



A parliamentary perspective on discrimination and violence against the girl child

New York, 1 March 2007



A parliamentary event organized by the Inter-Parliamentary Union and the United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women on the occasion of the 51st Session of the Commission on the Status of Women

ECOSOC Chamber – UN Headquarters, New York

SUMMARY OF THE PROCEEDINGS

This parliamentary event at the United Nations Headquarters was organized by the Inter-Parliamentary Union and the United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women (UNDAW) on the occasion of the 51st Session of the Commission on the Status of Women.

Inaugural session

➤ **Senator Mónica Xavier (Uruguay), President of the IPU Coordinating Committee of Women Parliamentarians**, welcomed the participants, noting with pleasure that they represented some 45 parliaments. She looked forward to an interesting debate on the important topic of discrimination and violence against the girl child, generating ideas that the participants could take with them when they returned to their parliaments. Introducing the panelists, she noted that the keynote speaker, Dr. Rima Salah, would shortly be leaving her position as Deputy Executive Director of UNICEF, and paid tribute to the important part she had played in strengthening cooperation with parliaments and the IPU.

➤ **Hon. Margaret Mensah-Williams, Vice-President of the IPU Executive Committee**, said that she was pleased to be representing the IPU President, Mr. Rer Ferdinando Casini, who unfortunately could not attend due to unforeseen commitments in Italy, but who sent his very best wishes for a successful meeting. She expressed her deep appreciation to both the United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women (UNDAW) and to UNICEF for their collaboration and support.

The IPU aimed to bring a parliamentary dimension to the proceedings of intergovernmental organizations. The objective of the meeting was to highlight the specific part that parliaments could play in bringing about the elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence against the girl-child, not only in protecting her but also in empowering her so that protection ultimately became unnecessary. Despite existing legal instruments and wide international mobilization, girls continued to endure *de facto* and *de jure* inequalities in all societies of the world. Girls had less access than boys to food, physical and mental health care, and education; they enjoyed fewer rights and opportunities. Many were subjected to harmful traditional practices like female genital mutilation or forced marriage while still children.

Child protection had long been a priority for the Inter-Parliamentary Union, which had worked side by side with UNICEF to develop a strategy to help parliamentarians do more to protect children's rights. Putting an end to discrimination required a holistic approach and the commitment of all components of society. Legislation alone was not enough - it needed to be implemented, and its implementation monitored. There was a need to

change entrenched thinking, build self-confidence and engage men and boys in the endeavour. The fulfillment of children's rights was an obligation on all, one that could only be achieved if everybody understood and acted on their duties to children. Parliamentarians could make the difference. They had the power to legislate, the power to oversee proper implementation of laws, and the power to allocate the necessary financial resources to make a change. As leaders, they must raise awareness, combat discrimination, tackle stereotypes and protect and support children.

➤ **Ms. Carolyn Hannan, Director of UNDAWA**, acknowledged the important work of the IPU Coordinating Committee of Women Parliamentarians on the promotion of gender equality and empowerment of women. She was particularly pleased that the IPU had decided to focus these annual meetings on the priority themes under consideration by the UN Commission on the Status of Women, providing a unique opportunity for parliamentarians to contribute to the latter's work. Preparations for its current session had shown clearly that girls continued to face discrimination, violence and neglect, often in hidden forms. Legal frameworks intended to protect the rights of girls were not effectively implemented, and the priorities and needs of the girl child were not adequately addressed.

The Commission was continuing its efforts to ensure a strong focus on national level implementation. That entailed providing opportunities for interactive dialogue and exchange of national experiences, as well as sharing of examples of good practices. In addition, the Commission had decided to review the implementation of the outcomes on priority themes after two or three years. Implementation of those outcomes could only be accelerated at national level if they were known and used. Parliamentarians could play a critical role in that process, by bringing the outcomes to the attention of parliaments and promoting active follow-up. She hoped there would be further opportunities for parliamentarians to discuss with a broad group of stakeholders how the outcomes could be used at different levels, and how progress could be most effectively assessed and documented when the Commission reviewed implementation in two or three years' time.

