



## **REPORTS ON RECENT IPU SPECIALIZED CONFERENCES AND MEETINGS**

### **PARLIAMENTARY MEETING ON THE OCCASION OF THE 57<sup>th</sup> SESSION OF THE UN COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN**

(New York, 5 March 2013)

1. The IPU and UN Women organized a one-day parliamentary event on *Parliamentary strategies for tackling violence against women and girls*. The meeting took place on 5 March 2013 at UN Headquarters in New York on the occasion of the 57<sup>th</sup> session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW).
2. The meeting was opened by Mr. A. Radi, President of the IPU, and Ms. M. Bachelet, Executive Director of UN Women. The morning session was chaired by Ms. R. Kadaga, Speaker of the Parliament of Uganda, while the afternoon session was chaired by Ms. M. Mensah-Williams, Deputy Speaker of the National Council of Namibia. Other speakers included members of parliament, experts and representatives of international organizations.
3. The event brought together approximately 200 participants, 140 of whom were parliamentarians from 45 national and regional parliaments<sup>1</sup>, as well as government officials and representatives of international organizations. The participants discussed strategies to prevent, protect against and prosecute all forms of violence against women and girls. In addition, the meeting sought to provide a parliamentary contribution to the debates of the CSW.
4. The debates centred on two main topics: how parliamentarians can enhance their role in the global effort to end violence against women and violence against women in the political arena. Effective measures were proposed to prevent and eliminate the problem.

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<sup>1</sup> Participants included representatives from Afghanistan, Algeria, Andorra, Argentina, Austria, Bahrain, Belgium, Bolivia, Burkina Faso, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Czech Republic, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Denmark, Finland, Gambia, Germany, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Ireland, Italy, Jordan, Lesotho, Malawi, Mali, Mexico, Morocco, Namibia, Nigeria, Norway, Peru, Portugal, Republic of Korea, Russian Federation, South Africa, South Sudan, Spain, Suriname, Turkey, Uganda, Ukraine, United Kingdom, Zambia, the Central American Parliament, the European Parliament and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe.

5. The salient points of the debate are as follows:
- (a) Legislation is fundamental in ending the different forms of violence against women and is at the heart of parliamentary action. Parliaments have to legislate, review legislation, identify gaps and strengthen laws.
  - (b) Laws on their own are not enough; they require implementation and resources. Parliaments have a responsibility to ensure that laws are enforced and can facilitate implementation by using their good offices to involve all those concerned - the police, law enforcers, health care providers, social workers and religious and community leaders. Parliaments and parliamentarians can make a difference by raising awareness among women of their rights and by sending a clear message to everyone that violence cannot be tolerated.
  - (c) To be effective and really change lives, laws need budget allocations. Parliaments must therefore scrutinize the budget to ensure that adequate financial and human resources are allocated to effectively implement legislation. Building partnerships and alliances is also critical, notably involving more men and boys in efforts to prevent and end violence against women, and joining forces with the media to disseminate information and heighten awareness.
  - (d) Political violence against women hinders women's participation in politics and the smooth functioning of democracy. It can be used as a weapon in conflict situations, during election processes and when women are elected to office. The media may perpetuate this violence by stereotyping women in politics. Men and women parliamentarians have to lead the way in preventing and addressing this problem by changing the culture in politics and in the media, developing regulations and using legislation to protect women in politics. MPs have to devise concrete solutions so that everywhere women can vote, run for elections and serve their constituents in full freedom and security, without being harassed, threatened or the object of sexist or degrading remarks.
  - (e) The speech delivered by Ms. Mensah-Williams at the plenary session of the CSW can be found in annex.

6. Two informal meetings took place on 6 March: *Women in politics: Latest trends and Partnerships to address violence against women: Parliamentary caucuses as a platform*. A third event, *Too young to wed: Working together to address child marriage*, organized by the IPU and a number of international partners, took place on 7 March. The IPU's analysis of progress and setbacks of *Women in Parliament in 2012* was launched during the 57<sup>th</sup> session of the CSW.

**STATEMENT BY MRS. M. MENSAH-WILLIAMS,  
DEPUTY SPEAKER OF THE NATIONAL COUNCIL OF NAMIBIA**

It is a great honour for me to take the floor on behalf of the Inter-Parliamentary Union. Allow me to introduce myself; I am the Deputy Speaker of the National Council of Namibia.

Last week, the Inter-Parliamentary Union and UN Women organized a parliamentary meeting on the occasion of the 57<sup>th</sup> session of the Commission on the Status of Women. Our meeting focused on *Parliamentary strategies for tackling violence against women and girls*. Before sharing with you the outcome of that event, allow me to reiterate our thanks to UN Women for its ongoing cooperation, and stress once again how useful it is for us parliamentarians to participate in the work of the Commission, follow its debates and learn from the wealth of information, exchanges and meetings that the CSW generates. It also allows us to go back 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.

Now, let me turn to the outcome of the annual parliamentary meeting held last week. It was a very interactive and constructive event, with more than 200 MPs from 43 countries participating. Our parliamentary meeting was centred on two main issues. The first focused on how parliamentarians can enhance the role they play in the global effort to end violence against women. The second topic focused on violence against women in the political arena, with a view to proposing effective measures to prevent and eliminate it. We are particularly sensitive to this form of violence, which hinders women's participation in politics and the smooth functioning of democracy.

Madam Chair, allow me to highlight some of the main outcomes of that meeting:

1. As we sought to focus on our role as parliamentarians, it will come as no surprise that we highlighted the fundamental role of legislative change in stopping violence against women. Legislation is at the heart of parliamentary action. We as MPs have to legislate to penalize the different forms of violence against women. Parliamentarians should review legislation, identify gaps and strengthen laws.
2. But laws on their own are not enough. And this is our second point: Laws need implementation and resources. Here again we have a responsibility to ensure that laws are enforced, hence the importance of our oversight role. Parliamentary monitoring of anti-VAW law and policy implementation is greatly needed. We can facilitate implementation by using our good offices to involve all those concerned with implementing legislation - the police, law enforcers, health care providers, social workers and religious and community leaders. We can also make a difference by raising awareness among women of their rights and by send a clear message to everyone that violence cannot be tolerated.
3. To be effective and really change lives, laws need budget allocations. Parliaments must therefore scrutinize the budget to ensure that adequate financial and human resources are allocated to effectively implement legislation. We considered that budgetary obligations could be included in legislation, which would therefore facilitate its implementation.

4. We looked at building partnerships and alliances. We all agreed that violence against women is a human rights violation that affects families and communities and one that concerns everyone - men and women alike. In this regard, involving more men and boys in preventing and ending violence against women is critical.
5. We considered that the media, including social media, can be major allies in educating and raising awareness. We discussed ways to ensure that the media do not perpetuate stereotypes and gender inequalities or even condone violence against women. Today, as the media report on acts of violence against women around the world, more and more people are outraged by these crimes and demand action to end impunity.
6. Last but not least, we addressed the distinct nature of political violence against women, which is a subject of particular relevance to us parliamentarians. This form of violence can be used as a weapon in conflict situations, but also during election processes and when women are elected to office. The media also perpetuate this violence by stereotyping women in politics. Men and women parliamentarians have to lead the way in preventing and addressing this phenomenon by changing the culture in politics and in the media, and by regulating and using legislation to protect women in politics. We have to devise concrete solutions so that everywhere women can vote, run for elections and serve their constituents in full freedom and security, without being harassed, threatened or the object of sexist or degrading remarks.

Madam 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 debates and conclusions held during our meeting in their respective countries. We are convinced that if each of us plays our part, significant progress can be achieved.

Thank you.