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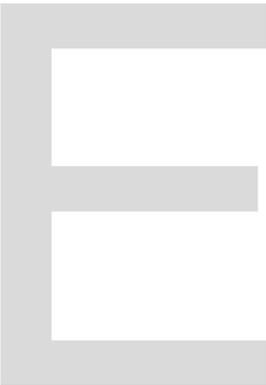
Standing Committee on
Democracy and Human Rights

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The freedom of women to participate in political processes fully, safely and without interference: Building partnerships between men and women to achieve this objective

***Explanatory memorandum submitted by the co-Rapporteurs
Ms. S. Lines (Australia) and Mr. M. Kilonzo Junior (Kenya)***

1. There has been a remarkable improvement in the representation of women in parliaments, despite continued barriers to their participation that include prevailing cultural, social and economic conditions.
2. The target of ensuring that at least 30 per cent of parliamentarians are women has not been achieved, despite various initiatives, including the UN World Conference of the International Women's Year (Mexico, 1975), the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (adopted in 1979) and the Fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing, 1995).
3. The global average proportion of women parliamentarians (with both chambers combined for bicameral systems) increased from 11 per cent in 1975 to 13 per cent in 1998, and from 15 per cent in 2003 to 23 per cent in 2016. At least 37 countries have reached the minimum target of 30 per cent women in their lower parliamentary chamber, as recommended by the UN Economic and Social Council in 1990.
4. There are still 72 countries in which less than 15 per cent of members of the lower house are women.
5. In 2013, the Nordic countries had the highest regional average – 42 per cent – of female parliamentarians in the lower or only parliamentary chamber. The Americas, Europe (excluding Scandinavia) and sub-Saharan Africa had averages of 25, 23 and 22 per cent respectively. The average in both Asia and the Arab States was 18 per cent. In the Pacific, it was 13 per cent.
6. In 2014, the level of women's representation across the world (with both chambers combined for bicameral systems) had increased to 22 per cent. That was still below the target of 30 per cent. All efforts in terms of policy, legislation and other measures have failed to meet the objective of a minimum of 30 per cent women's representation. Urgent efforts must therefore be made beyond existing initiatives in order to achieve true gender equality.
7. All the above-mentioned initiatives, policies and resolutions have been championed by women within and outside parliament. However, little has been done to create partnerships between men and women to ensure that the above-stated objectives and Sustainable Development Goal 5 (gender equality and empowerment of women and girls) are met.
8. In its publication *Equality in politics: A survey of women and men in parliaments*, the IPU based its work on a clear principle: there is a fundamental link between democracy and genuine partnership between men and women in the management of public affairs. One of the IPU's core aims is to improve women's access to and participation in parliament, as well as to build real political partnerships between men and women.



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9. In chapter 6 of the same publication, Ms. Johanita Ndahimananjara stated: "The problem is not competence, because women are up to the task, both intellectually and physically, but rather conviction and inequality. Efforts have been made, but much remains to be done to place women on a par with men. Bridging the gap, which is a bar to our development, requires political decision and will. The future of humanity should not be solely in the hands of men; it is a matter of concern to all of us without distinction."

10. Mr. Mosé Tjitendero, Chair of the IPU Gender Partnership Group (2000–2002) and Speaker of the National Assembly of Namibia (1990–2004) is quoted as saying: "We believe that true equality between the sexes can only be achieved if both women and men pull forces together to break the barriers of the age-old belief that women and men have different roles to play and therefore have an unequal stand in society... A man of quality should not fear women who seek equality."

11. Women constitute 50 per cent of those eligible to stand for election and hold political office in most countries. They also make up more than 50 per cent of registered voters. Despite that, their representation in parliament does not reflect those figures. Men and women must therefore make deliberate efforts that go above and beyond existing mechanisms in order to ensure that women are properly represented in parliament and other spheres of public life.

12. In the Atlas of Electoral Gender Quotas, the following statement presents part of the solution for achieving the objectives set out above: "Men make up the majority of politicians. They account for 79 per cent of the world's parliamentarians, 83 per cent of ministers, 93 per cent of heads of government and 95 per cent of heads of State. They also make up the majority of members of political parties and their executives. Therefore, they have a considerable influence on decision making. It would be impossible to envisage or discuss, let alone adopt, quotas to enhance women's participation in politics without them. All sensitization, consultation, debating and decision-making efforts must be inclusive, and must consider (and try to reconcile) the interests of both men and women."

13. In chapter two of *Equality in politics: A survey of women and men in parliaments*, various factors are identified, which hinder women's access to parliament. Some of those factors include: domestic responsibilities, prevailing cultural attitudes regarding the role of women in society, lack of support from family, lack of confidence, lack of finances, lack of support from political parties, lack of experience in representative functions (such as public speaking), lack of support from the electorate, lack of support from men, lack of support from other women, the perception of politics as dirty or corrupt, lack of education, security concerns and religion.

14. The above-mentioned factors are not universal to all women and all countries. Nevertheless, solutions must be found to ensure that women participate fully in politics and political life. Gender parity cannot be achieved using "one size fits all" formulas.

15. Countries like Slovenia have provided equal opportunities for both men and women in their Constitution. England has gender committees and commissions. However, the agenda of building bridges to achieve gender parity must go beyond policymaking and legislation. While legislative quotas have contributed to 30 per cent of parliamentarians being women in India, it has become apparent that political parties also had a central role in ensuring that those quotas were achieved. It has been proposed that political parties should be encouraged to comply with gender quota requirements by ensuring that their public funding is dependent on such compliance. That practice has been successful in Australia.

16. Other external factors, including war in the Middle East, have affected women and children, with a knock-on effect on women's participation in politics. Peacemaking also has a strong influence on the overall gender parity agenda. For example, now that peace has been restored in Rwanda, the country's parliament has the highest number of women MPs in the world.

17. The statistics in the publication *Women in Parliament: 20 years in review* should also be borne in mind. For example, the table showing the top 10 parliaments for women's participation in 1995 and 2015 serves as an interesting comparison. Benchmarking against these countries could be carried out to encourage the adoption of their good practices or to learn more widely from those countries that have achieved levels of women's representation of more than 30 per cent.

18. The statistics in the publication *Women in Parliament: 20 years in review* also reveal the importance of continuously reviewing the progress made by various parliaments. Such reviews can encourage parliaments that have not reached the 30-per cent target to redouble their efforts. They also provide an opportunity to applaud the countries that have managed to achieve their gender parity objectives. It is imperative that gender parity be treated as a human right and not just a privilege, in order to ensure that it is protected and enforced. The right to gender parity should also be made justiciable in court.

19. Most discussions, deliberations and rulings in parliament take place in parliamentary committees. It is therefore necessary to amend the standing orders of parliaments in order to ensure that women are given greater responsibilities in committees.

20. The results of the quota systems in Sweden and Togo should serve as a lesson that legislative action is not a solution in itself.