Keynote Address

➤ **Dr. Rima Salah, Deputy Executive Director, United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)**, gave the following address:

In recent years, and particularly since our collaboration at the United Nations General Assembly Special Session on Children in 2002, the relationship between UNICEF and the IPU has gone from strength to strength. We have produced publications together – such as the handbook on child protection, and one under way on trafficking. We have held joint meetings, and more generally have developed a partnership that truly realizes the complementarity of the two organizations' work. So I join you here today as partner, colleague and friend.

We are here because we recognize that our commitment to human rights is meaningless if it is not a commitment to equality for women and girls. We are here because our experience has taught us that our commitment to children has little value if it is not a commitment to health, education and protection for all children, both boys and girls equally. We are here because we know that our commitment to the Millennium Development Goals is empty if we cannot ensure that progress achieved is enjoyed equally by girls and boys and contributes to narrowing the gap between them.

I believe that there is no better test of our commitment to justice, no better measure of our stated belief in non-discrimination and the equal rights of all, than the way a society treats its girls and its women. By that measure, while we are moving in the right direction, we are moving too slowly. Too many girls are out of school and engaged in exploitative labor; girls remain far more vulnerable to HIV infection than boys; their health and nutritional status remains significantly below that of boys; rape and sexual violence remain commonplace in conflicts; girls continue to be trafficked; and female genital mutilation remains a serious problem in many countries.

We in UNICEF know that we should be doing more. Our performance on gender mainstreaming and on ensuring that all our programmes take every opportunity to improve the situation of girls is simply not good enough. That is why we are undertaking an independent institutional evaluation of all our programmes which will provide the basis for a plan of action to improve the results we deliver, together with our partners.

So it is in this spirit of self-reflection that I would like to propose four questions to help frame some of the discussions of our meeting, and more generally remind us of the issues that confront us. These questions are not new, but they are as relevant today as they have ever been. And they are not radical, because there is nothing radical in rejecting the view that half the world's population is born into second-class status. But they do reflect what, from UNICEF's perspective and based on our experience around the world, we believe to be the issues at the heart of addressing discrimination and violence against girls.

My first question is: 'What more can we do to ensure that all girls go to schools that offer them a quality education in an environment that meets their needs as girls and allows them to learn and study in safety?'

We are all aware of the efforts that have been made to get girls into school, but I think we also all agree that we can do better. We need to ensure that girls go to school, stay in school, and achieve the basic learning outcomes. We need to abolish school fees; support community-based early childhood development programmes that help parents, not just mothers but fathers too, to provide appropriate care for girls; make sure girls not in school are offered opportunities for an education, whether formal or informal; and to invest in programmes, both in and out of schools, that build girls' life-skills so that they can grow into leaders and learn how better to protect themselves from exploitation and violence. We know that quality education is one of the most effective ways of promoting girls' empowerment, development and self-reliance.

My second question is: 'What more must we be doing to provide girls with an opportunity to have their voices heard?'

We all know that article 12 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child affords all children, girls and boys alike, the right to a say in decisions affecting them. This presents a special challenge for girls, and we need to create spaces for them. This is not rhetoric; it is an active decision that should also be seen as a model for the processes whereby national and sub-national programmes, budget allocations and

policies are determined. Let us share our experiences of what has worked and commit ourselves to try out new approaches that will end the silence and allow girls to become their own best advocates.

My third question is: 'How effectively are we encouraging and supporting men and boys to become part of the solution?'

Challenging gender discrimination is not a job for women and girls only or even primarily. Many of the problems girls face arise from the actions or inaction of men and boys. So we cannot conceive of a solution to these problems within which men and boys are not active participants. And I think here particularly of the role that fathers can play in supporting their girls to develop to their fullest potential. Again, let us share our experience, identify best practices and build upon what works.

My final question is: 'Are we doing all we can do to have a full and accurate understanding of the real situation of the world's girls?'

The data we have on the situation of girls and women are inadequate, or too often unavailable. Sometimes that reflects inherent difficulties in gathering data, but sometimes it reflects a failure to look. And we must ask ourselves whether a failure to look reflects a failure to care. So let us make a commitment to revitalize our efforts to get the data foundation in place as a prerequisite for all our future work.

