



## Parliamentary strategies for tackling violence against women and girls

A parliamentary event organized by the Inter-Parliamentary Union and UN Women on the occasion of the 57<sup>th</sup> Session of the Commission on the Status of Women  
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# FINAL REPORT

## Opening

**Hon. Rebecca Kadaga, Speaker of the Parliament of Uganda, Vice-President of the IPU**, opened the meeting, welcomed the participants and greeted the introductory speakers.

## Introductory speeches

**Mr. Abdelwahad Radi (Morocco), President of the Inter-Parliamentary Union**, gave the following address:

This parliamentary event is the ninth of its kind. For us parliamentarians it is a unique opportunity to make a contribution to the work of the Commission and make our perspective heard.

The topic of *Parliamentary strategies for tackling violence against women and girls* is one that I hold close to my heart and I am delighted to see so many of you here to share your experiences, exchange information and identify new strategies for addressing violence against women and girls.

The figures are alarming: globally six out of every 10 women will fall victim to physical and/or sexual violence in their lifetime; one out of five women will be a victim of rape or attempted rape at some point in their life; 35% of all murders of women in the world are committed by an intimate partner; 14.2 million girls are married each year before their 18th birthday and 3.3 million risk suffering genital mutilation. Behind these figures are human lives, the lives of women and girls who will never be the same again.

This is a global problem that spares no country, including my own, where the State and civil society are joining forces to tackle it, and one which should prompt us all to take action. These types of violence are the result of gender inequality and gender-based discrimination. It is an area in which we can and must take action if we want to get to the heart of the problem.

I am very proud to say that the IPU is waging a huge campaign to mobilize parliaments to take action on violence against women. It also provides support to parliamentary initiatives aimed at establishing an effective legal framework, monitoring implementation and galvanizing public support through sensitization campaigns.

Laws can transform the lives of women if they are comprehensive and properly implemented and that is where we parliamentarians come in. I am here today in my capacity as President of the IPU but also as a Moroccan Member of Parliament. As you may know, my country's Criminal Code still contains gaps which the new Constitution has taken into account by establishing absolute gender equality and prohibiting all forms of discrimination against women. I condemn in the strongest of terms what is taking place across the world and will do the needful to ensure that rape and other forms of sexual violence are clearly criminalized for what they really are: acts of violence and attacks on the physical integrity of a person. I am convinced, and recent international studies have shown, that the passage and enforcement of a law aimed at providing protection against gender-based violence play a pivotal role in changing mentalities and behaviours in any given society. The IPU is counting precisely on lawmakers to bring about change.

Recently, the Parliament of the Maldives passed a private member's bill on domestic violence, which had been drafted with IPU assistance. Similarly, in Burkina Faso and Togo, the IPU assisted parliamentarians in drafting bills on violence against women and girls.

These parliamentary initiatives carry hope and prospects for change in the lives of women throughout the world. There are many others, which we will discuss during our deliberations today. Our discussions will also focus on violence against women in the political arena. I am particularly sensitive to this form of violence because it hinders women's participation in politics and the smooth functioning of democracy.

Parliamentarians can and should devise concrete solutions so that everywhere women can vote, run for elections and serve their constituents in full freedom and security, without being harassed, threatened or the object of sexist or degrading remarks.

These forms of discrimination and violence exist everywhere, as is known full well. This is a very serious matter and one that we must not neglect. Violence against women, be it in the public or private sphere, requires us to act with a clear vision and in a concerted manner.

Our meeting today should enable us to draw some lessons from the work that has been accomplished to date and heighten our political commitment to put an end to this scourge.

**Ms. Michelle Bachelet, United Nations Under-Secretary-General and Executive Director of UN Women,** offered the following words:

I am delighted, once again, to meet with parliamentarians from around the world during the annual Commission on the Status of Women. This is the ninth consecutive year we have convened during this event, and each time we come together we make more progress toward our goals. I value the opportunity to share and exchange information and ideas with all of you on the issues under consideration, and know that your parliamentary perspective will enrich our deliberations.

I also wish to acknowledge the long-standing and fruitful relationship that we have between the United Nations and the IPU on issues pertaining to women's political participation and gender equality. I look forward to building on this relationship as UN Women expands its scope of work, particularly in the area of eliminating and preventing all forms of violence against women and girls.

We find ourselves today at a tipping point in history: never before has there been greater momentum to end violence against women. Never before have we had the saturation of cell phones and the Internet to capture and communicate in real time the atrocities taking place in countries around the world. Never before have we witnessed such public outrage and calls for change and action. Today, no matter where we live, we are all witness to violence such as the brutal gang rape and death of a young woman that took place in India last December.

**We know that violence against women is the most pervasive human rights violation with the worst record of justice.**

**Michelle Bachelet**

Here in the United States, the gang rape of a 16-year-old in Ohio also made headlines, prompting Nicholas Kristof of the New York Times to ask whether Steubenville was so very different from New Delhi.

