



Inter-Parliamentary Union

For democracy. For everyone.

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Speaking notes

Ms. Margaret Mensah Williams
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General Debate on
*Redressing inequalities: Delivering on
dignity and well-being for all*
136th IPU Assembly and related
meetings
Dhaka, 2 April 2017

Mr. President,
Mr. Secretary General,
Dr. Shirin Sharmin Chaudhury, Speaker of Bangladesh Parliament,
Mr. S. Alremeithi, President of the Forum of Young MPs of the IPU,
Mr. Kailash Satyarthi, Nobel Prize Laureate and Chairperson, Global March
Against Child Labour,
Distinguished guests,
Dear colleagues,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

When the international community adopted the Sustainable Development Goals in 2015 we felt something crucial was happening. We felt human dignity and shared prosperity were now high on the global agenda.

The debate that starts today is a reminder that the SDGs lie at the core of our mission as parliamentarians, which is to redress inequalities and deliver on dignity and well-being *for all*.

There is one way to fast-track this process: by putting gender equality at the basis of all our undertakings.

We know that all forms of inequality are interrelated. By advancing gender equality, we tackle inequalities across the board.

Today I call on all of us to take firm action in three priority areas:

The first priority is to eliminate gender inequality in our laws.

Ninty per cent of our nations still have provisions that discriminate against women. This can no longer be tolerated. It undermines all our efforts to promote development and reduce inequalities of any sort.

Legislation that affirms the principle of gender equality and addresses all forms of gender-based violence and discrimination should be the norm in all our countries.

The second priority is to enable our parliaments to deliver on gender equality.

Today the percentage of women in parliament stands at only 23.3; there are 17 women heads of State or government and 18.3 per cent of ministers are women. We are still far from where we should be. Gender equality in political decision-making is crucial in making our institutions legitimate, efficient and effective. Women from different walks of life bring a rich experience and another perspective to parliament. Research by the IPU has shown that women parliamentarians have been the key drivers of progress in the area of gender equality, women's rights and children's rights. Such progress is essential in ensuring dignity and well-being for all.

Women parliamentarians, in particular women Speakers of Parliament, are also strong role models. When they see us lead, our girls and young women have a reason to believe that making decisions is their business.

But it is not only about women taking the lead. Parliament itself needs to become gender-sensitive in its organization, operations and work. We must implement the IPU *Plan of Action for Gender-sensitive Parliaments* from A to Z if we are to eliminate gender-based inequality.

The third priority is to make women's economic empowerment a reality for all women.

Women's economic empowerment is a key driver of human development. We have evidence that women's increased access to income and assets means that girls and boys are more likely to be at school and that families have better nutrition and health. In addition, there is evidence that gender equality at work could add US\$ 12 trillion to the world economy. This additional income could help reduce inequalities, provided that it is equitably distributed.

The economic empowerment of women means ensuring that they can earn a fair wage, do decent work, and benefit from social security on an equal basis with men. This is not happening in reality.

Women continue to earn less than men; they continue to occupy precarious jobs; they continue to undertake most household responsibilities and the value of the unpaid work that is mostly done by women is not recognized.

All of this has to change if we are serious about addressing inequalities.

I am pleased that this Assembly will draw attention to women's economic empowerment by adopting a resolution on the financial inclusion of women as a driver of development. Let's take this agenda back home!

Let me end by saying that:

If we are to succeed in delivering on dignity and well-being for all, we must respond to the needs of: women in crisis situations, women migrants or refugees, women with disabilities or living with HIV, young and elderly women. All women.

We must lead the way in our families and in our parliaments. We cannot be complacent, perpetuate gender biases and let inequalities prevail. Let's walk the talk!