



Inter-Parliamentary Union
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133rd IPU ASSEMBLY AND RELATED MEETINGS

Geneva, 17 - 21 October 2015

PARITY DEBATE ON "PARLIAMENTARY OVERSIGHT AND POLITICAL WILL"

organized by the Meeting of Women Parliamentarians

Tuesday, 20 October 2015

09:30 - 11:30, Room 2, level 0, CICG

Over the past years, the Meeting of Women Parliamentarians has placed particular emphasis on the need to engage more with men and to strengthen balanced discussions among men and women. To help achieve these aims, the Meeting will be hosting parity debates.

The Parity debate is a new concept. Parity requires that (1) participating delegations are gender balanced and (2) women and men MPs share their views on an equal basis. The focus of Parity debates is not necessarily a gender equality issue in itself; instead, participants will be asked to keep in mind gender dimensions of other questions discussed, constantly asking themselves if there is a difference for men and women, in terms of situations, roles and impacts, and how solutions can also contribute to advancing gender equality. It is also expected that, as equal numbers of men and women will speak in the debates, the different and complementary views and experiences of both genders will necessarily emerge, ensuring that gender equality concerns are mainstreamed in the discussions.

The first Parity debate will be organized at the 133rd IPU Assembly. It will focus on the political will to hold governments to account, thereby contributing to preparations for the second IPU-UNDP Global Parliamentary Report on *Parliament's power to hold government to account: Realities and perspectives*.

Parliamentary oversight is one of the basic functions of most parliaments. It serves an important role in a democracy, by holding government to account for its policies on behalf of the people. It is also highly political. This discussion will focus on the role of individual parliamentarians – men and women - in carrying out oversight. Particular attention will be paid to the political will to ensure, through effective oversight, that laws, policies and budget allocations meet the needs of both men and women.

Effective oversight requires a conducive political and institutional environment. At the most basic level, there needs to be a common understanding that it is right and proper for parliament to question the government, and that this oversight delivers better policy and results for citizens. Environmental factors such as the system of government, the electoral system and the strength political parties are all powerful influences on the way oversight takes place.

Institutional capacity for oversight varies greatly. The types of oversight tools available to parliamentarians (questions, inquiries, interpellations, reports) differ from one country to another, as does the capacity of the parliamentary administration to support parliamentarians with independent research and budgetary analysis, including capacity to carry out gender impact analysis.

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Arguably, however, the political will of parliamentarians to use the tools at their disposal is the most important factor in the effectiveness of parliamentary oversight. Ultimately, it is individual parliamentarians who have the role and responsibility to hold government to account on behalf of the people.

Political will is never something that can be taken for granted. To better understand the notion of “the political will to hold government to account”, and how it can be increased, it is useful to identify the motivations, incentives and disincentives for parliamentarians to carry out oversight.

The session will be structured around these key questions:

- Is oversight the responsibility of all parliamentarians, or only those from the opposition? What does the political will of parliamentarians to carry out oversight depend on?
- Do women and men parliamentarians have the same responsibility to oversee government action on gender equality? Does their electorate hold women and men parliamentarians accountable in the same way?
- Are there issues where oversight takes place across party lines, for example on matters of gender equality or human rights? On the contrary, are certain issues, such as national security or the intelligence agencies, effectively excluded from parliamentary oversight?
- As a parliamentarian, how do you explain your oversight activities to citizens? What value do citizens place on oversight, and what would make it seem more valuable?

The discussion will draw out the challenges and obstacles that parliamentarians – men and women – face when carrying out oversight. It will aim to identify good practices that tend to reinforce the role of individual parliamentarians and to increase the effectiveness of parliamentary oversight.

The discussion will be moderated by a member of parliament who will put the key questions to panelists before seeking the views of participants in the session. There will be no formal list of speakers; participants will request the floor by raising their hand. In the spirit of interactive debate, prepared speeches are strongly discouraged. In the spirit of the Parity debate, the composition of the panel will be gender balanced as will the order of speakers invited to intervene from the floor.

This session will contribute to the preparation of the second Global Parliamentary Report on “Parliament’s power to hold government to account: Realities and perspectives”. It will complement the debates that will be held on 21 October (*at 2.30 pm*) on “*Powerful parliaments: building capacity for effective parliamentary oversight*”.

Mr. Philippe Mahoux (Belgium)
Mr. Peter Katjavivi, Speaker of the National Assembly (Namibia)
Mr. Pablo Letelier (Chile)
Ms. Fawzia Koofi (Afghanistan)
Ms. Marija Lugaric (Croatia)
Ms. Pia Cayetano (Philippines)