In the aftermath of such tragedies, women, men and young people have raised their voices in a singular cry: enough is enough. People are demanding an end to impunity and insisting on the protection of the rights of women and girls to live lives free of violence.

We know that violence against women is the most pervasive human rights violation with the worst record of justice. This violence is universal and occurs in all countries and now is the time for stronger action so that education fosters prevention, services are provided to survivors, and perpetrators are punished.

This year, the Commission on the Status of Women is addressing this priority theme and must come to strong agreement on the way forward. A way forward that signals that violence against women is never acceptable and that Member States will no longer turn a blind eye to such crimes, such human rights violations.

At this Commission, the agreed conclusions we reach must not only reaffirm existing norms and standards on the elimination of violence against women and girls. They must have the "teeth" they need for implementation. That means States must back them up with effective plans and policies, legislation and budgets.

As parliamentarians, you and your colleagues around the world are essential to this goal. You have put ending violence against women on the political agenda and I thank the IPU for the important role it has played in this area. Legislative change is fundamental to halting the violence epidemic, and it is you, the representatives of the people, who can make it happen and make a real difference for women and girls. I applaud your efforts and would now like to suggest four concrete ways that you can further help prevent and end this appalling violence.

First, parliaments pass legislation and create laws that criminalize violence. Today, two-thirds of countries have legislation criminalizing domestic violence, for example. But this is not enough. All countries should have legislation that penalizes violence against women in all spheres and all forms of violence. Parliaments must identify gaps and amend weak legislation.

For example, after the horrific rape and death of the young Indian woman I mentioned, a panel was appointed to look at strengthening criminal laws in cases of sexual assault against women. Headed by former Chief Justice J. S. Verma, the panel has proposed criminal penalties for several forms of harassment, for stalking, for voyeurism, for assaulting a woman, and for military or police supervisors who fail to control subordinates who commit rape.

These new proposals will go a long way in strengthening current Indian laws which prohibit acts that "outrage a woman's modesty," but do not define specific off-limits behaviours. At a press conference in January, Mr. Verma said, "Merely addressing the end stage of rape isn't the solution. You have to address the first steps, which ultimately graduate into aggravated forms of sexual assault."

So I urge all of you to review and strengthen laws in your countries to end violence against women.

Second, parliaments play a key role in monitoring and implementing existing and new legislation.

When laws are not implemented, or are implemented casually or inconsistently, that is a failure of governance, a failure to meet the rights and needs of constituents and, in this case, a failure to protect women and girls from violence. This is an area where coordination and partnerships with other stakeholders can make all the difference.

Parliamentarians can use their good offices to bring police, prosecutors, judges, health care providers, social workers and religious and community leaders on board to wage the battle together and hold each other accountable. Ending violence against women requires the full engagement of all sectors of society.

Third, successful implementation of legislation lies in society's increased awareness of violence against women. Today, the Worldwide Web and social media greatly help in this regard. But parliamentarians also have an important role to play. You can help sensitize people and shape public opinion. You have speaker power! You can engage the wider community in an open debate on changing social norms and attitudes and send the

message that violence against women is unacceptable and will not be tolerated and perpetrators will be brought to justice.

Last, as they say, but certainly not least, is the parliamentary function of budget setting and budget approval. This is key to progress. We know too well that the road to hell is paved with good intentions. A law is not potent if it does not have the financial and human resources required for its implementation. Many a law or an action plan is passed without a budget, without those “teeth” I spoke of earlier. In reality, this means that nothing happens.

In order for a law to have effect it must have financial backing. And these financial requirements must be reflected in budget allocations. Women and girls around the world are counting on you to deliver those budgets. And so am I.

Before I close, let me make one more point; it concerns violence against women in public spaces. Violence in this sphere often goes unreported and unaddressed.

But as we have seen all too clearly of late, the violence that is committed against women and young girls in cities, whether on the bus or on city streets, can be as brutal and fatal as any. It is time for this issue to be front and centre as a priority on every policy agenda.

In closing, I want to strongly reaffirm UN Women’s commitment to working as hard as we can to help end violence against women and girls, in public as well as in private spaces. We have been working on global campaigns to raise awareness and to mobilize all stakeholders for the elimination of such violence.

For example, the United Nations Secretary-General’s UNiTE to End Violence against Women campaign includes a welcome focus on the role of men and boys in ending this violence. And it is producing results. A remarkable young man in Tanzania, for example, was so moved by the stories he read of violence against women that he entered and won a global UNiTE T-shirt design contest last year. Today, he mobilizes his peers through a travelling “Caravan for Change” that raises awareness of violence against women and girls in his own country.

