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GRP/2008/Inf.5  
10 October 2008

## A PARLIAMENTARY RESPONSE TO VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

*Third Conference for Members of Parliamentary Committees on the Status of Women  
and other Committees Dealing with Gender Equality  
Geneva, 2-4 December 2008*

Dear Madam Speaker,  
Dear Mr. Speaker,

As part of its efforts to strengthen the capacity of parliaments to promote gender equality, the Inter-Parliamentary Union organizes an annual conference for chairpersons and members of parliamentary committees dealing with the status of women and gender equality. This year's conference, which will take place from 2 to 4 December 2008, will focus on combating violence against women (VAW).

Violence against women remains a major issue on the international human rights agenda. It is a universal problem, differing only in scope and nature from one country to another. It occurs in the broad context of gender-based discrimination with regards to unequal power relations in both public and private spheres. In the private sphere it encompasses family and intimate violence, including harmful cultural practices and traditions. Within the public sphere, this includes sexual violence, harassment and exploitation. States, through their agents or their public policies, may also inadvertently condone VAW. This is manifested through inadequate laws or ineffective implementation of laws, effectively allowing perpetrators of violence against women go unpunished for their acts.

Violence against women is an unacceptable reality which needs to be addressed as a matter of urgency. The IPU has committed itself to stepping up action in this field and supporting parliaments in making the fight against VAW a national priority. This commitment serves to complement, from the parliamentary perspective, the United Nations Secretary-General's Campaign on VAW, which was launched in March 2008.

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The three-day event will provide an opportunity for members of parliament to take stock of the situation, discuss the various types of violence against women and debate concrete parliamentary initiatives that can be taken to combat such violence. Specific attention will be paid to legislative frameworks and effective enforcement. The topics on the agenda will be introduced by members of parliament and/or experts and representatives of international and/or regional human rights bodies. As in the past, the emphasis will be on discussion, and everything will be done to leave ample time for a free exchange of views. Interpretation into Arabic, English, French and Spanish will be provided.

All national parliaments are invited to this event. It is proposed that delegations be composed of two parliamentarians who are members of committees dealing directly or indirectly with the status of women and gender equality issues or who are experts in this field, along with their advisers. Where possible, the principle of gender balance should be respected in the composition of delegations.

We will be sending the agenda and organizational details as soon as they have been finalized. Meanwhile, we are pleased to attach a registration form. I would like to point out that participants should handle all matters relating to their visas, hotel accommodation and transportation. To facilitate hotel bookings, I am enclosing a reservation form which participants may wish to use.

We look forward to receiving your delegation in Geneva at this event.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Anders', with a large, sweeping flourish that loops back under the name.

Anders B. Johnsson  
Secretary General