And for all these questions we need to recognize that when we talk of girls we are not talking about a homogenous group. We need to recognize that some girls need special attention, special support and special efforts. For example, we may need to target girls living in households below the poverty line, belonging to disadvantaged groups or who have been the victims of violence or exploitation. That all girls have the same rights does not mean that one-size-fits-all policies will do the job.

What does all this mean for parliamentarians? Let me begin with legislation. You are all involved in the development of legislation in your countries and there are clearly important ways in which you can help to make laws work better for women and girls. Before considering the laws themselves, I urge you to consider the process by which legislation is developed. Is it participatory? Does it provide opportunities for women and girls to give their views and inputs, and to take ownership of these regulations that shape their lives? A thorough appreciation of the extent to which laws adequately guarantee and deliver on the rights of women and girls is essential if the legal system is to do justice to the issues. Parliamentarians have many opportunities to review legislation, to consider in-depth the extent to which it truly delivers protection for women and girls.

Another capacity you have is to make sure that legislation proposed is good not only on paper but also in practice, by insisting that it be linked to adequate budget provision to ensure its enforcement and accompanied by adequate and appropriate enabling legislation. Experience has shown that laws mean little without proper resources. Yet in a competitive resource environment women and

girls often come at the bottom of the list. Parliamentarians are one of the only mandated groups who can raise this issue.

I would like to stress that it is not only legislation specifically referring to women and girls that affects their lives. Very many areas of legislation are relevant to women and girls' lives, and need to be developed, reviewed and discussed with a gender perspective.

Parliamentarians' oversight role includes making sure that the rights of women and girls are not forgotten in the work of the executive branch. One important tool in many systems is the use of parliamentary questions, which have been shown to be able to force governments to look more closely at issues that are being neglected. For example, we know the huge contribution that has been made with regard to girls' education through the routine requirement that enrolment, attendance and attainment data be broken down between girls and boys. Parliamentarians can call for programmes to be time-bound and give precise target dates for the attainment of specific results. As elected officials, you also share the ability to lead in your communities. And it is precisely this leadership which affords you the authority to be effective champions for women and girls, and we depend on you as leaders of your communities.

I cannot overemphasize the important role you all play as advocates. It is through advocacy that we can change attitudes and challenge stereotypes. At UNICEF we have seen parliamentarians bring about important changes by focusing a spotlight on successful initiatives that promote the rights of women and girls.

For every girl that is excluded from school, or who struggles to learn in an environment where she fears violence or sexual abuse; for every girl whose voice has been silenced, whose opinions and views have been ignored; for every girl who has been exploited for her labour or her body; all of us have an urgent responsibility. And part of that urgent responsibility is to listen to them. The title of a survey of more than 1,300 young people from 59 countries, on discrimination and violence against girls, said it all: "It's time to listen to us!".

Session One: Combating discrimination and violence against the girl child

This session aimed to provide an overview of how to assess and identify violence and discrimination and looked at what parliamentary mechanisms exist to address violence against the girl child such as legislative reform and using international standards. Presentations were made by Ambassador Moushira Khattab, Vice-Chair, United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, and Mr. Gary Barker, Executive Director of Instituto Promundo, Brazil.

Theme 1: A holistic and human rights based approach

➤ **Ambassador Moushira Khattab, Vice-Chair, United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child**, offered some views on a holistic and rights-based approach to protecting the girl-child.

Why a holistic human rights approach? Many of the key development issues facing States today have an important gender dimension, making an understanding of gender norms and roles essential to the design of policies and laws. Adopting a human rights and multidisciplinary approach when dealing with the rights of the girl child reveals that she has civil and political rights, together with social, economic and cultural rights. A poor girl born in a remote village has the right to life, development and survival. This means that she has the same right to education as any other child, which in turn means that she has the right to be registered at birth and to parental care, essential to enable her to enjoy her right to good health.

