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COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN New York, 28 February 2008

Intervention by Senator Monica Xavier (Uruguay) On behalf of the Inter-Parliamentary Union

Mr. Chairman,

It is a great pleasure for me to take the floor on behalf of the Inter-Parliamentary Union. My name is Monica Xavier, I am a Senator from Uruguay and President of the IPU Coordinating Committee of Women Parliamentarians.

Yesterday, the Inter-Parliamentary Union and the United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women organized a parliamentary meeting on the role that parliaments can play in financing for gender equality. I would like to thank UNDAW for its cooperation. It was the fourth parliamentary meeting we have jointly organized each year on the occasion of the CSW. I would like to underline how important it is for legislators to participate in the process of the Commission, contribute to the debate and learn from the information, exchanges and meetings that we hold here. It is also important for us parliamentarians to go back home with the commitment to ensure national follow-up of the decisions that have been taken here.

Yesterday's meeting was very successful and it enjoyed strong participation - over 130 parliamentarians from some 50 countries participated in a very engaging and constructive debate.

I would like to mention here a few of the issues that were discussed and commitments made.

The issue of financing is crucial to meeting national and international objectives for gender equality. How many times have we - as parliamentarians - found ourselves in a situation where we pass laws, approve programmes, develop national plans for women and identify clear objectives which we cannot satisfactorily implement because of a lack of resources.

If we are committed to meeting the MDGs and achieving gender equality in our countries, we need to establish priorities and provide necessary financing so that our efforts are effective. From this perspective, we as parliamentarians can play a key role. Our capacity to adopt budgets and exercise oversight of executive action affords us a central role to ensure that set objectives are met.

I would just refer to three salient points of the many we discussed yesterday. The first one relates to gender-sensitive budgets. Participants clearly emphasized that this can be a very

effective mechanism for meeting the needs of both men and women. This does not imply a separate budget for women, but rather mainstreaming gender into all political and economic processes. One of the commitments we made yesterday was to initiate or strengthen this type of process in our own parliaments.

If in our countries we do not implement gender-sensitive budgets, we as parliamentarians have a commitment to ask ourselves why, pressure our governments and question our institutions.

The second point refers to parliament's oversight role. In order to ably carry out this function, we have to set objectives, establish goals, defend positions and regularly monitor the situation. We should be vigilant and examine all opportunities to secure financing for gender equality. In so doing, we need to analyse the gender impact of all economic and financial measures. We should follow more closely international aid and not be afraid to request conditionalities that promote gender equality. We should also initiate discussions and examine the impact of taxation on men and women. For example, the impact of indirect taxes such as VAT should be carefully scrutinized, given that they have a greater impact on the lives of women. We should also think creatively and not be afraid to adopt measures such as, for example, earmarking resources in favour of gender equality. One of the experiences which we discussed yesterday was the earmarking of resources from alcohol taxes for programmes to combat violence against women.

The third point concerns the need to review our laws and frameworks so as to eliminate discriminatory measures. Indeed, we should avoid financing programmes and systems which discriminate against women. One example we dwelt on is the question of financing political parties. Time and time again it has been said that we cannot increase financial support for women's political participation without in parallel reviewing the internal functioning of political parties, which very often discriminate against women.

In order to achieve change we need political will and we need to work together. The debates in the Commission are very important for our societies. However, the responsibility to translate commitments into effective change does not fall exclusively to governments. Parliaments are part of this process of change, and we call upon the Commission to include in its conclusions our role in this process. We as parliamentarians and the IPU are committed to follow up these conclusions and contribute to their implementation in our countries.

Last but not least, I would like to mention that yesterday we presented a new Map of Women in Politics, which provides an overview of the situation of women in parliament and in government across the world as of 1 January 2008. The Map shows that we are still far from achieving parity. Only 17.7 per cent of parliamentarians and 16 per cent of ministers are women. Not to mention the level of women in the highest decision-making positions, such as head of State or head of parliaments, which remains very low.

The inequality that these figures illustrate is closely linked to an inequality of resources provided to combating discrimination against women. In conclusion, we need to strengthen our efforts and action to achieve genuine equality between men and women.