



INTER-PARLIAMENTARY UNION

53rd Session of the Commission on the Status of Women

S T A T E M E N T

**by Senator Pia Cayetano (Philippines)
President of the IPU Coordinating Committee of Women
Parliamentarians**

**United Nations
New York, 5 March 2009**

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Mr. Chairman,

Yesterday, the Inter-Parliamentary Union and the United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women organized a parliamentary meeting focusing on the role of parliaments in promoting equal sharing of responsibilities between men and women. I would like to thank UNDAW for its cooperation. It was the fifth annual parliamentary meeting of its kind jointly organized on the occasion of the CSW. I would like to state how important it is for parliamentarians to participate in the process of the Commission, contribute to the debate and learn from the information, exchanges and meetings that take place. It is also important for parliamentarians to go back home with the commitment to ensure national follow-up to the decisions that have been taken here.

Our meeting was a success, with the participation of over 100 parliamentarians from 45 countries. I will report now on some of its results.

Let me begin with one general comment: when going through the Draft Agreed Conclusions, we noted that parliaments have a contribution to make in most, if not all, of the recommendations put forward, whether in terms of legislation, adoption of the budget, changing mindsets or overseeing government action. We therefore encourage the Commission to acknowledge this role in the text. This would certainly provide parliamentarians with an incentive to follow up the Conclusions within their respective parliaments.

More specifically several **priority areas** emerged during our debates which I would like to bring to your attention. Some reinforce already existing recommendations in the Draft Agreed Conclusions, whereas others fall more directly in the ambit of parliament.

The **first point** is the need to recognize and **make more visible** unpaid care work. Parliamentarians feel strongly that this should be upheld as a general principle, regardless of whether it is performed by women or men, although we all know that the majority of unpaid care work is performed by women. Without visibility there can be no protection, no rights, no benefits, no inclusion, and no support.

As parliamentarians, we can go back to our countries and examine the tools at our disposal to showcase the value of unpaid care work. We need to question our national accounts systems, make use of time-use surveys and most importantly, use the **national budgetary process** to take into account the contribution of unpaid care work and provide support to those who perform it.

The **second point** is the need to reduce the **burden of unpaid work** and promote equal sharing of responsibilities between men and women in the field of care. To achieve this, existing legislative frameworks have to be reviewed and national policies and laws have to be brought in line with international commitments, particularly those aimed at protecting and supporting women workers. Most countries have ratified international labour conventions related to workers with family responsibilities, maternity protection, hours of work, etc. Policies must translate into action on the ground and parliamentarians have a fundamental role to play in this respect.

But how many countries have actually developed and enforced the required national legislation and policies needed? We have examined closely our policies, for instance on parental leave, breastfeeding and discrimination against women workers. On this point, we underscored the importance of a gender-balanced approach to care-giving and the need to develop measures to support a more active role of men in care-giving.

The **third point** relates to changing mindsets and addressing **gender stereotypes**. As opinion makers, parliamentarians can make a difference by challenging existing gender stereotypes and prompting a change of mentality. This begins with education and promoting gender equality in school curricula and grass-roots programmes. In addition, addressing gender stereotypes from a policy perspective is also required. As parliamentarians, we need to publicly highlight the value of care and draw attention to the role and responsibilities of men.

The **fourth point** relates to **institutions** and, in particular, the institution of parliament. There was much debate about how the workplace, and in our case parliaments, can become more gender-sensitive and family-friendly. One of the primary obstacles to women's political participation is their difficulty in balancing family responsibilities with political commitments. We examined some reforms implemented by parliaments, but to be honest, examples are few and far between. Parliamentarians need to lead by example. Therefore, one of our specific responsibilities is to start implementing family-friendly measures within our own parliaments, and become measures of good institutional performance.

The world today is undergoing a major **economic upheaval**. In such times of uncertainty, there is a need to ensure that public expenditure related to social development and gender equality is safeguarded and not forfeited because of competing priorities. A key concern is that reductions in public expenditure could result in additional pressure on households and therefore on unpaid care work.

While this is undoubtedly a time of crisis, it is perhaps also an **opportunity** to change and review discriminatory and outdated economic concepts. It is our hope that the response to the current situation and the resulting economic world order will address current imbalances and misconceptions, recognize and reward women's various contributions to the economy and promote a more gender-balanced sharing of societal roles.

As far as the IPU is concerned, we will be addressing this aspect during our upcoming international parliamentary conference on the global economic crisis. We will hence also seek to provide relevant input to the preparatory process for the UN high-level conference on the world financial and economic crisis, to be held in New York later this year.

Let me end by highlighting the interest expressed by the many parliamentarians present yesterday and their commitment to follow up in their respective countries some of the debates held. They also committed to follow up the Agreed Conclusions from the CSW in their parliaments. We are convinced that if each of us plays our part, progress can be achieved.

I thank you for your attention.