Using a human rights approach with vulnerable children, particularly girls, will show that giving money to a street girl will not help her. Rather, she will be helped by being sent home, which entails helping her family to provide her with the care she needs. This will mean income-generating activities for the family, it will mean eliminating disparities between rural and urban development, it will mean making it legally punishable for a family to abandon a child. Adopting a human rights approach towards the girl child means that dragging her to be genitally mutilated or forcing her into early marriage is a punishable offence. It means that education of parents and of religious and community leaders is vital.

This interdependence of rights necessitates more than making services available. Making education free and available is not enough; governments must also focus on the demand side. This will link education to poverty alleviation, to gender discrimination, to harmful traditional practices, to the culture of dialogue and respect for the views of the child. Having a human rights based approach to education, for example, will involve giving food rations to girls to improve their health and encourage their families to keep them at school, or opening a local free health clinic to make the community see the return on girls' education, or working with the banking sector to ensure that micro-credit is easily available to poor families.

This complicated formula may make educating the poor seem too expensive compared with its short term material return. But without this package of supportive services, poor families will not send their girls to school. With education playing a fundamental role in the prevention of discrimination against the girl child, it is necessary to review school curricula for bias and stereotypes at all levels, to sensitize teachers, and to keep girls in the educational system as long as possible, in order to delay marriage and other factors that are obstacles to their education. There is also a need for education of the mother: granted micro-credit to start a business, she must be persuaded not to take the daughter out of school in order to work in the business.

How can parliamentarians monitor the implementation of the rights of children? One important duty is to ensure that their governments' international commitments are observed. They should also monitor the implementation of national legislation conforming to the standards set out by the international conventions to which their country is a Party, and ensure that States comply fully with the reporting obligations in those conventions. Parliamentary committees on gender equality should be established, composed of both men and women, making use of the tools of gender-budgeting analysis, ensuring the gender mainstreaming of all decisions and legislation, and allocating sufficient resources to these activities.

Budgeting for children is a very crucial human rights issue. The budget is the most important policy statement of the State. The development of gender-sensitive national budgets will help to improve the promotion of girls in the education system, literacy, women's and girls' empowerment and access to health services. Parliamentarians should systematically analyze their national budgets from the perspective of rights-based gender equality with a view to correcting inequalities and discrimination.

Theme 2: Transforming social roles

➤ **Mr. Gary Barker, Executive Director of *Instituto Promundo***, Brazil, offered the following thoughts.

The way that families and societies raise children creates ideas about what it means to be boys and girls, women and men. Almost all forms of discrimination against women and girls are socially constructed, originating in children's upbringings. According to statistical data, males with more traditional ideas about what it means to be a man are four times more likely to have used violence against a woman than those with a more egalitarian view of manhood.

Ways have to be sought to show men that there can be benefits to them in changing their attitudes and behaviour: benefits such as a closer relationship with children, or more balance in their lives between work and home, or better relationships with wives, including sexually. While it is true that some of such changes involve a sacrifice of power by men, they can be shown that there are compensatory rewards.

Bringing men and boys to change their attitudes involves individual-level characteristics, such as the ability to reflect critically on the norms according to which they have been raised, and to consider that traditional views of "manhood" may entail some harmful aspects: to reflect, for example, that being masculine does not necessarily require the ready use of violence to settle disputes, or the excessive use of alcohol, or driving too fast.

There are also contextual factors: as men perceive changes in social norms governing behaviour, they may come to change their own views of that behaviour. Thus it has been found that as men become aware of stiffer penalties for violence against women, they themselves come to find such behaviour less acceptable. Similarly, changes in the provisions for paternal leave may bring men to perceive it as normal to spend more time with the child and the family.

Most programmes aimed at changing men's and boys' attitudes are currently run by non-governmental organizations, on a modest scale. Ramping up such activities to the national level will require cooperation from the public sector. Here, the support of parliamentarians becomes important. Such programmes might be implemented in the education sector, in the community, in the armed forces, in the Scouts or youth organizations, or in any other group context. They tend to be successful when they include not only information but also space for critical reflection about masculinity and about what gender means, and about ways to deal with partner conflict without violence. Other factors for success are that they should have clear messages and images promoting different ways of being male within the identity formation processes that men and boys are already undergoing.

