



INTER-PARLIAMENTARY UNION

CHEMIN DU POMMIER 5
1218 LE GRAND-SACONNEX / GENEVA (SWITZERLAND)
TELEPHONE (41.22) 919 41 50 - FAX (41.22)919 41 60
E-MAIL postbox@mail.ipu.org

Speech delivered by Senator Monica Xavier on behalf of the Inter-Parliamentary Union to the 51st session of the Commission on the Status of Women

It is a great pleasure for me to take the floor today on behalf of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU). I am Monica Xavier, a member of the Senate of Uruguay and President of the IPU Coordinating Committee of Women Parliamentarians.

Listening to the ongoing debates held at the CSW this week, it is clear that there is still a long way to go to build and offer a secure environment for girls, protect them from discrimination and violence and most importantly provide them with opportunities to grow and develop.

Child protection has been a priority for the Inter-Parliamentary Union for many years now. Despite international legal instruments and wide international mobilisation, girls continue to endure *de facto* and *de jure* inequalities in all societies of the world. International reviews and monitoring in the past ten years have cast a harsh light on this discrimination and fundamental inequality. Girls have less access than boys to food, physical and mental health care, and education - though this has improved in the past years. They enjoy fewer rights and opportunities. They are less confident and given less support than boys. Girls are more vulnerable to violence and exploitation. Many are subjected to harmful traditional practices like female genital mutilation, for which there is no possible excuse. They endure marriage while they are still children, sexual violence, trafficking, and HIV/AIDS.

Faced with these appalling facts, it is vital that we mobilize the parliamentary community for it to make the difference back home when it comes to protecting and empowering the girl child. The IPU is very much committed to strengthening parliamentary input in this field. In this work we have achieved much with our partnership with UNICEF. Together we have developed a strategy to help parliamentarians do more to protect children's rights. The strategy consists of a series of activities including seminars, production of Handbooks for parliamentarians and research on legislation...

As you know the IPU aims to bring a parliamentary dimension to the proceedings of intergovernmental organisations. On 1 March we held a parliamentary meeting on "The parliamentary dimension to discrimination and violence against the girl child". This event was organised with our partners from the Division for the Advancement of Women whom I want to thank for their support. We had more than 150 members of parliament from around the world for what was a lively and constructive meeting. This meeting aimed to complement and enrich the deliberations of the 51st Session of the Commission on the Status of Women.

Our debates highlighted among other things the specific part that parliaments can play in the global effort to put an end to violence against the girl child and empowering her. And there is a lot parliaments can do. They have the power to legislate, they have the power to oversee proper implementation of laws, and to allocate the necessary financial resources to make a change. As leaders, members of parliament can also raise awareness, combat discrimination, tackle stereotypes, protect and provide support to children. What is more, members of parliament can and should bring children's voices to the world of politics and address their needs.

Discussions focused on legislation – the need to develop and adopt strong laws that cover outlawing all types of violence against the girl child, physical and psychological, but also in spheres where legislators sometimes hesitate to tackle like violence in the home. We also agreed that legislation needed to be reviewed on a regular basis and that parliaments had to exercise their oversight function thoroughly, through parliamentary committees, questions to government, and ombudspersons so as to ensure that legislation responded to the needs of the girl child.

But legislation is not enough and we discussed the need for accompanying enforcement regulations, policies and programmes as well as the importance of voting resources for the girl child.

Partnership with men was much discussed – they are our allies in our fight for equality and for changing mentalities. We highlighted the need to develop policies that would empower men to take a more active role in spheres where they have been traditionally less active. We also stressed the importance of education and building the capacities of girls.

These are just a few points. A more comprehensive report of our meeting will be made available in a few days.

The other meeting the IPU organised this week was for women Speakers of Parliament and their role in caring for the next generation of women, today's girl children. Half of the women speakers of parliament in the world today were in New York to discuss what they could do as political leaders and as role models to bring about change for the girl child.

We must address this scourge from all possible angles and bring together the good will and commitment of all actors of society. In unity lies strength.

With this in mind I would like to draw your attention to one example of cooperation which the IPU is proud to be part of. This week the IPU, with its partners from IDEA, NDI, UNDP and UNIFEM, launched the international Knowledge Network of Women in Politics, or iKNOW politics, which is a virtual network linking women in politics around the globe. The new network's on-line workspace—www.iKNOWPolitics.org—is designed for parliamentarians, legislators, candidates, political party members, researchers and practitioners to support women's full political participation through the sharing of information, expertise and best practices. I hope that this network will serve to highlight achievement of women and provide good examples and mentoring for the girl child.

Colleagues,

I am sure our activities in the following days will be rich and incisive. I hope they will serve to highlight the pivotal role of parliament in this field. I would therefore like to conclude by urging you all to ensure that the conclusions of the debates at this CSW give parliaments and parliamentary cooperation their due place. It is through such inter-parliamentary exchanges between national parliaments that a collective parliamentary voice can be heard at the United Nations. And it is through such inter-parliamentary exchanges that the United Nations can receive the enhanced political understanding and support that it requires from national parliaments.

This is the third successive year in which the IPU has held parliamentary meetings during the CSW. I would like to thank the United Nations and the Division for the Advancement of Women for their support. We look forward to strengthening and building on this cooperation.

Thank you very much.