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## LEADERSHIP STATEMENT - SILVIA GONZÁLEZ SELLÁN

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I have always been passionately engaged in changing the world around me for the better. At 14 years old (the youngest legally permitted), I joined a Spanish political party dedicated to social and economic justice. For the six years that followed, I participated in drafting political documents, organizing demonstrations and labour strikes, as well as pursuing real change in collaboration with elected officials.

At 15, I proudly took part in the 18-day long occupation of a high-school during the 2012 Spanish Mining Strike. During that time, I helped organize and personally ran daily games and educational activities for young children of striking workers, as one of them myself. As I grew up, I progressively took on more and more of a leadership role in activism. At 16, I founded and became the director of the Dolores Ibárruri student collective, a 10-member group within my party of which I was the youngest member. I organized and participated in several school and university strikes against the Spanish government's cuts in education.

At 17, I led a successful student boycott of my high-school's sponsored final-year trip against the organizers' choice of [redacted discriminatory policy]. During this time, my own family's financial hardship increased due to [personal family events]. Nevertheless, I ended my last year of high-school with the highest average grade (an exact 100%), completed the Spanish University Entrance exam on the top 1% of scores, and earned the only awarded regional High-School Excellence Scholarship, which covers first-year public college tuition. I chose to study a double-Bachelor's program in Physics and Mathematics.

At 18, I started participating in the Spanish anti-eviction movement. We used civil disobedience to confront police-enforced evictions of vulnerable families who had no alternative accommodation, an event which was unfortunately common at the time. I chose to risk arrest and prosecution to defend what I believe are inalienable human rights and dignities, a choice I would repeat today and which I am proud of making. This was also the year in which I was able to vote for the first time, and signed up to be an election volunteer worker. I have done this in every election since, and have found organizing and actively participating in democratic society to be one of the most fulfilling experiences of my lifetime.

At 19, I came out publicly as transgender, and became a founding member of the regional Sexual and Gender Diversity Association. Together with my then boyfriend (now husband), we led the effort to make the University recognize name and gender changes for transgender students, and protested for the inclusion of gender-neutral washrooms on campus. Albeit slow, change did eventually come: three years after our initial meeting with University officials, both of our demands were officially

implemented. This did mean, however, that for the vast majority of my college years I saw no institutional recognition of my transgender status, and had live under constant misgendering and dead-naming by professors and students alike, something I am truly glad future students will not have to go through thanks to our pressure.

At 20, I moved in with my husband and returned to tutoring to cover our expenses. Managing a part time job and two simultaneous Bachelors' programs was definitely challenging. Fortunately, I developed the time management skills necessary to succeed at it, and was chosen for the 2017 Fields Undergraduate Summer Research program in Toronto. I saw collaborating with the University of Toronto as my best chance of making it out of a small public Spanish university and into the world of first-class scientific research in an accepting city. Because of this, I spent the next year combining my studies with the writing of my first first-authored scientific paper, which I submitted for publication at 21. In 2018, I participated for the second consecutive year in the Fields Institute Undergraduate Summer Research Program. This time, I took on more of a leadership role within my research team and taught the rest of the students what I had learned the previous year. I coordinated and oversaw our work on the project, which also ended up as a scientific publication.

I ended 2018 by applying to graduate school, and got accepted to the University of Toronto and [renowned US institution]. Despite the reputation of the latter, I chose to come to Canada because I felt it aligned best with my firm ideals of inclusion, diversity and social justice. Today, I am certain I made the right choice.

Like everyone's 2020, my first PhD year has been different from what I had initially planned. I have had to quickly adapt to a whole new set of circumstances, which has not stopped me from virtually presenting my latest paper at the biggest Computer Graphics venue in the world, and submitting another one for publication. My planned internship at Adobe San Francisco is now fully virtual, which carries with it the usual research coordination challenges across many different timezones and spaces.

The next year will most likely carry with it more uncertainty and expect more sacrifice from all of us. To navigate it, I hope to rely on my firmly set principles, my proven ability for adapting to challenges and the hope that a fairer world is waiting on the horizon.