Areas in which males can be engaged at the policy level include fatherhood and paternal leave policies. This is a fundamentally startling idea in some countries, where the raising of children is still regarded as women's work. The provision by law of such leave could be an important way to send the message that it is men's work too. There should be policies to encourage men to be present and involved in childbirth, to accompany the mother on her pre- and postnatal visits, and to be aware of the signs of complications.

In the area of gender-based violence, a punitive approach alone will not work. Here national campaigns to change social norms can make a difference, perhaps involving male celebrities to send the message that violence against women is not acceptable.

What can members of parliament do? One important responsibility is to review policies in place to ensure that they are not sending an unintended message to men that certain discriminatory forms of behaviour can be tolerated. They should also make sure that any changes are not just politically-correct window-dressing. Parliamentarians as visible men and women are in a position to take a stance, to publicly question the ways that society raises its children, to take paternal leave, to support initiatives such as the White Ribbon campaign of men against violence towards women.

➤ General discussion

In the ensuing discussion, many delegates gave information about their countries' laws to protect children, or girls in particular, and what special bodies had been or were being created for that purpose. Others described the work carried out by associations, of varying degrees of formality, of women parliamentarians to draft legislation promoting women's or children's rights and combating violence. Several talked about the role of specific defenders of women or children, often called ombudsmen, while some described the progress made in their countries in areas such as increasing girls' enrolment in schools and higher education.

The conclusions from the debate included the following:

- A particularly discriminatory situation is that of young girls with unwanted pregnancies, who are frequently forced to drop out of school. Parliamentarians have an important role to play in enacting legislation to ensure the right to education of girls in that situation.
- In countries that have a high proportion of unwanted pregnancies, but where abortion is frowned upon or even forbidden, there is a need for laws to be passed in order to facilitate adoption. Sweden is about to alter its abortion laws so that women from any country can have a safe and legal abortion there.
- Provision of paternity leave has been found to increase fathers' sense of involvement in childbirth and child-rearing. That has enhanced gender equality, and where there is more equality between the sexes, there is less violence against women.
- Violence occurs all over the world, and in all social strata. Approximately 90 percent of all acts of violence are committed within the victim's family or social environment, with most violent acts being targeted behavioural patterns intended to exercise power and control, and with around one woman in five suffering violence at the hands of a current or former intimate partner. In some countries violence within the home, considered a sanctuary, is punished more severely than violence outside.
- Female genital mutilation is becoming a problem in some European countries with large immigrant populations. There is a need to recruit people from within the immigrant community to work against the practice, to make families aware of the

huge psychological cost of forcing a daughter to undergo such a barbaric practice. Parliamentarians should ask their governments what they have done to implement the Cairo Declaration of 2003. Under Spanish law, people engaging in the practice can be prosecuted even if they do so outside Spain. This is also the case in the United Kingdom.

- A particularly extreme form of discrimination against girls involves their being forced into prostitution, especially sex tourism, or being trafficked for those purposes. Some suggested that developed countries might consider relaxing their immigration rules, so that women can reach those countries without having to pay the price of being trafficked.
- While much attention has been given to punitive measures against trafficking, not much creative thought has yet been applied to the demand side. There is a need to investigate what it is in their upbringing that allows some men to find it acceptable to have sexual relationships with under-age girls, or to see women as objects that can be traded and sold.
- While the media have an important educational responsibility in how they present violence against women and children, or gender matters in general, in practice they often evade it, on the grounds that their role is simply to reproduce whatever images society gives them. The answer might be to persuade the media to accept the challenge of simultaneously playing an educational role while still being interesting and enlightening. If a few journalists lead the way, peer pressure might solve the problem.
- Where female parliamentarians are a very small minority, particularly in culturally conservative environments, one way to achieve goals is to appeal to their male colleagues' own interests. In Kenya, when it was desired to apply a zero tax rate to feminine hygiene products, the women representatives persuaded their male colleagues to calculate how much they were spending on behalf of their wives and daughters, and that was enough to ensure the men's support. Similarly, the women representatives showed the men that if violence against women were eliminated, the country's health budget could be reduced.
- When violence against women is the by-product of custom, the law itself cannot immediately provide relief. It is the mindset that has to be changed, and that does not happen quickly. The role of parliamentarians will be vital in this area.
- Parliamentarians' role does not end at the passage of legislation; they also have to monitor its implementation and effects, because where changes involve a loss of power, the once-powerful will seek subtle ways to regain it.