We also coordinate the UN Trust Fund to End Violence against Women which, by the end of 2012, included 95 programmes in 85 countries and territories. Among its grantees is the Population Council, which equips indigenous girls in Guatemala with GPS systems to create maps that include areas of perceived safety and risk. Local leaders are using the maps to improve municipal planning, including lighting, police patrols and more.

In addition, we know that violence against women and girls affects entire families, communities and cities. Therefore, we have also developed a “Safe Cities Free of Violence against Women and Girls” global programme that brings a comprehensive approach to the issue.

Dialogue and collaboration among stakeholders, including parliamentarians, is key to forging a consensus on concrete actions to end violence against women and girls. The women and girls you serve – indeed, all humanity – are counting on the passion you have in your mission to alter the course of their lives...and of history.

### **Testimonials: Behind a strong political will: parliamentarians’ motivation and responsibilities**

Mr. Aliou Aya (Mali), Member of the National Assembly, President of the Parliamentary Network on Violence against Women and Children; Mr. J. Mendes Bota (Portugal), Member of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, First Vice-Chairperson of the Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination; and Ms. Sarah Sayifwanda (Zambia), Member of Parliament, former Minister for Gender and Women’s Development, explained what had motivated them to press their country to address violence against women and girls, the forms of violence they had focused on, and the difficulties they had encountered. The session was moderated

by Ms. Gayle Tzemach Lemmon, Deputy Director of the Women and Foreign Policy Program of the Council on Foreign Relations.

Mali's Parliamentary Network on Violence against Women and Children was set up by the National Assembly in November 2010 following a seminar organized by the IPU. It now comprises some 50 parliamentarians, including all 15 women MPs, and concentrates on eliminating female genital mutilation. The Government has undertaken awareness-raising campaigns against the practice, discovering that in certain parts of the country it persists because some people erroneously think that it is called for by Islam. To counter this mistaken belief, religious leaders, or imams, have accompanied the campaigns, and have been able to demonstrate that in no degree is it a requirement of the Muslim religion. Another factor was some people's belief that female genital mutilation is a national tradition, but, again, the campaigns were able to demonstrate their error. It is not at all uniformly practiced throughout the country, with some ethnic groups, particularly in the north, not performing it at all.

It has been shown that as a nation's literacy increases, so the ignorant practice of female genital mutilation diminishes, but the Malian Parliamentary Network decided that it could not wait for that gradual process, and that instead it should take the legislative route. A law was prepared for presentation in 2012, but the invasion of the north of the country by drug-dealing terrorists rendered that impossible. Further legislative action will have to wait until the situation had stabilized, but at least there has been progress in that female genital mutilation is no longer a taboo subject that cannot even be discussed.

Mr. Mendes Bota told a lighthearted story about how he became an activist combating violence against women. Walking one day past an open door at the Council of Europe, he discovered a conference room full of women all apparently discussing football. As a passionate football fan, he joined the conversation, but discovered that the topic actually under discussion was a huge upsurge in trafficking of women into Germany for forced prostitution, ahead of the 2006 World Cup.

That was the beginning of his involvement. When the subject was debated in the full Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, he spoke out against football's governing association, FIFA, that was not doing enough to counter the organized criminal gangs that were trafficking women. Suddenly he found himself in a leading position in the cause, supported by heroic women, some of his male colleagues, civic leaders, NGOs and even some footballers.

**"I became an activist for women's rights through my love of football!"**

**José Mendes Bota, Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe**

It is important for women parliamentarians, legislators or activists, to seek men's support for their causes. At least for the present, society and the world are headed by men. Universities, football clubs, major companies, are nearly all led by men. And those men in leading positions can influence other men, through example, provided that the women secure their support.

Violence against women is not an easy issue to raise money for, but potential donors need to be made aware that it is a money-saving investment: it has been variously estimated that at least 2% of GNP relates to the cost of violence against women, in terms of hospital care, helpers for victims and medical supplies. There is similarly a huge cost, in terms of lost economic potential, of early or forced marriage.

It is not easy to create something that goes against what society considers normal, but those working for change have to persevere. Parliamentarians have a calling and a responsibility to lead their communities in harmony. On that basis, Ms. Sayifwanda and her parliamentary colleagues in Zambia eventually succeeded in creating legislation against all forms of gender-based violence. In the early days of her work to that end, her male colleagues said that such legislation could never succeed: with the predominance of men in positions of power, it would never be possible to pass laws censuring their ways of behaving. But she persevered, engaging

civil society, the Ministry of Justice and other arms of government, as well as non-governmental organizations, particularly those of women.

A change in behaviour in a country such as Zambia has to negotiate the space between customary and statutory law. She organized awareness-raising campaigns and workshops, travelling the whole country and visiting traditional leaders to seek their support. Another important step was the translation of the legislation into the country's seven official languages, so that people could truly be aware of what was being required of them.

