



Inter-Parliamentary Union

For democracy. For everyone.

Chemin du Pommier 5
Case postale 330
1218 Le Grand-Saconnex
Geneva – Switzerland
www.ipu.org

IPU Statement

Ms. Margaret Mensah-Williams
Chairperson of the National Council of Namibia, President of the IPU Bureau of Women Parliamentarians

61st Session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women
New York, 20 March 2017

Chairperson,
Distinguished delegates,

It is a great pleasure for me to take the floor on behalf of the Inter-Parliamentary Union.

On 17 March, IPU and UN Women organised their annual Parliamentary Meeting on the occasion of the 61st session of the Commission on the Status of Women. The event was entitled *Empowering parliaments to empower women – Making the economy work for women*.

This event is the quintessence of the collaboration between IPU and UN Women. Our organisations share the belief that parliaments are key to achieving gender equality. That is why we feel it is so important for parliamentarians to contribute to the work of the Commission. Parliamentary participation is also crucial if we are to ensure national follow-up to decisions taken here.

The annual Parliamentary Meeting was interactive and constructive and attended by 140 members of parliament from 47 countries. Debates focused on parliamentary strategies to advance women's economic empowerment.

There were three main conclusions.

First, we need to lay the groundwork. Women's economic empowerment requires addressing cross-cutting issues such as gender stereotypes, discriminatory legislation, gender-based violence and unequal access to education and decision-making positions.

We need to use existing data and campaign for lifting discrimination. The situation of 173 countries having discriminatory legislation can no longer be tolerated.

Nor can we tolerate having only 23.3% women in parliament. More women must be in decision-making positions providing the ground for women's economic empowerment. IPU has been promoting greater political participation for years

and progress is slow. We will continue working together with all of you and partners such as UN Women.

Second, parliaments must review their labor and social policies to promote equality at work. Women need available and affordable childcare. Unpaid care work must be shared between men and women as a condition to ensuring equality in paid work. This is key to achieving Sustainable Development Goal 5, and in particular target 5.4. Equal pay legislation is necessary.

Social protection coverage must cut across all sectors, including those mostly occupied by women – such as the care economy and the informal sector – but also for self-employed women. We must ensure work is a safe place for women and combat sexual harassment. Specific measures for women to lead companies are required.

Third, we need to promote women’s ability to hold the purse strings and make economic decisions – so that they can own land, access credit, invest freely, save and start their own businesses. Specific, targeted measures for women’s financial inclusion are key. Financial services must be accessible and affordable, and women need support to increase their access to those opportunities. Budgets and fiscal policies must be scrutinized through a gender lens so they deliver for women and for the whole national economy.

To conclude, our parliamentary meeting identified cross-cutting issues that we need to address:

1. Women are not a homogenous group. We all carry our particularities and need specific measures to ensure equal economic opportunities. Women with disabilities in particular require attention by all of us, legislators, government officials and gender advocates. We must start by ensuring they are also represented in our parliaments.
2. All legislation for women’s economic empowerment requires strong oversight from parliamentarians to ensure that laws passed are implemented, resourced, and monitored for results.
3. Data collection, disaggregated by gender, is key to inform our decisions and promote gender-sensitive reforms. It is also an enabler of accountability.
4. Partnerships are a must: we need partnerships among women, partnerships with men and also with financial institutions and civil society organizations

All of us – women and men parliamentarians – have a heavy agenda ahead. We look forward to working with you to deliver gender equality for everyone and throughout the economy.

Thank you.