience: Around 1000 women in leadership positions from all over the world.

It could have been an evening full of self-praise and self-marketing. But the opposite was the case. Neither the two award winners nor the members of the high-ranking German Host Committee seemed practiced in accepting public praise. Modesty was the order of the day, and the community was repeatedly invoked.

Lagarde: Women's rights and climate change are non-negotiable



"Always seeing the humanity behind the numbers" - Irene Natividad presents ECB President Christine Lagarde with the Global Women's Leadership Award 2025.

Irene Natividad described in her laudation how she had perceived Christine Lagarde for years, not only as an outstanding woman due to her tall stature but as a constant presence in a sea of men, always seeing the human component behind the economic figures. Lagarde had always pointed out climate change and equality. "Women's rights and climate change are non-negotiable," was one of her credos.

Lagarde took the award ceremony as an opportunity to point out the worldwide massive setbacks in equality. Women must now fight not to be silenced. Everything that grandmothers and mothers fought for their daughters must not have been in vain. The 69-year-old asked what really matters in life and what the foundations for female success are. Her answer was manifold: Legal foundations, learning, leadership, and labor. "Women have fantastic qualities as leaders," emphasized Lagarde.

Quota woman Monika Schulz-Strelow thanks her husband



Quota woman Monika Schulz-Strelow with the Global Women's Leadership Award at the JW Marriott Hotel in Berlin. Behind her, applause from Jutta Allmendinger (right) and other members of the German Host Committee from Berlin.

Monika Schulz-Strelow was the second woman to be honored on Friday. "Without the debate about a quota for women, the current development would never have happened," said Elke Büdenbender in her laudation. The president of the quota lobby association FidAR (Women on Supervisory Boards) was visibly moved. The First Lady has resigned from her position as a judge ten days ago and wants to devote herself more to equality in retirement. Monika Schulz-Strelow dedicated her Global Women's Leadership Award to the women present, without whom everything would not have been possible. She also thanked her husband of 46 years, who "never held her back" and never tried to change her. Indeed, the 75-year-old admitted, there are people who are afraid of her. The business consultant has been advocating for the sustainable increase of the proportion of women on the supervisory boards of German companies for 20 years. Under her leadership, the FidAR initiative developed into an important German business network. In 2015, she received the Federal Cross of Merit for her tireless, voluntary efforts.

Sponsor: Never complain, rather act

The opulent three-course menu at the dinner in Berlin was thanks to the 1000 women to a businesswoman from South Korea: Sung-Joo Kim. 20 years ago, the 68-year-old bought the then dilapidated German luxury label MCM against all reason and turned it into a successful brand in the Asian market. The Berlin designer Michael Michalsky was creatively responsible for the luxury brand MCM from 2006 to 2017.

MCM is currently the world's only luxury goods trading company that is solely owned by a woman. 77 percent of the MCM leadership team is female. Since 2017, Sung-Joo Kim has been a member of the Fashion Council Germany and was named one of the 25 hottest CEOs in Asia by the business magazine Fortune, although she prefers to use another title: "Chief Visionary Officer (CVO)". Kim also founded the Sungjoo Foundation, which supports women's projects worldwide. Sung-Joo Kim praised feminist Irene Natividad in a short speech, with whom she has been friends for years. "Irene is our champion and our role model." She gave women a tip: "Don't accuse, don't complain, just act."

Women at the dinner: Impressive and modest



Came with a snake diadem and business cards made of papyrus to the Global Women's Summit in Berlin: Amany Asfour, doctor and power networker for women.

In the German Host Committee of the Global Women's Summit were many leading women who came on stage at the award ceremony on Friday, including the president of Humboldt University, Julia von Blumenthal, sociologist Jutta Allmendinger, Annette Matsat, vice president for labor law and labor policy at Mercedes-Benz Group, or the president of the German-American Chamber of Commerce Simone Menne.



Briton Bola Olabisi (right). She founded the Global Women Inventors & Innovator Network (GlobalWIIN) with her partner.

Hanna Hennig, Chief Information Officer (CIO) for global IT at Siemens, came with a delegation of 30 women who cheered her with pink Siemens fans. "Please don't be so modest," Irene Natividad demanded more than once. The commonality among the women was that they only briefly spoke about themselves or their names were only faintly heard.
