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# 137<sup>th</sup> IPU Assembly

St. Petersburg, Russian Federation, 14–18 October 2017



## Parity debate

### Holding the purse strings: Exercising oversight for the common good

Organized by the Forum of Women Parliamentarians  
Tuesday, 17 October 2017  
11 a.m. - 1 p.m., Dumsky Hall (ground floor), Tavrishesky Palace

The Forum of Women Parliamentarians will organize in St. Petersburg its third parity debate entitled "Holding the purse strings: Exercising oversight for the common good".

The overall aim of a parity debate is to promote dialogue between women and men at the IPU, and encourage them to debate issues of common interest together. As equal numbers of men and women will speak in the debate, the different but complementary views and experiences of both genders will emerge clearly, ensuring that gender equality concerns are mainstreamed into the discussion. Delegations are therefore invited to be represented in this debate by male and female participants.

The debate coincides with the publication of the latest IPU and UNDP *Global Parliamentary Report on Parliamentary Oversight: Parliament's Power to Hold Government to Account*. It will explore one of parliament's most powerful functions: scrutinizing the budget and overseeing public finances and spending.

The national budget provides a comprehensive statement of the priorities of a government and how it intends to resource them. For parliaments, budgetary oversight is a milestone opportunity to ensure that the budget optimally matches a nation's needs with available resources. Parliamentary involvement in the budget process establishes checks and balances that are crucial for transparent and accountable government and efficient delivery of public services. Parliamentary oversight also contributes to ensuring that the budget is inclusive, fair and responsive to the needs of all people. This is all the more important as States work towards the achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

It is widely agreed that the power of the purse is one of the most significant powers available to parliament. Nevertheless, the exact role of parliament in the budget process varies from parliament to parliament, with some parliaments having significantly greater powers than others.

Some recent trends can, however, be observed. Increasingly, parliamentary oversight takes place throughout the entire budget cycle, from the formulation of budget priorities to the evaluation of the impact of government policy on citizens' lives. Parliaments are also increasingly requiring the government to use gender-responsive budgeting techniques to ensure that budgets contribute to the goal of gender equality in society, are more transparent and respond more effectively to the needs of the people. Parliaments are supported in this role by audit institutions and are building their own internal resources such as Parliamentary Budget Offices and their capacity to carry out gender analysis of budgets.



#IPU137

Effective oversight requires a strong mandate with clearly defined powers to hold government to account; committed and willing participants, and sufficient capacity in parliament to give teeth to those powers. How does parliament's power to oversee the budget measure up against these criteria?

The debate will begin with a presentation of the findings and recommendations from the Global Parliamentary Report 2017. It will then focus on the following key questions:

- What formal and informal powers does parliament have to oversee the budget process? How can parliament best use these powers to ensure that the budget delivers for the common good?
- What concrete steps has your parliament taken towards bringing a gender perspective into the national budget, and what should be done to strengthen and increase these initiatives?
- How open and transparent is the budget process, and what would be the most important improvement to be made?
- How strong are the partnerships between parliament and external partners such as supreme audit institutions, and how could these partnerships be strengthened?
- What skills and knowledge do parliamentarians need to oversee the budget, and how can they acquire them?

There will be no formal list of speakers; participants will be asked to request the floor simply by raising their hand. In the spirit of interactive debate, prepared speeches are strongly discouraged. In line with the principle of a parity debate, the composition of the panel will be gender balanced, as will the order of speakers invited to intervene from the floor.