Session Two: Empowering the girl child

This session examined how to provide a safe and secure environment for girls, through implementing and enforcing legislation, changing attitudes, transforming social roles, providing opportunities and; education. It sought to address how to ensure that legislation is comprehensive and covers discrimination and violence at sub-national as well as national level.

Theme 3: Legislative reform: Drawing the line

➤ **Dr. Susan Bissel, Chief, Implementing International Standards Unit, UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre,** offered the following thoughts.

The United Nations Secretary General's Study on Violence against Children is a very important advance in the work on violence against children. The Study was built up over three years, examining findings from all around the world. It was endorsed by the United Nations General Assembly, which decided that work should continue for a further year in order to promote wide dissemination, give support to follow-up to recommendations, submit a report on progress in 2007, and present a strategy for further implementation.

The overarching recommendations of the Study include that States should strengthen national and local commitment and action, prohibit all violence against all children, prioritize prevention, promote non-violent values and awareness-raising, enhance the capacity of all who work with and for children. In addition, States should provide recovery and social reintegration services, ensure participation of children, create accessible and child-friendly reporting systems and services, ensure accountability and end impunity, address the gender dimension of violence against children, and develop and implement systematic national data collection and research. Above all, States should strengthen international commitment to ending all forms of violence against children.

The Study built upon the leadership of parliamentarians to consolidate legislative and other efforts to ban all forms of violence against children. It has already led to more and better information on violence against children; it has stressed the urgency of addressing violence as a denial of children's rights, and it has promoted strong commitment to understand dimensions of violence and address its root causes.

Effective legislation to protect children against all forms of violence is an obligation for all States Party to the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Law reform constitutes a strong basis for awareness-raising, social mobilization, prevention and capacity-building activities. It is key to investigating cases of violence, for fighting impunity, and bringing protection and redress to child victims. Law reform is also a very challenging task for all regions. Globally, legislation often concentrates on sexual or physical violence, neglecting psychological violence. Violence within the home is frequently not even mentioned. Child friendly-proceedings and effective remedies are often not in place. Recovery, reintegration and redress receive very little attention.

The Study calls for an overall ban on violence against children in the national legislation of all countries by 2009. This goal is within reach, and it is very clear that the role of parliamentarians is decisive to move the process forward.

Theme 4: Developing a safe and secure environment for girls

► **Senator Judith Blanca Diaz Delgado, President of the Committee on Equality and Gender, Mexico**, provided the following information.

Reforms have been made to the political constitution of the Mexico, specifically to articles 4 and 8 which provide for the participation and inclusion of women in all aspects of the life of the country. Legislation protecting the rights of children and adolescents was promulgated in 2000. The fundamental principle of this law is that of equality for all children or adolescents, with no discrimination as to race, colour, sex, or any other factor. A number of initiatives to amplify the content of the law have been put forward, focusing on the protection of children from any work which is dangerous or harmful to their health, and to inform parents about the basic principles of health, hygiene and accident

prevention. Measures have also been proposed to promote the physical and psychological rehabilitation of girls who have been the victim of abandonment, exploitation or abuse.

A draft decree has established a general law creating a national system for protection and assistance for women and girls, including the prevention and eradication of violence against them, in line with the main principles recognized by the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child. It promotes a process to modify socio-cultural patterns of behaviour both for men and for women, and it includes a review of educational programmes and curriculum design. The law also sets out to increase awareness in the population at large of the need to prevent and eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls, and to uphold respect for their rights. It lays down the basic principles which Mexico is to follow in this area, in line with the international instruments it has ratified, and it establishes mechanisms in the areas of education, health and justice to enable the State to guarantee women and girls a life free from violence.

