

136^ IPU General Assembly
Contribution to the general Debate,
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Let me skip general remarks and make only some telegraphic notes:

-In the last decades the world has made remarkable progresses in many fields but also inequalities have taken a steps forward, marking a sharp increase;

-fixing inequalities can no longer be a merely national, nor even a regional, objective: it must necessarily be a global and a political and a social commitment, involving different stakeholders;

-inequalities leads to distortions within countries, where they widen the gap between rich and poor, between different ethnic groups, between different religions, between educated and uneducated, between men and women, between boys and girls.

And this concerns all countries in the world at different levels of development: high, medium and low.

I want to focus on one of the harshest inequalities, which affects the world population: gender inequality which encompasses all fields of life: economic, financial, political, legislative, social, personal....

There is one specific type of inequality which must be strongly opposed by us as decision-makers in Parliaments, as those who keep governments to account for commitments taken: gender discrimination by law.

Most countries in the world have legislation in place that discriminates against women and most of us do not even know about it. Yet equality under the law is essential to the recognition of each individual's value and fundamental rights.

Let me give you some examples:

- Laws on marital status: marriage, including child and forced marriages, polygamy, and divorce;**
- Laws on personal status: the permission to travel, or the value of women witnesses in court,**
- Access: access to health services, including sexual and reproductive health and rights**
- Economic status: inheritance and property rights, access to the labour market, financial services, equal wage, etc.**

And these are just a few examples: we could go on given the fact that about 90% of countries in the world have laws which include discriminatory measures.

This is also due to the fact that access for women to decision making positions has always been and continues to be a major challenge: women make up 23.3% of MPs worldwide: it is not enough even if some progress has been made.

It is not enough because if we do not reach at least the critical mass of one third of either gender, which is the minimum threshold for a voice to be heard and to be effective, the efforts of a few will be not be enough to develop their full potential.

Parliaments can play the most powerful role in changing laws, in overseeing their enforcement, in budget allocation, in advocacy in all countries in the world.

On the occasion of the 136th IPU General Assembly, the Forum of Women Parliamentarians addressed, amongst others, the issue of women's financial inclusion: a strategic and strong political vision is needed to create and implement the policy and legal frameworks necessary to effectively promote and regulate women's financial inclusion.

We also raised the issue of how to enhance the access of the most underprivileged women to financial services, including women living in the most remote rural areas.

To conclude, let me address another issue: gender inequality adversely affects the health of millions of women and girls throughout the world.

Inequality in health is a key social determinant, shaping exposure to health risks and affecting health behaviours, access to services, and health outcomes, including morbidity and mortality.

Finally a serious threat to health is gender-based violence: one in three women still experiences physical or sexual violence, mostly by their partners. And this happens worldwide. It is a must for us, as legislators, as members of Parliaments, to stop this epidemic.