In acting against female genital mutilation, and violence against women in general, communication is essential. In addition to conventional modern media, an important role is played by traditional communicators, who can convey the message through music and poetry that violence against women is not something to be regarded as normal, but something to be prevented or punished.

A danger is that the images shown by the media tend to be patriarchal. It proved necessary to appeal to the media not to contribute to outdated stereotypes, but to play their own civic role in changing attitudes. Gradually, the media moved to the side of the reformers: whereas in 2008 In Zambia, 2,400 cases of sexual violence were reported, by 2011 the figure was over 11,000.

### **Session 1: When parliaments commit to ending violence against women and girls**

Ms. Gisèle Guigma (Burkina Faso), Member of the National Assembly, Rapporteur of the Network of Women Parliamentarians of the *Assemblée parlementaire de la francophonie* (APF) and Senator Lucero Saldaña (Mexico), Secretary of the Ad Hoc Committee on Child and Youth Rights, Member of the Committee on Gender Equality, discussed parliamentary strategies for a strong legislative framework and effective implementation of laws and policies to end violence against women and girls. The session was moderated by Speaker Kadaga.

In Burkina Faso, too, action on violence against women took root from a seed sown by the IPU, which had assisted in organizing seminars on legislating to prevent such violence, and the role of parliamentarians in doing so. The seminars, also involving police, traditional chiefs and NGOs, facilitated the parliamentarians'

.....violence against women is a global issue which does not belong to a particular community; even in the most developed countries of the world, women and children suffer from violence ....

**Nayyareh Akhavan, Islamic Republic of Iran**

engagement, and finally a working group formulated a draft law on all forms of violence against women and girls. Unfortunately, it was submitted just before the legislative elections, not leaving time for a Government response. After the elections, the protagonists are waiting for the Government's proposals for amendments, but as the National Assembly is now 90% new, the awareness-raising has to start all over again.

Burkina Faso was instrumental in bringing the resolution before the United Nations that prohibited female genital mutilation, which had been adopted on 20 December. Within the APF, too, it had worked towards the adoption of a resolution forbidding harmful practices on young girls.

In Mexico, two major laws in favour of women were passed in the period 2006-07. One was a general law on equality between men and women, the other a law guaranteeing women's and girls' access to a life free of violence. These two important laws helped Mexico move from a concept of equity to one of equality: equity as an instrument and equality as a goal and a right. Both laws also acted as a framework for coordination of actions by several ministries involved in gender-related matters and as a basis for the creation of budgetary lines to fulfil their objectives.

The general law on equality establishes a national programme and an observatory to measure and evaluate results. The law on access to a life free of violence gives women and girls guarantees on their protection by

legislation and public policies. The broad principles of the general law have been adapted to the details of various locations' specific circumstances, which required material resources as well as legislative work and negotiation.

In the discussion session that followed, contributions were made by representatives of Algeria, Andorra, Bahrain, Bolivia, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Gambia, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Italy, Jordan, Lesotho, Mali, Mexico, Morocco, Norway, Peru, South Africa, Spain, Turkey, Uganda, the United Kingdom and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe.

Representatives described some of the actions their governments had taken to prevent violence against women, such as criminalizing domestic violence, outlawing female genital mutilation, regulating divorce proceedings and providing the necessary budget for implementation of laws.

While it was still largely the case that men occupied the majority of parliamentary seats, it was important that male and female parliamentarians should work together as allies to pass legislation on these important topics. When new legislation was introduced, male parliamentarians who were undecided could often be persuaded more readily by men who were already in favour, rather than by women. It was also important to couch the legislation in language that would not be perceived as threatening to men.

Participants stressed the importance of the media in campaigns to outlaw violence against women. Particularly in rural areas, where not all homes had radio or television, there was especial importance in traditional communicators, working through songs and poems. It was also suggested that the IPU could urge satellite television channels around the world to broadcast messages and guidance in the area of violence against women. It was the responsibility of the Government to organize missions to the remoter regions of their countries, particularly those devoid of radio or television, to inform the people about the provisions of laws protecting women, and to inform women in particular of how to call on that protection.

**Gender-based violence is a scourge that affects everybody – male or female. It compromises the social development of children and the household, family unity, the social fabric of communities and the well-being of society as a whole.**

**Mr. Monare, National Assembly, Lesotho**

Of particular importance was the education system, which could play a critical role in changing the mindset of children. This, in turn, required special training for teachers in educating young people to resolve conflicts without violence. Some countries incorporated life-skills units in their education system to inculcate such healthy attitudes. A fundamental

first step was to eliminate gender-based discriminatory attitudes, by eliminating gender-specific language, and even gender-specific colours. It was important, too, for the educational system to treat the parents as equal to one another, so that they would not harbour and pass on the idea that males were in some sense privileged or superior.

In parallel with the work of the education system, mothers could shape children's ideas about violence against women. That could require guidance to the mothers in how to teach ideas and attitudes that might be very different from those prevailing in their country.

