

Driving Change

An Interview with Susana Malcorra,

Dean of the IE School of Global and Public Affairs and Former Minister of Foreign Affairs and Worship for the Republic of Argentina

EDITORS' NOTE *Susana Malcorra's most recent position was as Minister of Foreign Affairs and Worship of the Argentine Republic from December 2015 to June 2017. She took the job after more than eleven years of experience in the United Nations. From April 2012 to December 2015, she was the Chef de Cabinet (Chief of Staff) of the Secretary-General, Ban Ki-moon. Previously, she led the Department of Field Support (DFS) for Peace Missions, based*



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in New York, as Under-Secretary General of the United Nations. In 2004, she joined the World Food Programme (WFP) in Rome as an Assistant Secretary General and Chief Operating Officer (COO). Before starting in the United Nations, she had almost 25 years in the private sector. From January 1993, she worked in Telecom Argentina, retiring in 2002 as the Chief Executive Officer. She started her professional development in IBM Argentina, joining shortly after obtaining an Engineering degree from the University of Rosario. She is an active international speaker and member of the board of multiple public and private institutions. Malcorra has been awarded the Gran Cruz de Mérito Militar con distintivo blanco (Kingdom of Spain), 2011; United Nations Foundation, Global Leadership Award, 2011; Cóndor de los Andes en Gran Cruz (Plurinational State of Bolivia), 2016; Gran Cruz de la Real Orden de Isabel la Católica (Kingdom of Spain), 2016; Orden al Mérito Cavaliere di Gran Croce (Italian Republic), 2017; Induction to the International Hall of Fame, International Women's Forum (IWF), 2017; and the Orden de Bernardo O'Higgins (Republic of Chile), 2018. She is a founding member of the Argentine Chapter of the International Women's Forum, honorary member of the Association of French-Argentinian Women, and a member of the Aspen Ministers Forum of the Aspen Institute, Atlantic Council – Adrienne Arsht Latin America Center, Kofi Annan Foundation, Brookings Foreign Policy Leadership Council, and Global Future Council on Geopolitics of the World Economic Forum. She sits on the boards of Inter-American Dialogue, Kofi Annan Foundation, International Crisis Group, and Fundación Euroamerica.

What interested you in public service and being a part of the government in Argentina?

I should start by saying that the offer came as a surprise to me. The candidate at the time called me to say that he was considering me for the position and while it was not something that was in my mind, the minute he said it, it shook me. Having the honor to serve your country and to represent your country to the world is one of the highest honors you could have. I felt that I could make an impact

based on my experience in the private sector and at the United Nations with my understanding of the world from that perspective. I felt that I could contribute from an angle where I could add value and make a difference which led me to say yes.

Were you able to make the changes and create the impact that you had hoped during your time as Minister?

I had moved from the private sector to the United Nations which is a very complex system and I had learned the need for adaptation and leveraging your capacities and experiences to adjust to a new environment. You have to find and create ways to bring about change, but also recognize where you are starting from in that process. Nobody has a magic wand that will solve all problems. This was my first time serving in a position in government in my country and it was the first time for me to be involved

in politics in my country. I feel that there are things we did which had a real impact. We were able to put Argentina back into recognition by the world and brought the voice of Argentina throughout the world. You always wish you had done more, such as my conviction to bring Argentina closer to Africa which I still believe is very important, as well as the Arab world, which we made progress in doing but need to do more. I was able to achieve what I had wanted in the short period of time that I was in the role.

You have a deep understanding of the United Nations. Do you feel that the UN has been effective at evolving to meet the challenges the world is facing?

The UN needs to constantly evolve as the world evolves. Every institution needs to adjust to the changing landscape in order to survive. The UN is many things – first of all, it is a constellation of member states. The UN is 193 member states coming together around the General Assembly. People need to understand that the UN is a very complex architecture that was established after World War II to avoid a reoccurrence of that war. With this as its framework, one could argue that so far so good. The UN is also the security council which is 15 member states of which five have veto power. The structure of the security council was established during a time which is very different than today. The UN is also the Secretary-General who has convening authority, but can only go so far since the member states are there to set the tone. The

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UN has a critical role to play in the world and is doing important work in refugee countries, addressing human rights, gender issues, environmental concerns and much more. I think the UN needs to continue to transform itself to adjust to the 21st century and that relates to all of the pieces of the UN.

How concerned are you about the impact of the pandemic in Latin America and what are the keys to recovery for the region?

I am very concerned. When you look at the impact in the region, it is disproportionate to the percentage of the population that the region has. The number of deaths in the region are far more based on population percentage versus the rest of the world. Something has happened that has caused this deeper impact on the region which is a great source of concern. From an economic perspective, the region does not have the ability to provide the type of support that is needed and that you see happening in the United States or in Europe. There is no fiscal space to do the things needed in Latin America. I am worried about people who have lost many years to this pandemic not being able to catch up since the governments do not have the ability to provide the necessary support and I am very worried about the economies in Latin America. This is a region that was already very uneven in terms of equality and I feel that opportunities for the future in regard to technology and the digital revolution may not materialize in Latin America if they are not properly managed. There is a

need for the international financial institutions to find ways to address the needs of the middle-income countries in order to create opportunities for the future.

What attracted you to the academic world and to your current role?

I had been in the private sector for 25 years, then at the United Nations, and then served in government and I did not plan for any of these roles. These unexpected opportunities helped me discover a new person in me and new things that I could do where I could make an impact. This helped me to learn to transition and adjust and embrace opportunity. This same thing happened in the academic world. I was working as an advisor at IE but it was somewhat of a removed role and through circumstances that occurred, I was offered the opportunity to be the Dean. I embraced that opportunity and I love it. I am a practitioner and not an academic so I bring a different viewpoint and feel that this is a way to shape the future of the world through helping shape the minds and profiles of future leaders.

You are also involved in the Adrienne Arsht Latin America Center. What interested you in working with the Center?

The Center cares about my region which provided a call to engage with it. I am a person who dedicates myself to things that can make a difference and the Center is one of those tools that through exchange and discussion can bring about ideas on how to change and how to improve the region.

There is much debate around the world about gender equity. As a leading woman who has held senior roles in business, government and education, do you feel that progress has been made in providing opportunities for women?

Women need to fight for these opportunities. I do not believe that the opportunities are there at the level that they should be. For me, it is not a matter of justice or a matter of what is right, which it is – it is really a matter of making economic sense. Having half of the population not being fully represented and fully engaged in development, production and the economy is absolutely crazy and that is what is happening. There is no question about the benefit of diversity in decision-making and achieving better results, and the first type of diversity is gender diversity. I believe it is fundamental not to give up until we achieve 50-50 representation because that is when better decisions and outcomes occur, but we are far from there today.

Inequality is a reality throughout the world, and I could argue that in many places we have been pushed back on this agenda. When I was very young, I believed that merit was all that mattered, but now I believe that while merit is important, we also need policies to make action happen in order to achieve the full representation of society.

What advice do you offer to young people beginning their careers during this unprecedented time?

I always remind them that whatever they are learning will serve them a very short time. They need to be ready for a continuous learning journey. The jobs that they may get when they leave school might not be there in five or ten years time. Having your mind open to change is, for me, absolutely essential for the younger generation. They need to realize that their biggest asset is the capacity to associate themselves with others and to work with others. They have to learn the technical skills and be ready to embrace change and to live with uncertainty. Uncertainty can lead to fear and fear is the worst enemy in life, so you need to understand that uncertainty is part of the landscape today and you need to use that uncertainty as a trigger for positive energy to prepare yourself for continuous change. ●

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