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The Role of Parliaments in Promoting Equal Sharing of Responsibilities Between Women and Men

New York, 4 March 2009

One-day Parliamentary Meeting on the Occasion of the 53rd Session
of the UN Commission on the Status of Women

REPORT

Opening session

Senator Pia Cayetano (Philippines), President of the IPU Coordinating Committee of Women Parliamentarians, welcomed the participants, noting that they comprised some 140 representatives from about 50 parliaments. She observed that it was the unique responsibility of parliamentarians to pass meaningful legislation or influence policy on promoting equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men. The first objective of the day's meeting was to contribute, from their perspective as parliamentarians, to the deliberations of the United Nations on the theme of equal sharing of responsibilities, including care giving in the context of HIV/AIDS, trying to identify some key recommendations that she would present at the plenary session of the Commission on the Status of Women the following day.

The second aim of the meeting was to allow the parliamentarians to gather insights from the Commission's discussions, insights that they would then be able to take back to their home capitals to be translated into meaningful legislation or policies.

Ms. Carolyn Hannan, Director of the United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women, extended a warm welcome to the parliamentarians, acknowledging the very important work of the Coordinating Committee of Women Parliamentarians and expressing her appreciation for the excellent long-standing collaboration with the IPU. The annual parliamentary events on the priority themes of the Commission on the Status of Women had been recognized by the Commission in 2006 as a very important contribution by parliaments to the work of the United Nations, and the increasing participation of parliamentarians at the Commission was an indication of the important role played by parliaments in the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women.

The policy responses on the unequal sharing of responsibilities were very complex, not only because there were implications for a very wide range of sectors, but also because of the need for gender-responsiveness, with a challenge to the existing unequal sharing, not a reinforcement of it. Many of the earlier policy responses concerning care giving and unpaid work had not been focused on gender equality *per se*; in some countries the concern had been to move more women into the labour market. In others, it was an rapidly aging population, or alternatively a declining fertility rate, that had raised the care needs. And in many countries the HIV/AIDS pandemic had focused attention on care giving. But it was important that any policy response should have a strong gender equality and women's empowerment focus.

The international financial crisis might well make it more difficult to respond appropriately to this priority theme. A clear focus must be maintained on social development, gender equality and

vulnerable groups, whereas so far the response to the crisis had largely been couched in terms of macro-economic policy and changes to the financial architecture.

The Commission would be negotiating a set of policy recommendations for Member States as the outcome of the session, known as the Agreed Conclusions. She encouraged the parliamentarians to obtain copies of the Conclusions once they were available, to take them back to their capitals and to examine the ways in which they could be used in parliaments to bring about change on the ground and turn policy into action.

Keynote address

Dr. Marilyn Waring, Professor of Public Policy at the Institute of Public Policy, AUT University, Auckland, New Zealand, gave the following thoughts on women's unpaid contribution to national economies:

It was my years as a parliamentarian that led me to examine issues concerning unpaid work. Representing, as I did, a rural constituency, in which there were many people not recorded as productive or as working in the national economy, I found it very difficult to advocate for inputs for them. If a person – usually a woman – is engaged in child care, or is working on the family farm, then under the United Nations System of National Accounts (UNSNA), she is counted as being economically inactive, unproductive and at leisure. Here, a very simple equation applies: if people are invisible as producers, they are invisible in the distribution of benefits. Thus a vast amount of work counts for nothing if it is produced outside the boundary of production established by the UNSNA.

In 1993 the UNSNA's boundary of production was revised to include subsistence agriculture and its harvesting, processing and preservation; the fetching of water; the gathering of firewood; the weaving of cloth and the making of shoes or baskets, but it still excluded a significant sector of any nation's economy. Indeed, most time-use surveys conducted by countries in the past 20 years have demonstrated that the single largest sector of any nation's economy is that lying beyond the boundary of production, in terms of hours worked and usually also in terms of imputed value. But it is the boundary of production that establishes what activities count towards a country's GDP, and what data are to be collected, and those data are used to determine strategic priorities and policies.

“.....“of little or no importance in a nation's economy”

United Nations System of National Accounts, referring to household and caring work, cited by Dr. Waring

Once the boundary of production was extended to include the carrying of water, the rules as applied to poor women's lives became even more surreal: if a woman uses water to make food, the food she sells counts as production, the food she eats does not; if she washes her children with some of the water, that is not production, if she washes the pig, it is; if she pours water on her plants, that is production, if she washes the dishes, it is not.