Until violence against women and girls could be eliminated, it was essential to provide shelters for its victims. Also needed were specialist domestic sexual violence support services and rape crisis centres. Establishment of shelters and services had to take an integrated and multisectoral approach, involving social welfare workers, health care personnel, police and NGOs, and providing counseling as well as medical care and material support. In the domestic arena, the definition of domestic violence should be expanded from physical violence to include psychological and emotional abuse.

Training in gender issues, especially in those societies where violence against women might be regarded as normal, was needed for police officers, health service personnel and members of the judiciary.

Also important was the provision of toll-free phone lines for victims of violence to call for help, with wide publicity on how to use them. Several representatives described their governments' efforts in those areas.

Particular importance attached to making victims and potential victims aware of the protection that the law could offer them, as part of the functions of observatories for violence against women. Immigrant women were particularly at risk, as their uncertainty about their rights and status made them reluctant to draw the attention of the authorities to themselves. This allowed men to act violently towards them with impunity. Similar concerns applied to prostitutes, particularly those who had been forced into the trade.

The issue was raised of whether countries which had banned female genital mutilation, such as Burkina Faso, could take any legal action against local women who took girls to a different country, such as Mali, to be mutilated where the practice had not yet been forbidden. Although attempts had been made to stem this trans-frontier traffic, it seemed that it would not be possible to halt it until all countries that shared a border had legislated to outlaw female genital mutilation.

In some countries, violence against women was not covered by criminal law. That was obviously unjust, and some countries were making the necessary changes to their legislation, or considering doing so. One important step was to include femicide in the penal code as a specific crime. Several representatives reported that their government was considering taking that step, while some reported that their country had already done so, and called on others do the same.

Action should be taken against the offence of stalking, and the appalling cases of so-called "honour" killings. Legislative measures on violence against women could include domestic violence disclosure schemes to allow the police to warn people about a partner's previous convictions for violence, domestic violence protection orders, prohibition of forced marriages and teenage rape prevention campaigns.

In the international arena, work needed to be done to prevent sexual violence in conflict and post-conflict situations, and donor countries should assist developing countries in their attempts to scale up their protection for women and girls.

The conclusions and recommendations that emerged from the debate included the following:

- Legislation must be upgraded to counter violence against women. Special attention has to be paid to the specific crimes of femicide, stalking, and so-called "honour" killings.
- Until violence against women and girls can be eliminated, it is essential to provide shelters for its victims. Also needed are domestic sexual violence support services and rape crisis centres.
- An important factor is to involve men, particularly male parliamentarians, and boys in prevention of violence against women.
- There is a need for the IPU and UN-Women to work with parliaments in various countries, offering capacity-building and guidance on how to create the legislation to achieve the desired goal.
- Parliamentarians have the responsibility of ensuring that countries sign and ratify the CEDAW Convention and/or the Council of Europe Istanbul Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence, and monitoring governments' compliance with their provisions.



## Theme 2: Violence against women in the political arena

Ms. Gabriela Montaña, President of the Senate of Bolivia; Ms. Gabrielle Bardall, Elections and Gender consultant; and Ms. Roberta Blackman-Woods, Member of the House of Commons of the United Kingdom, examined different manifestations of violence against women due to their involvement in politics. The session was moderated by Ms. Margaret Mensah-Williams, Vice-Chairperson of the National Council of Namibia. The meeting observed a minute's silence for the passing of President Hugo Chávez of Venezuela.

The process of participation by women in the political sphere in Bolivia is part of a much larger change taking place, the building of the Plurinational State, one that for the first time in history takes into account two formerly disadvantaged sectors: indigenous peoples and women. The alliance between the two groups has facilitated enormous qualitative and quantitative progress in women's participation in the political sphere and decision-making areas. Since the political constitution approved by referendum in 2010 entered into force, the country's women have begun to lay the road to parity, which is now a reality in the Chamber of Senators, where female senators are a majority, while female participation in the Chamber of Deputies has increased from less than 20% to almost 40%. This growth in female representation has been possible only because the State is in the process of a total transformation, in which in all spheres the old patriarchal attitudes and behaviours are being swept away.

With a significant number of women now in decision-making positions, the way is clear for the construction of a society free of violence against women. The previous year, the law against political harassment and political violence against women was passed. This had been very necessary in Bolivia because particularly in the local or municipal context there had been a very high number of cases of violence against elected women, intended to force them to renounce their office or to take decisions against their will. Under the new law, some such cases have already gone to trial.

Another law recently adopted by the Assembly is that on a life free of violence against women. Its predecessor law concentrated on domestic violence, but the present law was expanded to violence in the public sphere also, thereby covering all types of violent crime against women and allowing no provision for impunity. Alignment of the criminal, civil, family and other codes will be the final step in a process of reform of the judicial sphere in the area of violence against women.

