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127^{ème} Assemblée de l'Union interparlementaire et réunions connexes
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SPECIAL SESSION ON GENDER-SENSITIVE PARLIAMENTS

Do our institutions reflect and promote gender equality? Are they gender-sensitive, gender-neutral or gender blind? To what degree do they represent the increasingly diverse character of modern society?

Parliaments are the first to be concerned by such questions as their existence fundamentally depends on the premise that they mirror the society they represent. Indeed, a modern parliament is one that manages to adapt itself to continuing social change; it is one in which citizens recognize themselves and find answers to their questions and aspirations.

In the 20th century, one of the greatest changes to democracy around the world was women's increased participation in politics, both as voters and as members of parliament. In parallel, gender equality concerns and objectives have become more prominently placed on the political agenda and are now recognized as a central element of social, cultural and economic development.

While these changes are a welcome reality today, there is still a question as to how far parliaments have managed to transform themselves into political institutions that truly and effectively reflect and champion gender equality.

Past IPU surveys on women in parliament have found that women are overwhelmingly the main drivers of progress on gender equality and that there is a need for parliaments, as institutions to shoulder their part of responsibility in this regard. The finding begged the questions: What are parliaments doing to foster gender equality within their own structures and work? What policies inform gender equality efforts? Are the institutional structures of parliaments around the world representative of both men and women and their respective needs? In short, are parliaments gender-sensitive?

In 2009, the IPU carried out a global survey of parliaments to assess their degree of gender sensitivity (see: *Gender-sensitive Parliaments: A Global Review of Good Practice*, <http://www.ipu.org/english/surveys.htm#gsp11>) and identify good practices that support the promotion of gender equality in and by parliaments.

The survey defines a gender-sensitive parliament as one that responds to the needs and interests of both men and women in its structures, methods, operations and work. It identifies five priority areas for gender-sensitive parliaments. A gender-sensitive parliament is one that:

1. Achieves gender equality in numbers and positions;
2. Develops laws to support gender equality, adopts gender equality objectives and plans and implements gender-sensitive working policies;
3. Mainstreams gender equality concerns in all its work and proceedings;
4. Ensures that it is a non-sexist environment and that it provides facilities that equally accommodate men's and women's needs;
5. Supports men as they share responsibility for gender equality, and encourages political parties to become gender-sensitive.

Objectives of the Special session

The special session aims to provide a platform for members of parliament to discuss what constitutes gender-sensitive parliaments and identify objectives and concrete strategies for the achievement of such institutions.

Outcome of the Special session

The Special Session will result in the development of a Plan of Action for Gender-sensitive Parliaments to be adopted by the 127th Assembly. The Plan of Action would provide an overall framework for action for parliaments to transform themselves into gender-sensitive institutions.

The Session will also provide an opportunity for members of parliament to carry out a preliminary short assessment of their respective parliament.

Participation

Men and women parliamentarians from around the world will be invited to take part. A balanced participation will be sought throughout the proceedings of the Special session. Delegations are therefore encouraged to access the online registration form at: <http://www.ipu2012uip.ca/registration/> and to indicate the names of at least one man parliamentarian and one woman parliamentarian who will be attending the Special gender partnership session.

Format

The Special session will be organised in three half-day sittings. Debates will be held in plenary as well as in break-out groups. Participants will be invited to share experiences, work together in developing strategies and take part in short exercises to assess the level of gender-sensitivity of their respective parliaments.

Agenda:

Sitting 1: Basic components of a gender sensitive parliament (*Plenary*)

(23 October 2012, 9.00 am to 1 pm)

The sitting will begin with a key note address on gender equality and democracy. This will be followed by an introduction of the main findings of the IPU global survey on Gender-sensitive Parliaments: A Global review of good practice and a discussion on what are, according to participants, the main components of a gender-sensitive parliament.

An interactive debate will be encouraged. Prior to opening the floor for interventions, participants will be asked to take part in a short exercise whereby they will be asked to provide in one sentence their definition of a gender-sensitive parliament.

At the end of the sitting, participants will be asked to sign up to break out groups which will meet on 25 October 2012.

Sitting 2: Strategies for achieving gender-sensitive parliaments (*Break-out groups*)

(25 October 2012, 2.30-5 pm)

Further to the discussions held during the first sitting, participants will be asked to sign up for the break out groups. Each group will focus on one or two components of gender-sensitive parliaments. The groups will aim at identifying concrete strategies and good practices to achieve the identified components.

The topics of the three break-out groups are:

Group 1: Mainstreaming gender in all of Parliament's work

The group will discuss:

- What strategies to place gender at the centre of Parliament's legislative and oversight work? (What legislative framework is required; what internal policies? Practices?)
- What structures can contribute to enhancing mainstreaming of gender concerns within parliament? (Committees, caucuses, focal points)
- What strategic partnerships should be developed? (partnership between men and women, role of political parties, role of civil society, etc.)
- What mechanisms, rules and policies to promote an equal participation of men and women at all levels of parliament's work (in decision-making positions, within the

various committees and parliamentary bodies, within the various parliamentary departments?)

Group 2: Building a gender-sensitive culture and infrastructure in Parliament

The group will discuss:

- Internal culture of parliament – norms, practices, language
- Combating stereotypes in parliament
- Giving visibility to the work of women parliamentarians and communicating on gender equality issues
- How to facilitate balance between family and work obligations. Gender sensitive and family friendly working modalities (meeting times, schedules, etc.)
- Gender sensitive parliamentary structures and facilities (crèches, family support allocations, etc.)
- Gender equality internal policies (parental leave, sexual harassment etc.)

Group 3: Building the capacity of Parliaments to address gender issues

The group will discuss:

- Developing a gender equality plan of action for parliament
- Assessing internal capacity requirements (technical units, role of staff, training, etc.)
- Improving or formalizing cooperation opportunities (with civil society, national machineries, research centers etc.)
- How to carry out a gender sensitive evaluation. What monitoring mechanisms need to be established?
- How to build a new generation of gender sensitive politicians and parliamentarians

Sitting 3: Reforming parliament (Plenary)

(26 October 2012, 9 am-12.30 pm)

The sitting will begin with a report back from the break-out groups on strategies to transform parliaments into gender-sensitive institutions. The sitting will then discuss how to begin a reform process in parliament, what are the main steps and requirements.

Participants will also be asked to complete a self-assessment form and identify what action they could personally take to address identified challenges.

The sitting will conclude with the adoption of a draft Plan of Action on Gender-sensitive Parliaments which will be submitted to the 127th Assembly for adoption.

Process for developing the Plan of Action

The development of the Plan of Action will involve an inclusive and participatory process.

The IPU Gender Partnership Group will have the overall responsibility for overseeing the development of the Plan of Action. In so doing it will work in consultation with the Coordinating Committee of Women Parliamentarians.

A preliminary draft of the Plan of Action will be developed ahead of the Quebec Assembly. It will be distributed to Members in September 2012 for comments and suggestions. The draft Plan of Action will build on the findings of the IPU Global Survey on Gender-sensitive Parliaments: A Global review of good practice as well as on the results of various regional and national consultations on the subject that will have been held between the Kampala and Quebec Assemblies.

The Special session on Gender-sensitive Parliaments in Quebec will discuss the draft Plan of Action and serve to complete the document. The Gender Partnership Group, together with the chairs of the break-out groups, will act as a drafting committee to finalise the draft Plan of Action. The Gender Partnership Group will have the overall responsibility for finalising the document to be presented to the Assembly for adoption.