Since all production of services for the household's own final consumption is excluded, in the context of care for HIV/AIDS the situation becomes totally unreal. If a woman is caring for a sick relative, under the UNSNA she is not considered to be working. If she is caring for a neighbour outside her household, then she is working. If she is sent to care for her husband's sick relatives - as happens frequently in Africa – she is not classified as working, because then she is considered a member of the relatives' household. The only way to achieve decent strategy and policy about unpaid caring work is to understand that all caring work provided within any household is analogous to the care that is provided by any other institution: by the private health providers, government units for public health provision, or non-profit institutions such as NGOs or faith-based organizations.

To determine where policy and inputs should be applied, time-use surveys are needed. These do not have to be centrally-controlled expensive statistical exercises: they can be performed in communities by sampling, to give very good indicators of where strategic engagement should take place. Academics and technocrats want these surveys to add up to a nice tidy total, and thus they are not interested in counting simultaneity of activities. But a part of women's efficiency in the household economy lies in

their working at a number of activities simultaneously. In terms of the caring economy, the academics and technocrats don't want to count on-duty or on-care time, only the time when something directly measurable is being done. Thus the surveys give the impression that women at home have large gaps in their days when they might be available for productive work. They are not available, they are on duty; they are mothers watching over a child, daughters watching over the elderly, women watching over the terminally ill. This pressure to construct neat and tidy 24-hour days should be resisted, because it will not help in policy formation and is simply not reflective of women's reality.

The question of unpaid carers also has a human rights dimension. If women or children providing full-time care for relatives sick with HIV/AIDS are not considered to be at work, then they also cannot be considered to be exploited. But all such women's and children's human rights – to education, to health, to effective participation in political and community life, to the highest possible standard of physical and mental health, to safe working conditions – are restricted or lost because of the care work they have to undertake. Loss of access and opportunities: that is the infringement of their human rights.

Theme 1: The intersection of paid and unpaid work

Value and measurement of care work (both unpaid and paid); Linkages between unpaid care responsibilities and access to education, income, public participation, social security and benefits.

Ms. Winnie Byanyima, Director of the Gender Team, Bureau for Development Policy, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), presented the following ideas on paid and unpaid work:

How issues of care are addressed by society has significant implications for the achievement of gender equality, either broadening the capabilities and choices of women and men or confining women to traditional roles associated with femininity and motherhood. In the developing countries, poor women's role in providing care actually intensifies their poverty and insecurity, as those responsibilities prevent them from engaging in activities that have the potential to empower them. UNDP's main framework for promoting human development and poverty reduction comprises assisting governments to achieve the Millennium Development Goals, and unpaid care work has implications for all eight of them. The recent spread of the financial crisis to emerging markets and developing countries is likely to cause major setbacks in delivering on the Goals and to increase women's unpaid care work.

The solutions to the crisis currently being put forward are highly gendered, being primarily focused on remedying men's increasing unemployment, without a comparable effort to provide women with full employment and decent work: in no part of the world, even in developed countries, have women reached parity in employment with men. The impact of the crisis on women in emerging and developing economies is focused around declines in three areas: remittances, capital flows and trade. Traditionally, emigrants' remittances have gone to the woman of the household, enabling her to buy food and meet the cost of caring for her family. As remittances have slowed, owing to migrant job losses in developed countries, women accustomed to receiving them may now have to provide services themselves, such as child care, or cleaning, or care for the elderly, which formerly they could afford to pay for.

With regard to trade, the financial crisis in developed countries has reduced demand for imported goods. This is impacting the commodity prices of exports, such as agricultural products and minerals, which are major earners for developing countries. In the area of capital flows, the immediate consequence is likely to be that the developing countries may face once again the prescriptions of the 1980s and 1990s, when the standard economic wisdom was that governments should cut government services to balance the budget, introducing user fees for services that used to be free. If that is the response now, there will be consequences for unpaid work and for equality between women and men.

However, the response to the crisis in the developed countries is just the opposite, with plans to pump huge sums of money into the economy. Parliamentarians have to argue for consistency in economic policy, when the problem is the same in the developed and the developing worlds. They have to examine how their country's budget is going to respond to the crisis, because it is there that questions about unpaid work can be raised. If the budget for health care or water supply is cut, what will the consequence be for those whose employment is insecure and informal: for the most part, women?