However, it will not be possible for the issue of violence against women to be resolved only through stricter laws. Rather, there is a need for great efforts to create jobs and economic initiatives for women, and it has to be recognized that the process will take time and demand resources. But Bolivia has demonstrated that with political will it is possible to generate conditions for equal parliamentary participation of women and that such participation can be seen as an investment in achieving equality for all citizens, male and female alike.

Women and men must have equal access to the political process in order to work for change. Yet, from the wealthiest nations to the poorest, barriers exist to women's political participation, and one of the highest barriers is political violence against women.

The media give a distorted picture of election violence: bloody confrontations between political opponents, assassinations, state repression. What they do not make clear is that these manifestations are the kinds of violence that men perpetrate against other men. They do not reflect the reality of the election violence that women experience, driving women voters away from polling stations, coercing their choices and creating a climate of terror for women who dream of running for elected office.

UNDP's Global Programme on Electoral Cycle Support, UN Women and the International Foundation for Electoral Systems have begun to uncover some of the realities of the gendered nature of election violence. While physical violence against women in elections is certainly present, most often political violence against women is psychological or even sexual in nature. These psychological attacks can be made in public, for

example with women being accused of prostitution when they run for political office, or of being un-Islamic infidels, or of abandoning a woman's proper role. Intimidation and psychological abuse also takes place in private settings, with women being threatened with divorce if they vote against the wishes of their husbands and tribes. Economic violence is another common but under-recognized form of political violence against women in many settings. Physical and sexual violence are also realities for women voters and candidates. In Guinea, state military forces raped dozens of women at a political rally. In the Tahrir Square protests in Cairo, sexual harassment and assault have been described as "rampant" and "systematic."

Domestic abuse is used as a form of political violence against women, intended to coerce women's political choices or compel them to abstain from voting or running for office. Indeed, political violence against women is most frequently committed by people who are close to the victim: domestic partner, extended family, even fellow parliamentarians.

Political violence against women occurs (for the same reasons as violence against men) as the most effective perceived means to achieve a political goal under given circumstances, but it is also driven by some gender-specific motivations, especially as women challenge traditional roles by engaging in politics, something which threatens the survival of the male power structure. To have a complete picture of political violence, gender experts need to understand the political dimension of violence against women, and political experts need to understand the gender aspect of political violence. Better definitions and indicators are needed, encompassing the full scope of the problem, as well as a better job of documenting an area that is notoriously under-reported because of its often shameful and degrading associations.

Preventing and mitigating gender-based political violence require a concerted effort to address legal loopholes and provide real protection through the law and with the security sectors. Once legal protection is in place, it must be given adequate resources to guarantee its implementation. Prevention and mitigation can be supported by initiatives such as the Situation Rooms supported by UN Women in Liberia, Sierra Leone, Zimbabwe and elsewhere, which raise awareness and reduce impunity.

Security forces must be trained to prevent and respond to the many forms of political violence, as part of an overarching gender-sensitive security sector reform. Likewise, election administrators need to be engaged to leverage their role in favour of secure participation for women voters and candidates. Much work is needed with political parties, starting with the candidate recruitment process, as parties can prevent political violence by taking a firm stance against it in their governing documents and codes of conduct, and by lessening the risks women face in the electoral process.

Political women who have successfully overcome these challenges have the most important role of all. Their example can combat the intimidation that leads to high turnover rates and resignations. A powerful way of achieving this is through developing formal or informal associations or networks of elected women. Elected women must share their stories and raise awareness, since women victims of political violence and intimidation often believe they are alone in this experience, when in fact it is a global problem. Rather than a shameful occurrence or a sign of weakness, experiences of violence can be rallying calls for preventing future acts.

The media, too, are not free of blame in the area of violence against women politicians. That is an issue not often talked about, but it is important to see the media's treatment of women politicians as part of a spectrum of anti-female behaviour, a spectrum which starts with objectifying and sexualizing women politicians and over-emotionalizing their comments and behaviour.

Examples can be found all over the world. In the United Kingdom, for example, when under the premiership of Tony Blair over 100 new women parliamentarians were elected, an increase of historic proportions, the media insisted on referring to the new parliamentarians as "Blair Babes."

Often, the media will focus on how women look, rather than what it is that they are saying. As the late Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto had said: "I often found that people were more interested in whether I had gained weight or whether I was wearing clothes that were frumpy," rather than what she was saying or trying to do. This concentration on meaningless aspects has the effect of sidelining and trivializing the issues for which women stood, and can be found in many countries. In an example from the UK, reports about the most senior women politician, Home Secretary Theresa May, will concentrate in the main on her fashion sense, and very often specifically on her shoes, rather than what she is doing in her post.

