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Intervention by Senator Salwa Damen-Masri on behalf of the Inter-Parliamentary Union

Commission of the Status of Women, United Nations

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It is an honour and a pleasure to speak here today, on behalf of the Inter-Parliamentary Union, on the two themes of this year's Commission, namely enhancing women's participation in reconstruction and reconciliation process in post-conflict countries and the role of men and boys in promoting gender equality.

If I could just introduce myself: I am a member of the Senate of the Kingdom of Jordan, and a member of the IPU's Coordinating Committee of Women Parliamentarians.

I would like to begin by noting and commending both the important and extremely productive work of the Commission on the Status of Women.

To give a brief background on our organisation, the IPU is the world organisation of parliaments, and currently includes 138 member parliaments. It works for the enhancement and strengthening of parliamentary democracy, placing particular emphasis on the question of gender equality in politics, and more particularly on the situation of women in parliament. The IPU considers that a balanced participation of men and women in the management of public affairs is central to any democracy. In this context, the IPU has developed, over the past 30 years, a number of programmes to assist women's participation in the political process.

Much more work needs to be done, however: today, women still only constitute an average of 15 per cent of all national parliamentarians.

A more promising and recent phenomenon, however, has been the proliferation of women in the parliaments of post-conflict countries.

- Many post-conflict countries appear within the top 30 countries of the world ranking of women in national parliaments, several averaging between 25 to 30 per cent:

Rwanda (48.8% - rank n°1);
Mozambique (30% - rank n°14);
South Africa (29.8% - rank n°15);
Namibia (26.4% - rank n°20);

Timor-Leste (26.1% - rank n°22);
Uganda (24.7% - rank n°26);
Eritrea (22% - rank n°31);
Nicaragua (20.7% - rank n° 35).

The IPU has carried out a number of projects in post-conflict countries, aimed at facilitating women's capacity to participate in reconstruction and democratic processes. These projects have been developed in response to the challenges and obstacles women face in acceding to decision-making positions, particularly in parliament.

IPU activities have covered support to women running in national elections and women participating in constitutional drafting processes. For instance, the IPU supported women in the constitutional drafting process in Rwanda. This drafting process produced a particularly gender-sensitive Constitution, including an electoral quota for women. In fact, Rwanda went from 17.1% in 1988 (prior to the conflict), to 25.7% (during the transition period), to 48.8% in 2003 (post-conflict).

Once elected, women require support to be able to actively participate in the work and life of the parliament. Support activities carried out by the IPU fall under four main categories: capacity building activities for women parliamentarians; strengthening Parliament's capacity to address gender issues; establishing networking links; and sensitising men to gender issues.

Let me go through each one briefly.

1. *Capacity building activities for women parliamentarians*

Women parliamentarians in post-conflict countries generally have no prior parliamentary or political experience. Consequently, assistance has been given in the form of training workshops to develop certain skills, including public speaking, preparation and delivery of campaign speeches, learning and using parliamentary procedures, and so forth. Activities have also been developed to assist women MPs in addressing specific gender concerns, and facilitating the sharing of women's experiences of parliamentary life and best practices.

2. *Strengthening Parliament's capacity to address gender issues*

For gender issues to be adequately addressed, the Parliament needs to be equipped with specific institutional resources. Women parliamentarians need up-to-date, reliable information and data on gender concerns. To this end, the IPU has supported the establishment of resource centres within parliaments. These centres have benefited from training seminars for staff, and the purchase of specific publications on gender issues. The IPU has also produced a series of handbooks for parliamentarians, including its handbook on the Convention of the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women, produced last year in collaboration with the UN.

3. *National networks*

When women act in concert, they can achieve great things, as demonstrated in Pakistan recently when women joined forces to introduce new laws on violence against women. The IPU is committed to assisting women develop national fora for women MPs, be they across political parties or between MPs and civil society. Assistance projects of the IPU have seen the development of women's caucuses in

Rwanda and Burundi, and work is currently being carried out in this respect in Timor-Leste.

4. *Sensitising men to gender issues*

Partnership with men is another essential ingredient. Men must be included in training workshops. For example, the IPU's seminar series on Parliament and the Budgetary Process, Including from a Gender Perspective are very good examples of collaboration between men and women parliamentarians. All IPU seminars and workshops, however, include men and women.

I come then, to the question of the role of men and boys in promoting gender equality. The IPU's approach to gender equality has always been premised on the idea of partnership between men and women, without which there can be no true democracy. As the Speaker of the Namibian Parliament, and former chair of the IPU's Gender Partnership Group, has said: « a man of quality should not fear women who seek equality ».

The IPU has developed a series of institutional mechanisms to facilitate gender equality in delegations to IPU Assembly.

For example :

- Delegations are strongly encouraged to be comprised of both men and women. In fact, the proportion of women at the IPU's latest Assembly in 2003 was over 28 per cent, being much higher than the current proportion of women in national parliaments world-wide, which is just over 15 per cent.
- Amongst the IPU structures, the Gender Partnership Group, composed of two men and two women, specifically aims to promote dialogue between men and women.
- The day-long Meeting of Women Parliamentarians held during the IPU's first Assembly of the year now includes a special segment on dialogue between men and women. This year, for example, we will hold a discussion on gender budgeting with interested men parliamentarians.

We strongly believe that together, men and women can advance the cause of gender equality.

In conclusion, I would like to take this opportunity, on behalf of the IPU, to pay tribute to the work of Mrs Angela King in promoting gender equality. Mrs King has been integral to collaborative efforts between the IPU and the UN on gender issues and we thank her for her commitment and dedication. We wish her all the best in her future endeavours.

Thank you.