



Inter-Parliamentary Union
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135th IPU ASSEMBLY AND RELATED MEETINGS

Geneva, 23 – 27.10.2016

Parity debate

Harassment and violence against parliamentarians: Issues and solutions

Organized by the Forum of Women Parliamentarians
Wednesday, 26 October 2016
11 a.m. – 1 p.m., Room 2, level 0, CICC

During the 135th Assembly, the Forum of Women Parliamentarians will organize its second parity debate entitled "Harassment and violence against parliamentarians: Issues and solutions".

The overall aim of a parity debate is to promote dialogue between women and men at the IPU, and encourage them to debate issues of common interest together. That can be achieved by keeping in mind the gender dimensions of the subjects debated; by constantly asking if there is a difference for men and women in terms of their circumstances, roles and impacts; and by reflecting on approaches that contribute to advancing gender equality. As equal numbers of men and women will speak in the debate, the different but complementary views and experiences of both genders will emerge clearly, ensuring that gender equality concerns are mainstreamed into the discussion. Delegations are therefore invited to be represented in this debate by male and female participants.

The protection of parliamentarians' rights is one of the essential conditions for democracy. It allows them to perform their duties and, in particular, to protect and promote human rights and fundamental freedoms in their respective countries. Parliaments contribute to protecting parliamentarians' rights because they are a forum in which society can be fully represented and where a wide range of ideas can be peacefully contested. As places where conflicts are resolved through dialogue rather than violence, they provide their members with the necessary framework to play their part in complete freedom and safety. Thus, parliaments guarantee freedom of expression, which is an essential aspect of the work of parliamentarians, while banning all insulting language, hate speech and violence. The parliamentary institution must also ensure respect for the human rights and freedoms of all persons, including parliamentarians, in other places where political discourse and debate take place, and in society in general. Nevertheless, it is a balance that remains fragile and can sometimes be upset. How can we therefore speak about democracy when violence in politics is rife, and when individual rights and freedoms are flouted, including the right to participate fully, freely and entirely safely in political processes?

The debate will focus on aggressive behaviour, intimidation and acts of violence that both men and women parliamentarians may have to face during their time in office. Those behaviours and acts may occur in parliament, in other public or political spaces, in MPs' private lives, and in new areas such as the Internet and social networks. As part of the debate, participants will be encouraged to analyse the violence that they have experienced as men and women politicians. The aim will be to determine how their experiences differ in terms of circumstances and motives, as well as in terms of the ways that violence can be tackled and prevented.

#IPU135

The debate will build on the work of the IPU Committee on the Human Rights of Parliamentarians, which celebrates its fortieth anniversary this year. In 2015, the Committee considered the cases of 320 parliamentarians who had been subject to violations of their fundamental rights and to arbitrary measures that hindered their ability to carry out their duties. Of the 320 cases, 37 involved women parliamentarians.

The debate will begin with a presentation of general observations and lessons learned from the cases of parliamentarians that the Committee is currently considering. The results of a recent IPU study will also be covered at the beginning of the debate. The study highlights examples of barriers that could adversely affect women's ability to enter politics. Those barriers include unacceptable behaviour such as sexist insults and comments, threats or harassment. To varying degrees, those types of behaviour towards women parliamentarians exist in countries throughout the world and affect a significant number of women in elected office.

The discussion will then move on to highlight the different types of harassment and violence against parliamentarians and how they are interrelated. These include violence motivated by ideas, opinions or political affiliation; sexist attitudes and violence, whose effect is to discourage women who are or wish to be in politics; and violence from aggressive and discontented individuals.

Parliamentarians will be invited to discuss the following key questions:

- Would you say that the work of parliamentarians is unsafe – on the premises of parliament? In other political and public spaces? In their private lives?
- Have you seen a change in the way MPs are treated? Have you noticed new forms of harassment or violence emerging?
- Do you think that the way in which men and women MPs are challenged by harassment or violence is similar in terms of:
 - How people challenge them?
 - Who challenges them?
 - Where they are challenged?
- Do you feel that some types of “misbehaviour” are felt to be part of the way politics is done?
- What are the impacts of harassment and violence on the role and work of parliamentarians, on the functioning of parliament, and on democracy?
- What solutions and good practices might there be – already in place or to be developed – that could address harassment and violence against parliamentarians?

The debate will be moderated by a member of parliament who will ask panellists a series of key questions before seeking the participants' views. There will be no formal list of speakers; participants will be asked to request the floor simply by raising their hand. In the spirit of interactive debate, prepared speeches are strongly discouraged. In line with the principle of a parity debate, the composition of the panel will be gender balanced, as will the order of speakers invited to intervene from the floor.

Moderator: Mr. Mutula Kilonzo Junior, Member of the Senate (Kenya)

Opening statements:

- A view from the IPU Committee on the Human Rights of Parliamentarians.
Presented by Mr. Rogier Huizenga, head of the human rights programme
- Results of the IPU survey on sexism, harassment and violence against women parliamentarians
Presented by Ms. Kareen Jabre, Director, Division of Programmes

Panellists:

- Prof. N. Luo, Member of Parliament (Zambia)
- Mr. Sven Spengemann, Member of the House of Commons (Canada)
- Ms. Edith Mendoza Fernández, Member of the Chamber of Deputies (Bolivia)