**"Who The Hill Did This?"**

Newspaper headline about Hillary Clinton, cited by Ms. Blackman-Woods

It is also the case that women can be stereotyped in the media, with their reactions being belittled as specifically feminine. This was seen in the coverage of Hillary Clinton's testimony to a Senate Committee over the handling of the Benghazi raid, termed across the media as "tearful," "exploding with rage" or "angry and emotional," as if tears, anger and emotion are necessarily unreasonable reactions to disaster.

However, women politicians find themselves in a double trap: if they feel real passion about an issue, that is represented as merely women's over-emotionalism, even hysteria; if they do not allow themselves to become emotional, their demeanour is characterized as un-feminine. Politicians often misrepresented in this latter way include Prime Minister Gillard of Australia and Chancellor Merkel of Germany.

This end of the spectrum may seem harmless enough, and women who resist being objectified and sexualized may be accused of "not being able to take a joke," or "reading too much into it." However, taken cumulatively those disrespectful occurrences add up to a barrage of being belittled and degraded.

At the start-point of the spectrum, the coverage that they receive in the media discourages women from running for office, at a time when parliaments worldwide are trying to recruit more female members. But where does the spectrum end? As hostile minds move along the spectrum, there can also be more pernicious results, leading to dehumanization of women and hate campaigns, making it in many countries truly unsafe for women to set out to be politicians.

Consequently there is a need to take a wide view and see that "just a joke" isn't just a joke, but can lead to devastating consequences for women in politics in some countries, for example Afghanistan. There is a need to change the culture in the media, to give a concentration on the concerns that women are raising, in parliament and elsewhere, rather than on how they look and dress. When necessary, such a change will involve using the full force of law to protect women politicians from violence and other threatening behaviour, including stalking which puts women politicians under pressure and makes them feel fearful, and which until quite recently was not treated as a serious offence by the authorities.

At the same time, women parliamentarians see themselves as acting as a voice for their constituents, arguing for other people, and it thus becomes difficult for them to admit that in some areas they need protection and are vulnerable. But if the threat of violence exists, then there is a pressing need to make sure both that women politicians are protected and that their concerns are taken seriously, which at present is far from the case.

In the discussion session that followed, contributions were made by representatives from Andorra, Chile, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Jordan, Malawi, Mali, Mexico, Morocco, Portugal, Spain and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe.

Participants agreed that how the press portrayed women politicians was a matter for serious concern. The way questions were put to women was very different from the way the media interacted with men, with their treatment of women ranging from the trivial to the aggressively hostile. That was a very significant discouragement to women venturing into a political career. If too many of them were dissuaded from entering politics, that would jeopardize the parity that other women had worked so hard to achieve.

Not until a country's parliament had gender parity among its members would the media portray that parity as something normal, with the sex of a legislator ceasing to be worthy of comment. Then the constituents, the readers of the media, the political commentators, would not be thinking about whether a parliamentarian was a man or a woman, just about what he or she was saying on the issues. Most countries had found that the road to parity had to start with affirmative action, quotas, regulations on alternation of candidates, or similar, but a few – Andorra was an example – had achieved parity in parliament without any such assisting measures.

**“You can stand for election, but I’ll be taking a second wife to carry out your duties of looking after me.”**

Malian husband, in an anecdote told by Mr. Aya, MP from Mali

Political violence, defined as any form of action aimed at preventing a women from running for office, or making her take decisions that were contrary to her beliefs, or forcing her to leave office, did not need to be physical. In the domestic sphere, it could take the form of threats and unreasonable demands, economic repression or other pressures.

The topic of political violence against women was rarely discussed. It did not emerge through traditional channels, through police reports, through hospital records or through the media. Women politicians recognized such events individually as forms of violence; the advantage of the present session was that it allowed the participants to recognize them collectively.

The conclusions and recommendations that emerged from the debate included the following:

- When women stand for public office, the countries concerned have to be able to guarantee their safety, and must have relevant laws in place which will bring down the full force of prosecution on aggressors. Women have to be given confidence that they are standing on equal terms.
- Individually, trivializing treatment, threats to take a second wife, and the like, are in themselves trivial, and may even be found amusing by women politicians. But cumulatively, they amount to an onslaught of insults that discourage women from taking their place in political office and cause them to limit the amount of time that they are prepared to spend in office.
- Women politicians should simply be the type of politician they want to be. No-one talks about male politicians as if they are emotionally-governed people, they are just politicians. The media should deal with women politicians as politicians, not as women.
- An essential step is to achieve parity or near-parity between the sexes in parliament. When that is achieved, it becomes the norm and people can stop concerning themselves with the sex of a politician, just concentrating on his or her stance on the issues.

### **What next? Future strategies for parliaments to end violence against women**

Ms. Margaret Mensah-Williams (Namibia), Vice-Chairperson of the National Council and Member of the Women’s Caucus, contributed some ideas on future strategies that could prove effective in halting violence against women, basing her remarks on the IPU’s campaign and programme.