In the area of sexual exploitation of children, the framework of the general law against organized crime provides protection against corruption, pornography, sex tourism, trafficking and similar offences, both through preventive actions and through stricter penalties. In particular, the new law stresses that no family, political or religious exceptions will be made. The law provides for prison sentences varying between 7 and 18 years, depending on the crime, although if such crimes should be committed by persons in a position of authority with respect to the child, then the sentences range from 16 to 30 years. In addition, parents committing such crimes will lose their parental authority over the child, while members of professions such as teachers or doctors will be barred from working in those occupations in the future. Important changes have been made to the Penal Code at the federal level, and now work is in hand on the harmonization of all laws covering violence in the home in the different penal codes of all of the states of Mexico.

Theme 5: Building capacity

➤ **Senator Pia Cayetano, Philippines**, presented the following ideas:

The general problems facing the girl-child are common throughout the world, although they may manifest themselves differently from country to country. They include culture-based discrimination; poor access to education; continuing prevalence of labour exploitation; physical, psychological or sexual abuse; commercial sexual exploitation; girl-children as substitute spouses; teenage pregnancy and reproductive health problems; girl-children in armed conflict.

Culture-based discrimination arises from a traditional view of women as stay-at-home wives, and from negative gender stereotypes in textbooks and the media. Poor access to education, a common problem in developing countries, is related to culture-based discrimination, since in some countries females are looked upon as a second-class citizens. Many girls, especially from rural areas, are forced to leave school as they are perceived to be destined for a life as housewives, to whom education would be of no importance.

The rising phenomenon of sexual exploitation and abuse is a major problem in countries that focus on tourism. Where there is prostitution, there is a constant demand for fresh new faces. The result: child prostitution. Work in the tourism and catering industries is

often an entry point for commercial sexual activity for children and adolescents, who are offered the opportunity to enhance their income by providing sexual services.

According to the International Labour Organization, 179 million children worldwide are exposed to the worst forms of child labour exploitation, including prostitution, pornography, drug trafficking, forced armed military conflict and other illicit activities. The issue of girl children as substitute spouses is prevalent in many Asian countries exporting human resources, with an estimated 30 million Asian workers in Asian countries other than their own and 40 million in the rest of the world. The result is that older daughters of overseas female workers not only take on the role left behind by the mother with respect to rearing younger siblings but also, and worse, they become substitute spouses for the father.

Every country should ensure that it has national or municipal laws on child abuse, child welfare, violence, trafficking and education, as well as laws adopting gender-responsive budgeting. An important task for parliamentarians is to update the legislation, in order, for example, to address the fast-growing technology-mediated child pornography. It is also important to look into definitions of prohibited acts, since the law as codified may not address current situations. The burden of proof, too, should be adjusted, so that mere possession of child pornography materials will be *prima facie* evidence of a crime. It is very important that the judicial system be strengthened and have the requisite information, and parliamentarians can take the lead in sponsoring seminars to that end.

There is a need to strengthen international cooperation and make use of extraterritorial prosecution, so that those who exploit the situation of children in poor countries can be prosecuted wherever they are hiding. There is a need, too, to continue to work together in venues such as the present meeting, to ensure that countries can learn from the experiences of others in dealing with issues of violence against children.

How to build a girl's self-confidence? Members of parliament themselves should be role models in the lives of children. Parliamentarians must take the time to meet children and show them what alternatives they have. Her own approach is to involve sports personalities, members of the Philippines national team, to empower girls by teaching them athletics, giving them something they can do and be proud of.

➤ General discussion

- Parliamentarians should ensure that legislation includes firm enforcement mechanisms, as otherwise it will be useless.
- It is important that there be explicit provisions in the national budget for women and children, covering areas such as maternity care, infant care, registration of births, and so on. Often the only explicit budgetary provision for children is that for education. Budgets must be transparent, and subject to public debate.
- In some countries, girls' problems start with their mothers, who pass on their strictly traditional views of life. By their early teens, with no education, the girls have no option but to be married. Efforts must be made to get girls out of the clutches of such mothers and into school
- To assist girls to advance in education, some form of affirmative action might be beneficial, such as adjusted university entrance requirements, or stipends paid to girls who complete a certain number of years in school.