At the same time, the crisis brings opportunities. UNDP looks at the situation of unpaid care work in a framework of three "R"s: recognizing, reducing, redistributing. It assists governments to *recognize* the contribution of women's unpaid care work to their economies, by quantifying it as an important part of the whole economy. It also helps governments to *reduce* the burden of care work, by looking at those aspects of unpaid work that can be addressed from the public purse: the provision of water supplies, for example, or rural energy services, will make women more available for paid work. Building roads will make it easier for women to move from one activity to another. All of these infrastructure approaches should be prioritized in national budgets, but parliamentarians also need to advocate for more social services, because they too reduce the burden of unpaid care on women, helping them get back into production.

The third "R" is *redistributing* the work of care, making sure that men and women share equally in the responsibility. Also, redistributing between the public sector and the household entails determining how much the government should pay, how much the family should pay, for care services.

All three "R"s are a matter of budgetary choices, which is why parliamentarians have a very important role to play.

General discussion

In the ensuing discussion, many delegates described the efforts being made by their governments to take account of women's unpaid work. Some countries had programmes of assistance to housewives, particularly female heads of household. Others provided assistance with the schooling of children. Some had introduced pensions for housewives, who had never paid into a pension scheme through not working in formal employment.

It was agreed that if countries try to gauge the value of the unpaid sector of their economy, they will find that it comes to 30-45 per cent of GDP in value terms. The patriarchy cannot cope with the redistribution challenges that thereby arise, such as that a large part of primary health care budgets, or a large part of the primary education budget, ought to go to households.

In some countries, the influx of migrants has been a blessing for women, enabling them to employ immigrants as child carers and domestic assistants, and for their own part to go out to pursue education or paid work.

The conclusions from the debate included the following:

- Unpaid domestic activities are often considered a woman's duty and obligation. Domestic and care work should be an obligation on the man also, and it is government's responsibility to ensure that women are on an equal footing with men not only in their obligations but also in their opportunities.
- Unpaid care work is a hidden tax. There is no monetary reward for it, but if it was not done, those in productive employment would not be able to go out to work.
- There is a need to create mechanisms to empower the vulnerable and the invisible to be able to have recourse to the law, and support systems so that women will not feel alone as they challenge taboos.
- It is important to gather data: if the right data are not present, social policy is just guesswork.
- It would be useful to create a database of legislative experience, enabling women in all countries to learn what measures have been most effective at bringing about empowerment and equal treatment.

Theme 2: Building a protective and supportive framework for workers with family responsibilities

Protecting women and men workers and addressing discrimination; Maternity, paternity and parental leave; flexible work arrangements; development of care facilities within the work environment, etc.; The role of parliaments in supporting legislation, policies and budgets for care giving and promoting equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men.

Ms. Naomi Cassirer, Senior Technical Officer, International Labour Organization (ILO), described the relevant ILO Conventions:

The ILO Convention on Workers with Family Responsibilities (No. 156) and its Recommendation were adopted in 1981, with the objective of establishing equality of opportunity and treatment between men and women workers with family responsibilities and between those workers with family responsibilities and others without. The Convention applies to all sectors of economic activity and all categories of workers, and to family responsibilities in relation to all dependent members of the worker's immediate family. Its goal is to influence national policy so as to create effective equality of opportunity and treatment by making it possible for workers with family responsibilities to engage in employment without discrimination and, to the extent possible, without conflict between their work and those responsibilities. The Convention calls for appropriate maternity and paternity leave, for measures such as part-time or flexible hours to give men and women more time to devote to their families, and for efforts to lighten the burden of family responsibilities, such as investments in transportation, and water and energy supply, so as to reduce the time lost from that available for economic pursuits or care giving.

It also calls for efforts to organize vocational guidance to enable workers with family responsibilities to re-enter the labour force after family leave, for example, and calls on Member States to ensure that family responsibilities cannot constitute a valid reason for termination of employment.

International Labour Convention No. 183 on Maternity Protection calls for a minimum of 14 weeks of maternity leave, and for replacement income during maternity leave to ensure that women's economic security and standard of living are not diminished because of their childbearing role.