Starting in 2008, the IPU launched a campaign and a programme of work to support parliaments in their efforts to end violence against women. It focuses on all forms of violence against women at the international, regional and national levels; it includes men and women parliamentarians; it builds on parliamentarians’ political leadership and ability to drive change; it aims to respond to the particular concerns of parliaments and parliamentarians. The programme includes activities in three target areas: building a strong and effective legal framework, securing effective implementation of legislation and reinforcing awareness about and visibility of violence against women.

A first lesson learned from the programme is that empowered parliaments and parliamentarians can take effective action on violence against women, through access to expertise and tools, through peer-to-peer engagement and exchange and through solidarity between parliamentarians, especially between men and women.

A second lesson is that a conducive environment facilitates parliamentary action on violence against women. That involves building partnerships and alliances; engagement with citizens, ministries, civil society and other partners; and cross-party alliances among parliamentarians.

Thirdly, as legislation is at the heart of parliamentary action, there is a need to build capacity of parliamentarians in drafting legislation on violence against women, by providing access to expertise and comparative information and by supporting parliamentary drafting committees.

A fourth lesson is that enforcement remains the main challenge. Here, parliamentarians need to monitor the implementation of legislation and policies, and provide budget to ensure long-term sustainability of programmes and ensure visibility and communication. This can be facilitated by providing parliaments with technical assistance to relevant parliamentary committees or support for organizing outreach missions.

The final lesson is that violence against women cannot be addressed without addressing gender inequality. Parliamentarians' role in this area involves working on changing social and cultural norms and attitudes, amending discriminatory legislation, promoting respect for women's rights and mainstreaming gender in Parliament.

After presenting the lessons from the IPU campaign and programme, she asked for views as to the main priorities for parliaments in coming years. Responses were contributed by representatives from Argentina, Canada, Chile, Côte d'Ivoire, Gambia, Mali, Mexico and Morocco.

It was stressed that in the gender arena, parliaments had to lead by example. In many countries, female participation in parliament was only slightly over 20 per cent. Without analysis of the reasons, and action to correct them, it would be very difficult to persuade the general population that parliamentarians were truly behind any gender-supportive legislation they might propose.

Individual women had responsibilities, too. It was their task to deconstruct the cultural structures that result in cultural behaviours. Culture arose from systemic issues, and if women did not demonstrate that they were not independent beings they were simply aiding and abetting the males who would abuse them. Women must consider themselves as individuals, each one unique and indispensable and each one entitled to rights. They had to militate for changes in the law and for adequate budgetary resources, and monitor and assess how such changes were affecting them.

The conclusions that emerged from the discussion included the following:

- While it is certainly right to speak out against mistreatment of women, parliamentarians have to remember that they were elected to speak for all of their constituents, male and female alike.
- Men also need help and training to deal with a changing culture that is stripping away the ways of thinking inculcated in them since childhood.
- Some representatives felt that certain of the solutions proposed are specific to particular cultures and, owing to cultural diversity, not applicable to other societies.
- Others by contrast felt that penalties for violence against women should be implemented uniformly worldwide, without any distinction of religion or of nationality.
- It was important not to curtail the rights of women on the excuse of the economic crisis, as some countries were tending to do.

- A global or international High Council of Women might be envisaged, as already exists in some individual countries, to propose solutions to women's concerns, particularly violence.
- In some countries it was not women-friendly laws that were lacking, but rather a deeper analysis of the reasons for violence.

Ms. Mensah-Williams, summing up, thanked all who had contributed to a very lively day's discussion. From the debates, she had distilled six points that would form the core of the IPU's presentation to the Commission on the Status of Women:

- Legislation is at the heart of parliamentary action. Parliamentarians have to legislate to penalize the different forms of violence against women, identifying gaps and strengthening laws.
- But laws on their own are not enough. They require implementation and resources. Parliamentarians have a responsibility to monitor that laws are enforced, involving all those concerned with implementation: law enforcement, health care providers, social workers and religious and community leaders. Also, parliamentarians can and should raise awareness among women of their rights.
- Parliaments must scrutinize budgets to ensure that adequate financial and human resources are allocated to implementation of legislation.
- Violence against women is a human rights violation that affects families and communities and concerns men and women alike. Building partnerships and alliances against it, and in particular involving more men and boys in preventing and ending it, are crucial.
- Although the media, including social media, can be major allies in educating and raising awareness, it has to be ensured that they do not perpetuate stereotypes and inequalities or even condone violence against women. Today, as the media report on acts of violence against women around the world, more and more people are outraged by these crimes and demanding action to end impunity.
- Political violence against women is a subject of particular relevance to parliamentarians. It can be used as a weapon in conflict situations, but also during election processes and when women take office. Men and women parliamentarians have to lead the way in preventing this phenomenon by changing the culture in politics and the media and by using legislation to protect women in politics.