

Governing Council
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REPORTS ON RECENT IPU SPECIALIZED CONFERENCES AND MEETINGS

REGIONAL DEBATE ON "GENDER-SENSITIVE PARLIAMENTS"

(Valparaíso, Chile, 11-12 July 2012)

1. In 2011, the IPU launched another publication, *Gender-sensitive parliaments - A global review of good practice*. This publication provides a comprehensive account of how parliaments can and should serve as models and champions of gender equality. The issue is of great importance for the IPU, which is committed to fostering gender-sensitive change in parliament.
2. As part of this work on gender-sensitive parliaments, the IPU, in collaboration with International IDEA, conducted a series of case studies in Latin America. Representatives of the parliaments of Argentina, Bolivia, Costa Rica, Mexico and Peru who participated in the national case studies used in the publication gathered in the city of Valparaíso, Chile, on 11 and 12 July 2012, together with counterparts from Chile, Ecuador and Uruguay to share experiences and lessons learned on adapting parliaments to gender needs.
3. The inaugural session of the regional debate was addressed by the Speaker of the Chamber of Deputies of Chile, Mr. Nicolás Mönckeberg Díaz, and by Ms. Ivonne Passada, a member of the House of Representatives of Uruguay and a member of the IPU Executive Committee and Gender Partnership Group.
4. Participants took stock of the gains made in women's rights in the region and underscored the need to consolidate them. They acknowledged that building gender-sensitive parliaments is an innovative way to guarantee that parliament, as an institution, embodies gender equality in its structures and functioning and champions gender equality in its work. They compared experiences on how their respective parliaments have adapted or are adapting their structures, methods of work, mechanisms and proceedings to meet the expectations and interests of both men and women. They also exchanged ideas and thoughts on regional dynamics to advance gender equality in parliament.
5. Special emphasis was placed on: the positive impact of affirmative action measures on women's representation in the parliaments and on complementary actions needed to ensure their success; reforms needed for including women in all levels of leadership in parliament and in political parties; parliamentary mechanisms to integrate a gender perspective into the work of the parliament; and identifying solutions to the problem faced by members of parliaments and parliamentary staff of juggling work and family life.

6. At the close of the meeting, the participants endorsed a set of recommendations for parliamentary action and follow-up at the national level. These include inter alia introducing and ensuring the effective application of election quotas to promote and guarantee the presence of women in parliament, condemning and addressing political violence against women in politics, setting up specific gender committees entrusted with analysing from a gender perspective all legislative activity and budgets, and reforming political party statutes to ensure equal participation of men and women in all executives bodies. (see Annex).
7. As a follow-up to this regional debate, efforts will be made to encourage and support Latin American parliaments in conducting a gender-sensitive self-assessment exercise, drawing up actions plans and establishing monitoring mechanisms aimed at strengthening the implementation of parliamentary action plans.
8. The meeting, organized jointly by the Chamber of Deputies of Chile and the IPU, was preceded by a national workshop to assess the gender sensitivity of the Congress of Chile, in which deputies, senators and administrative officials participated. The assessment resulted in the identification of gaps and recommendations designed to improve practices relating to gender equality in the Chilean Congress. Such national assessments are being carried out in other parliaments around the world. The IPU intends to pursue its assistance to parliaments in carrying out such exercises and designing subsequent plans of action.



GENDER-SENSITIVE PARLIAMENTS

REGIONAL DEBATE ON GENDER-SENSITIVE PARLIAMENTS

Regional meeting organized by the Chamber of Deputies of Chile and the Inter-Parliamentary Union

Chamber of Deputies
Valparaíso, Chile, 11 - 12 July 2012



Inter-Parliamentary
Union

Recommendations adopted by parliamentarians

Presented by Ms. Carolina Goic (Deputy, Chile), Rapporteur

Representatives of the Parliaments of Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Mexico, Peru and Uruguay gathered in the city of Valparaíso, Chile, on 11 and 12 July 2012 for a regional debate organized jointly by the Chamber of Deputies of Chile and the Inter-Parliamentary Union to discuss gender-sensitive parliaments.

The debate was preceded by a national workshop to assess the gender sensitivity of the Congress of Chile, in which deputies, senators and administrative officials participated. The debate provided men and women parliamentarians with an opportunity to exchange ideas, compare experiences and lessons learned on how their respective parliaments have adapted or are adapting their structures, methods of work, mechanisms and proceedings to meet the expectations and interest of men and women members.