- Some countries have school or higher education curricula designed to make students, particularly boys, give consideration to changes in gender roles. Others have developed special engineering and science courses for female students.
- Certain countries in Europe are particular targets for the trafficking of women by organized crime from the former Soviet Union. There is a need for inter-parliamentary cooperation, over and above intergovernmental cooperation, to stop the trade, as well as a need for men to stand up and say that participating in the forced sex trade is disgusting.
- Girls who run away from home because of violence are particularly vulnerable to being recruited into the sex trade.
- A particular area of violence against the girl child is that perpetrated on domestic servants, particularly in some developing countries. Attention needs to be paid to reaching this dark area of violence. Appropriate measures must be formulated, another task and responsibility for the parliamentarians.
- The situation of children during armed conflict is particularly grave. There is not only the danger of their being orphaned by the fighting between adults, or of displacement of whole families resulting in the child's loss of a sense of place, but in particularly cruel circumstances children may be forced to act as soldiers or guerillas, or girl children forced to provide sexual favours to combatants.
- It is a duty for developed countries to open their markets to the products of the developing countries. By increasing the revenue of the developing countries, they will be assisting them to fight against poverty, which in turn will help to alleviate discrimination.

The parliamentary session ended with closing remarks from Ms. Xavier who thanked all the participants for their thoughtful and interesting interventions. She highlighted some of the key issues raised during the day. Discussions focused on legislation – the need to develop and adopt strong laws that outlaw all types of violence against the girl child, physical and psychological, but also in spheres where legislators sometimes hesitate to tackle like violence in the home. Legislation also needed to be reviewed on a regular basis and parliaments had to exercise their oversight function thoroughly, through parliamentary committees, questions to government, and ombudspersons so as to ensure that legislation responded to the needs of the girl child.

But legislation was not enough and the meeting discussed the need for accompanying enforcement regulations, policies and programmes as well as the importance of voting resources for the girl child. With this in mind, initiatives aimed at building capacities of girls and providing them with access to education were recommended.

Partnership with men was also much discussed – they are women's allies in the fight for equality and for changing mentalities. Policies that would empower men to take a more active role in spheres where they have been traditionally less active are useful tools to change behaviors and social patterns.

These were just key findings. Ms Xavier noted that a full report of the meeting would be put together following the meeting. She concluded by inviting all participants to closely follow the debates at the CSW and to ensure adequate parliamentary follow up to the results of this meeting as well as to resolution to be adopted by the CSW at the end of its session.

Special event:

Presentation of the International Knowledge Network of Women in Politics (iKNOW Politics)

During the 1 March parliamentary event, a presentation was given on the International Knowledge Network of Women in Politics, an innovative global forum designed to promote gender-sensitive governance and advance the role of women in political and public life, which had been officially launched only a few days before, at the United Nations.

iKNOW Politics is a joint venture of five organizations: the Inter-Parliamentary Union, the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA), the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM). It seeks to support women's participation in politics through the sharing of information and expertise, with the goal of increasing the participation and effectiveness of women in political life through technology.

The forum is designed to connect parliamentarians, candidates, party members, researchers and practitioners across borders and generations, equipping them with the materials and expertise to make their political mark. It offers access to publications, resources and case studies on a wide range of topics, encourages participation in the creation of knowledge through mediated discussion forums and information exchanges; and makes provision for sharing of experiences and lessons learned among a global network of women in politics.

The content and information on the site is categorized into several main areas of governance and politics: electoral campaigning, electoral systems and quotas, political parties, parliaments and representatives, advocacy and lobbying, skills building, and post-conflict and transitional participation. Under each of the issues, there are links to online resources and news links. A key feature is the online library which includes more than 400 reports, handbooks and training materials, gathered together in a searchable database providing quick and easy access to a host of comparative information and data. There is also the possibility of asking questions on women in politics to an expert network. The experts' responses will be consolidated in a permanent archive accessible to all iKNOW Politics members. Users can also generate and join discussion circles, which will act as an organizing points on issues and themes, allowing brainstorming of strategies or broadcasting of upcoming events.

Parliamentarians' active input and insights will help ensure the site's effectiveness at meeting the needs of women in politics worldwide.