



INTER-PARLIAMENTARY UNION
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Statement by:

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

The CSW has just completed a first week of debates on the equal participation of men and women in decision-making. It is sad to note that, as things stand today, we are still a long way from equality. On Monday of this week the IPU issued its annual analysis on women in politics and the picture that emerges is rather mixed. Let me give you some of the highlights:

- In 1995, women accounted for 11.3% of legislators in the world's parliaments, including both chambers. In 2005, they represented 16.3% of legislators: a small five-percentage point increase over ten years.
- In 1995, Sweden topped the ranking of women in parliament with 40.4 per cent. By 2005 Rwanda had taken over with 48.8%.
- In 1995, women accounted for less than 10% of the members in a majority (63%) of the world's parliaments. By 2005, this figure had dropped to 32 per cent.
- In 2005, some 20 countries had reached or surpassed the Beijing Platform for Action Target of 30% of women in parliament.
- It is encouraging to note that 20% of all MPs who were elected in 2005 elections were women.

All in all, one might say that the situation is moderately encouraging but if current incremental rates continue, an average of 30 per cent women in parliament will not be reached until 2025. As for true parity, that would have to wait till 2040!

So our first objective should be to increase the number of women in parliament and to speed up the process in order to have truly representative and participative parliaments, which are the cornerstone of any democracy.

But this is merely a quantitative goal and our attention now is also squarely focused on enhancing women's input into decision-making. With this in mind, the IPU organized two specific events during the CSW.

First, on Monday, a meeting of women Speakers of Parliament was held, to discuss the specific role of these women leaders in furthering gender equality. Twelve women Speakers, representing half of the legislatures presided over by a woman, met for a lively debate.

The key question that was debated was **HOW** women are making an impact.

The short answer is that the mere presence of women has changed politics. As the Speaker from Jamaica stated, “women transform parliaments by being themselves.”

Women’s presence in parliament and their active participation in the legislative process is also necessary for the articulation of women’s issues. Women have to be in parliament and talk about problems they encounter with regard to poverty, economic empowerment, health and population, violence, democracy and human rights.

The Speakers said that the changes brought by women parliamentarians to the institution of parliament operated on different levels. I will mention 4 points:

First, women are instrumental in transforming the actual **physical** premises to make them more gender friendly and better adapted to the needs of working women with families. (facilities such as crèches, toilet, gyms etc)

Second, they bring about changes in the **institutional culture**, using their influence to instill working methods and procedures to make parliaments better adapted to women members. (such as meeting times etc)

Third, they **change the institutional discourse** to make it reflect their values. This often entails changes in language and vocabulary that had originated in patriarchal thinking.

Finally, they **influence the legislative agenda** to ensure that issues of particular importance to women are allowed a place in the debate.

With regard to women Speakers of parliament, their potential as **role models** was emphasized. A study has shown that women Speakers the authority of parliament is elevated in the public eye. Women Speakers can also wield influence outside the parliament because their position gives opportunities to voice opinions in other fora.

The IPU’s second event this week was our annual parliamentary meeting, organized in cooperation with the United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women. Some 150 parliamentarians were present from all regions of the world. This event provided an opportunity to discuss parliamentary mechanisms to promote gender equality within the institution of parliament.

While a number of themes were discussed, particular attention was paid to the role of parliamentary committees and bodies dealing with gender equality. The IPU released a provisional directory of such bodies. You will be pleased to note that so far some 60 parliaments have reported the existence of specific parliamentary bodies to address gender equality.

There was a broad recognition of the value of such committees in defending women's rights and promoting gender issues. Emphasis was placed on the need to ensure cooperation between these committees and other bodies, whether inside or outside the parliament. Several parliaments mentioned the importance of further investigating the structure and functioning of these committees, and facilitating contact between them, which is something the IPU will be working on.

Colleagues

The debate was rich and incisive. It showed the extent of parliament's commitment to defending gender equality. It also highlighted 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 exchange here at the United Nations that the UN can receive the enhanced political understanding and support that it requires from national parliaments.

This is the second 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.