The meeting enabled us to value and celebrate the gains made in women's rights in the region as well as underscore the need to consolidate those gains.

We observed that the topic of gender-sensitive parliaments did not concern women alone; indeed, it concerned everyone: women and men, members of parliament and parliamentary staff. The concept encompasses the very composition of parliament, its work and the way it functions. A gender-sensitive parliament is an institution in which all citizens – men and women – are recognized, and one that promotes equality while respecting differences.

Women in parliaments in the region

It should be noted that in spite of some disparities, women's representation in the parliaments of the region fares well compared to the global average. We have noticed that the countries with the highest number of women in parliament are those that have introduced some form of quotas. However, quotas have developed unevenly and have required successive reforms to truly attain a desirable proportion of women and men in parliament. Various measures are needed to ensure the success of quotas: genuine political will, election systems that facilitate the application of quotas and the introduction of quotas in the executive bodies of political parties.

One of the effects of a higher presence of women is the increase in gender-related legislation (e.g. laws on femicide, choice of the order of surnames, fast-track divorce, gender identity, parental authorization for men and women, etc.). Women's involvement in the elaboration of any law – regardless of its content – is a positive move.

How to integrate the gender perspective in parliament's mechanisms and infrastructure

We have noticed that women's committees or groups of women parliamentarians have facilitated a legislative agenda that promotes human rights in general and women's rights in particular. The establishment of specific gender committees is crucial for analysing legislative proposals from a gender perspective. It is therefore important not to identify the concept of gender with other concepts such as women, family, etc. Gender is a social construct that affects both women and men.

It is also important for these committees to have advisers or technical units that specialize in gender and equality. Similarly, they should be able to count on the support of civil society and the input of men parliamentarians. We have noticed the large numbers of women on committees devoted to social issues, such as family, children and social security and their low presence or absence altogether from finance, defence and foreign affairs committees. Despite the growing presence of women in parliament, they continue to be underrepresented in leadership positions in parliament and in the bureaux of committees.

How to improve the culture and infrastructure of parliament as a workplace

We recognize that the situation of women parliamentarians in Latin America varies from one country to another and are acutely aware of the difficulties many women face in carrying out their functions as representatives.

We have underscored the problem faced by members of parliament and parliamentary staff of juggling work and family life. We are aware that politics inevitably implies a heavy investment in terms of time and energy and is difficult for men and women. In spite of this, mechanisms can be adopted to alleviate this situation, such as aligning the parliamentary term with the school calendar, limiting night sittings and setting up spaces within the parliament for informal meetings. The onerous legislative workload is yet another difficulty.

Sexist and discriminatory practices have been noted in some parliaments and for that reason, it is important to draw up codes of conduct and regulations governing sexual harassment and mobbing. The work of women parliamentarians comes under heavy criticism simply because they are women.

We take a positive view of steps to incorporate non-sexist and inclusive language (e.g. Madam Speaker).

This document contains the following priority recommendations, which we undertake to follow up once we return to our respective parliaments:

Recommendations

- Condemn situations of political harassment and violence encountered by women in political office. Call for the adoption of legislative measures to prevent and punish such behaviour.
- Introduce – at the level of political parties or in the electoral law – election quotas to promote and guarantee the presence of women in parliament. These quotas should go hand in hand with mechanisms to ensure their effective application.
- Build the capacity of women candidates and members of parliament and promote training in gender issues for men and women members of political parties and parliament.

- Set up specific gender committees entrusted with analysing from a gender perspective all legislative activity and budgets.
- Promote the work of gender committees with a view to valuing them and attributing to them the same importance as other committees.
- Analyse from a gender perspective all bills and prevailing legislation. To this end, ensure that there are sufficient human and financial resources.
- Seek out strategic allies in order to succeed in mainstreaming a gender perspective in parliamentary debates, such as leaders of parliamentary groups.
- Reform political party statutes to ensure a balanced/equal participation of men and women in all executive bodies.
- Insist that presidential or government candidates have a specific gender-related programme.
- Recognize the importance of the media as a means of fostering a gender perspective in politics.
- Urge the IPU, based on its *Study on gender-sensitive parliaments*, to encourage parliaments to draw up action plans and a follow-up system aimed at strengthening the implementation of measures to incorporate a gender perspective in the legislative work, structures and working methods of parliaments.
- Call on the IPU to produce a comparative study of quota and gender-related laws, identifying gains made in each parliament, which could serve as a working document for a future meeting.