



Inter-Parliamentary Union
For democracy. For everyone.

Statement by the Permanent Observer Hon. Patricia Torsney

Commission of the Status of Women Fifty-Eighth Session

United Nations

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

On 11 March, the Inter-Parliamentary Union and UN Women organized a parliamentary event on the occasion of the 58th session of the Commission on the Status of Women. The event was entitled *At the crossroads of sustainable development and gender equality: the role of parliaments*. Before sharing the outcome with you, allow me to renew our thanks to UN Women for its ongoing cooperation, and to stress once again how important it is for parliamentarians to participate in the work of the Commission, follow its debates and learn from the wealth of information, exchanges and meetings that it generates. The Commission also allows policymakers to return home with a much better understanding of the overall UN process and the commitment to help ensure national follow-up of the decisions that have been taken here.

Let me turn now to the outcome of last week's annual parliamentary event. The event was a very interactive and constructive meeting attended by some 200 members of parliament from 43 countries. It concentrated on three main themes: (1) achievements and remaining challenges in terms of women's participation in decision-making, not only in politics but also in the corporate sector and the media; (2) the role of parliaments in implementing the Millennium Development Goals, and lessons learnt; and (3) the place of gender equality in the new generation of development goals.

Chair, allow me to highlight the three main outcomes of that meeting.

My first message is a positive one: change is possible. As you may have seen, the IPU and UN Women launched the *2014 Map on Women in Politics* during the Commission session. If you were to compare that map with the one produced in 2005, you would be struck by how much progress we have made.

- In 2005, only 15.7 per cent of parliamentarians worldwide were women. This figure has increased by almost 40 per cent, to 21.8 per cent.

- In 2005, 14.3 per cent of ministers worldwide were women. This figure has risen by 20 per cent, to 17.2 per cent.
- In 2005, nine countries had no women in parliament; this is the case today of only four countries.
- In 2005, eight countries had a woman head of State or government. Today, 18 countries do.
- In 2005, women accounted for 8.3 per cent of Speakers around the world. They currently account for 14.8 per cent.

While we are still far from equality, it is important to stress that change is possible and that progress has been made.

The situation is different, however, when it comes to women's participation in decision-making in other sectors, such as the corporate world or the media, where they are still widely underrepresented.

There are persistent challenges, and they bring me to my second point: change will require strong measures and political will.

The difficulty in reconciling work and life balance continues to hinder women's participation in all fields. Women do not yet have access to the financial, educational and capacity-development opportunities that are needed in politics and in other sectors. In many countries, the constitutional and legal frameworks required to secure equal participation of men and women are still missing or poorly enforced. The spheres of power remain an unfriendly, if not violent, environment for women.

There are several strategies for tackling these challenges. First and foremost, quotas remain a strong and efficient tool when they are ambitious and well enforced. Reform of political parties is another priority. Political parties have to be genuinely open to women and be given innovative incentives for including women (for instance, more media time for parties with greater numbers of women candidates or women members). Parliamentary institutions should also be examined and transformed to become more gender-sensitive in the way they function and are organized. Alliances between women, such as women's caucuses, and partnerships with men can also help enhance women's participation and more broadly advance women's rights and gender equality. A greater effort also has to be made to enhance women's participation at the local level, as this can be a stepping stone to entry into parliament or government. All in all, bold measures need to be taken to accelerate women's access to decision-making positions. And this will require commitment and political will from members of parliaments.

In terms of implementation of the Millennium Development Goals and of the next generation of development goals, our attention focused on the role of parliaments. This brings me to our third message - without strong parliaments and democratic

governance, it will not be possible to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. Parliaments have a key role to play in ensuring that gender equality is realized through the SDGs. But for parliaments to meet the challenge and actively play their part, they will need to build their capacity and power. They will have to organize their internal structures to ensure that the SDGs, and gender equality concerns, are mainstreamed throughout the legislative and oversight processes, such as the budget process. To that end, they need to consider appropriate deliberative mechanisms, such as a specialized committee or caucus. Such mechanisms, however, need to play a coordinating role if there is to be a greater chance that the respective expertise of the different committees will lead to more effective policies.

Chair,

Let me end by highlighting the interest expressed by the many parliamentarians present at our meeting to continue to be involved in the work of the United Nations. They undertook to follow up some of the meeting's debates and conclusions in their respective countries. We are convinced that if we all play our part, we can make significant progress.

Thank you.