The Convention calls for prenatal, childbirth and postnatal medical care, including access to qualified medical staff, required pharmaceuticals, examinations and tests, and hospitalization when necessary. It also requires that pregnant or breastfeeding women not be obliged to perform work prejudicial to their health or that of the child. It calls for measures to ensure that maternity does not constitute a source of discrimination in employment, mandating in particular a prohibition on pregnancy testing. It also protects against discriminatory dismissal and guarantees the right to return to the same job or an equivalent one paid at the same rate. Should discrimination be charged, the burden of proof is on the employer. To cover the difference between the length of maternity leave and the WHO-recommended six months of exclusive breastfeeding, the Convention calls for the right to one or more daily breaks for the purpose of breastfeeding, with such breaks being counted as working time and being remunerated.

These two conventions, together with the Equal Remuneration Convention and Recommendation, 1951, and the Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention and Recommendation, 1958, form the framework adopted by the ILO constituents for promoting gender equality in employment. Some 40 countries have ratified the Convention on Workers with Family Responsibilities, and 17 the Convention on Maternity Protection, although a number of other countries are Parties to earlier versions of it.

Ms. Isabel Allende, Chair of the Committee on Family in the House of Deputies of Chile, offered the following thoughts:

Despite the existence of instruments in support of women's rights, such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women and the Beijing Platform for Action, profound inequalities remain invisible, and deeply engrained in the cultural roots of societies. Many countries have made progress with respect to the education of women, but this has not necessarily translated into their greater participation in the economic, labour or political spheres. For that reason, economic development has to be combined with clear political will at the highest level, with an agenda of legislative reforms and with profound cultural change, which is perhaps the hardest type of change to achieve. And all parliamentarians, male and female, have a role in promulgating laws and public policies that will help to raise awareness and bring about this change, with a new social contract between the sexes whereby both public and private responsibilities will be distributed in a more equitable manner.

Women tend to be assigned the precarious jobs: those without social protection, with no formal contract, jobs which do not meet the criteria for what the ILO would call "decent work". But in addition there is a readiness on the part of women to accept such jobs. And this casts serious doubt on statistics

that seem to indicate greater labour participation by women, suggesting that countries are approaching a more equitable labour situation or making progress in achieving a work-life balance. Society has to make real progress towards a genuine balance and a genuine sharing of responsibility, with men becoming much more deeply involved in the care of children or the elderly, in domestic work, and so on. Otherwise, the majority of the burden will simply be left on women, with the enormous injustice that that entails of their being expected to put in a double day's work.

The Chilean Congress is working on creating measures to protect working women, and at the same time to dignify their role, recognizing the contribution that women make to the functioning of a country, an economy and a family. For example, arrangements have been made for them to have a retirement pension, that a housewife would never have had otherwise.

Female parliamentarians must demonstrate a clear political will to keep striving towards balanced and shared responsibility in the public and private spheres. And of course, parliaments must not stop at just making these laws and policies, but must also create mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating them.

In the grave crisis that the world is experiencing, efforts must be redoubled to ensure that it is not the workers who end up paying the cost, because they are not the ones who caused the crisis. Women in particular must not be forced by the crisis into even more precarious work, or into having to return to domestic work. If women suffer disproportionately from the crisis, a truly equitable society will not have been achieved.

General discussion

In the subsequent discussion, some delegates described the measures being adopted by their governments to assist workers with family responsibilities, including maternity and paternity leave and measures to protect breastfeeding women. It was agreed that promoting women's employment and sharing responsibilities is a major challenge in which the role of parliament is crucial, but that it seems very difficult to put the topic on the political agenda.

It was stressed that legislative measures aimed at a good balance of work and family life must be directed towards both men and women, not just women. Men's domestic responsibilities must be recognized and accommodated also. Providing assistance – such as flexible working hours – to women but not to men, risks reinforcing stereotypes and perpetuating the traditional roles of women in domestic work and caring. Women's employment prospects could actually be worsened, if potential employers saw their entitlements as too burdensome. Some delegates reported that in their countries, public-sector employers would respect women's entitlements, but that the private sector would not. Here, oversight and implementation measures were crucial.

It was noted that in some countries there is a resistance to women's participation in the public sphere, which is perceived as her neglecting her home and her family. Also, if women were to be actually paid for domestic work, that might take away any incentive to get out of the house and look for a job commensurate with their skills. On the other hand, modern technologies and telecommunications do offer opportunities for women to engage in paid employment while still staying in the home.

