



**Name:** Iris van der Veken  
**Position:** Executive Director  
**Company name:** Responsible Jewellery Council - RJC  
**Years in business:** 18  
**Business philosophy:** to drive sustainable development through RJC membership, scale up partnerships, embrace women empowerment and measure positive impact

## PROFILE

### WHO ARE YOU?

I have a background in law, communications and international relations. I worked in different industries across many countries from technology, diamonds, gold and jewelry and fashion. The common denominator has always been sustainability; that is my passion.

I am the proud mother of a 19-year-old son. I have been a volunteer for the Special Olympics for over 30 years. Inclusion – Inclusion- Inclusion- that is my mantra. We have to embrace and integrate people of determination- there is so much we can learn from them. And I am a runner. It is a great way to relax my mind and focus at work. The Antwerp 10 Miles and the Marathon of NY are two of my favorite runs.

### WHAT DO YOU DO TODAY – WHERE AND HOW

In April, I took on a new role in London as the Executive Director of the Responsible Jewellery Council (RJC). I am thrilled to work for an organization where I can

leverage my passion and skillset working closely with over 1,200 companies from mining to retail in the diamond, jewelry, silver, gold and colored stones supply chain in order to contribute to the 2030 Agenda as art of the UN 17 Sustainable Development Goals.

### WHERE DID YOU COME FROM?

I am no stranger to the industry. I had the privilege to work for some leading companies such as Rosy Blue and Signet. Some of the work I am particularly proud of was the first on the ground pilot of the RJC Code of Practices in India, Antwerp, Thailand and Sri-Lanka; establishing and chairing the United Nations Global Compact Belgium in partnership with the Belgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs; the launch of the Children's Rights and Business Principles Forum in Belgium and promotion of the Women's Empowerment Principles in the UAE as well as the recent work on the OECD Alignment exercise. All these examples

are based on a model of collaboration and partnership with a purpose.

### WHAT DID YOU FIND WHEN YOU GOT HERE?

First of all, it is inspiring to work with people who believe in purpose. I strongly believe the RJC has never been more relevant in this era of Return on Responsibility. Responsible business is good business. It is all about consumer confidence. When a consumer walks in a store or buys a diamond online, he or she has a right to know that the company it buys from is a company that drives sustainability forward and integrates good practices. Product integrity is non-negotiable. There is no option B. The RJC plays a leading role in mobilizing and facilitating companies to build a positive impact in their supply chain. We can support any company small or large to integrate the robust Code of Practices in its operations. It is a roadmap of continuous improvement.

### WHY DID YOU STAY? WHAT ARE YOUR PRIORITIES?

I love diamonds. They are a force for good, helping people mark important moments of their lives, thus becoming part of their life stories. So, the choice of coming back to the industry was a natural step. Consumer desire should not be taken for granted. Every company needs to build sustainability in their strategy. The RJC is your partner to do so.

My first priority is Members First... delivering long-term growth and value creation.

This is why I am taking time to meet with our member companies and potential members to learn how we can do things better. Digital transformation is at the heart of our strategy. Second is building partnerships with key stakeholders.

### WHAT DIFFERENCE DO WOMEN MAKE IN IN THE GEM AND JEWELRY INDUSTRY AND TRADE?

Women represent half of the total population worldwide. Empowering women represents the single biggest opportunity for economic growth. Investing early in the lives of women and providing girls with just one extra year of secondary education can increase a

girl's potential income by 15-25 percent. All industries have a shared responsibility. According to a recent World Economic Forum Gender Gap Report, it will take 100 years to close the gender gap at the current rate of progress, compared with 83 years previously. That is not acceptable.

We should not forget that women control 70 to 80 percent of all consumer spending through a combination of buying power and influence. It is imperative that every organization in our industry start looking at their impact through a gender lens. Women are changing the industry.

### WHAT CHANGES ARE NEEDED TO MAKE THIS INDUSTRY WELCOME WOMEN TO KEY POSITIONS?

It starts with your internal practices and how you can support women and then you can look at the bigger picture in your supply chain...through your brands and your consumers. At RJC I have a dedicated team with over 60 percent women. We are now doing a WEPS assessment (Women Empowerment Principles) to understand where we are and how we can move forward. It is a moral responsibility to drive SDG 5 Gender Equality forward.

## Consumers care about the positive stories behind diamonds



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