The conclusions from the debate included the following:

- In many countries women are better educated than men, but their careers stop at lower levels, representing an extraordinary waste of knowledge and skill, a situation that is likely to worsen because of the current economic crisis.
- One cause of discrimination against women is that maternity is regarded as a woman's private choice rather than an issue involving both parents and the community. In some countries the role of custom and tradition hamper the laws the parliamentarians seek to adopt.
- Particularly where there are high rates of female illiteracy, women may not be aware of their rights and not claim them. Awareness of rights must be disseminated, including in indigenous languages.
- Stereotypes about male roles are just as harmful as those about female ones, with men being criticized for taking paternity leave, or stay-at-home fathers being denigrated as weaklings.

Parliamentarians need to spread the message that men's participation in domestic and child-rearing duties, including full-time while the mother goes out to work, is a positive trend, not a negative one.

- Male parliamentarians should act as role models in the uptake of paternity leave.
- It is important that women should allow the father to do domestic and child-rearing tasks his own way, and not simply criticize the way he chooses to do them. That is something that women have to learn.
- Examples of successful challenges to traditions and stereotypes, and of positive advances for workers with family responsibilities, could be collected and made available through the Internet.
- While some might argue that infrastructure projects as a solution to the present economic crisis would merely serve to protect men's employment, on the other hand advances in water and energy supply, and in transportation, can also lower women's unpaid burden.

Theme 3: Changing mindsets and behaviours

Addressing women's and men's stereotypes about gender roles; Engaging men in shared responsibilities.

Mr. Andrew Levack, Co-Director, MenEngage Alliance, considered aspects of promoting the role of men and boys in care giving, fatherhood and support for gender equality.

The MenEngage Alliance comprises about 390 NGOs along with United Nations agencies including UNIFEM and WHO. Some programmes for men and boys may unintentionally reinforce harmful messages about masculinity, and some very rigid constructs of masculinity not only have negative implications for women but also create vulnerability for men in terms of negative health outcomes and dangerous behaviour. MenEngage, using an approach known as gender-transformative programming, seeks to provide an opportunity to increase men's awareness of gender role socialization and explore how traditional messages about gender, expressed in the way the way that boys are raised to be men, have negative impacts on both men and women.

The change in mindsets can be hard to achieve, since doing so requires questioning the influence of years of patriarchy, doubting cultural practices and societal customs, challenging individual beliefs, and asking individuals to change not only themselves but also the environment they live in. This work can be done in many ways, but it has to influence all levels of a society in order to be effective. It has to start from individual men and spread to their peers, or to family members who may be reinforcing harmful notions about what it means to be a man. The next stage involves working on community or social norms about the role of men, and the final stage goes on to larger institutional settings, including the role of government in promoting these messages.

Often the work just involves giving men the opportunity to reflect on what it means to be a man, what messages are being received about masculinity, and how such messages contribute to violence, how they limit men's ability to be involved with their family, how they put them at risk for HIV/AIDS, how they impede men's relationships with women. Given an opportunity to reflect on issues of masculinity, men have been able to change attitudes and engage in more healthy, productive behaviours. In turn, it has been discovered that men who are more gender-equitable have lower prevalence of sexually-transmitted disease and are less prone to gender-based violence. There are also positive effects on men's roles in fatherhood and care giving, and on enjoyment of sex life and mental health.

Our Strength Is Not For Hurting.

Slogan, White Ribbon campaign to stop violence against women

After that stage of reflection, men are asked to use their new-found insights constructively, such as by creating community

action teams, or promoting condom use, or participating in community events to talk about notions of real masculinity. They are then urged to start to give larger societal messages about what it means to be a man, redefining manhood and what it really means to be expected to be strong, and courageous, and a decision-maker. With campaign slogans such as Real Men Show Real Respect or Our Strength Is Not For Hurting, men can be taught the proper use of their greater physical strength. Then the notion of strength can be extended to mental strength. The slogan "Be strong, know your HIV status" is used, for example, in South Africa, where 80 per cent of all HIV tests are for women, and where there is clearly a need to correct the message that men should be too tough to seek health care.

The challenge now is how to scale up this work, from projects essentially carried out by NGOs to policies supported by governments, notably ministries of health or ministries of education.

Ms. Rose Mukantabana, Speaker of the Chamber of Deputies of Rwanda, offered the following thoughts on changing attitudes, in the context of her own country:

Rwanda is a patriarchal society in which the authority of the husband has traditionally been recognized by all members of the community, including women. But what marks the country is its tragic history of the genocide of 1994, whose consequences were staggering: more than a million people savagely exterminated in three months. This terrible time resulted in huge numbers of widows and orphans, the breakup of families, the razing of buildings both public and private, and the destruction of basic infrastructure. It also led to new burdens of care for the surviving women and children,

After the tragedy of the genocide the country had to rebuild itself from zero. As a first step, the new government put forward a national policy and programmes of unity and reconciliation, involving all components of the population in the process of development and democratization.

Partly as a result of this policy of inclusion, today Rwanda has the highest proportion in the world of women in its parliament: 56.2 per cent in the Chamber of Deputies, including the Speaker, and 35 per cent in the Senate. How has this come about? Firstly, as a result of a manifest political will to integrate gender into the processes of democratization and development, with the leadership at the highest level being sensitive to issues of gender and women's rights. Additionally, certain taboos and prohibitions from the past no longer have any relevance, because as a result of the effects of the genocide, women have found themselves obliged to take on the roles and responsibilities that in the past were the purview of men, such as climbing up to repair the roof of their house, milking the cows, political responsibilities, and so on.

Women's commitment to take effective charge of these responsibilities and to participate in the reconstruction and redevelopment of the country has led to their acceptance as partners by men. Instead of considering matters of gender as issues dividing men and women, gender in Rwanda is seen as a development tool, with men and women being equal partners,

The Constitution of 2003 also reinforces the principle of equality among all citizens, and in particular provides that at least 30 per cent of posts in all decision-making bodies are reserved for women. Women leaders have proved their competence and have not let down those who nominated or elected them. The situation in the country has also been helped by a solid institutional framework, including a Ministerial Department for Gender and Family Promotion.

Despite all that has been achieved, however, the country still faces some shortcomings and challenges. Because of the events of the past, women are not as competitive as men, owing to the interruption and disturbance of their education, particularly in the areas of science and technology. There is also resistance to change in certain areas, especially the rural ones. This will require a major effort of awareness-raising. Another challenge is a shortage of facilities for looking after small children and young adolescents while their parents are working outside the home, and the insufficiency of infrastructure and technology which could lighten the burden of household work, such as access to drinking water, enhanced stoves, and so on.

If everyone will view gender as a tool for peace, social cohesion and development, and not simply as a way of up-ending the existing situation of inequality between men and women, countries will prosper, and men and women will be partners in development.

General discussion

The discussion that followed agreed that inequalities are constructs of society; they are not related to the nature of men or women. What men can do, so can women. If people can get over these constructs and stereotypes, their countries will be able to attain development that benefits from the contribution of both men and women. But there is a need also for commitment on the part of women, because if they continue to resign themselves to their situation, any laws passed in their favour will be pointless.

Mass communications play a fundamental role in the education and socialization of the population and in forming mindsets and behaviours. It is fundamentally important that the media should present a

balanced picture, avoiding stereotypes and discriminatory and sexist language. They should also do their part to make women's problems visible. In countries where polygamy is allowed, it is not possible for a woman to ask her husband to wear a condom, even if she suspects that he is HIV-positive. If the woman tries to insist, the husband will simply transfer his affections to another wife. How can that flagrant example of gender inequality be handled?

The conclusions from the debate included the following:

- Stereotypes on masculinity can have bad health outcomes for men and boys, leading them to indulge in risky behaviours and have limited involvement in the development of their children, and also causing mental health and substance abuse. It is however possible to engage men and boys in reflecting on alternative ways of defining manhood that benefit themselves, women and the community.
- It may not be enough simply to prohibit discrimination; it may be necessary to make legal stipulations on duties. If parental duties are laid down by law, such as the equal duty of both parents to ensure that children attend school, this may help to change their attitudes to the traditional gender roles.
- In some cases a body such as a Gender Rights Parliamentary Committees may be necessary.
- Children learn values from parents. If the father takes an attitude of gender equality, the next generation will adopt it too.

Theme 4: Men and Women in Politics: Balancing public and private life responsibilities

Measures to assist women and men in balancing family and public responsibilities (as candidates and members of parliament); Entitlements for parliamentarians in terms of leave and facilities; Male parliamentarians as role models, for example in terms of uptake of paternity and parental leave.

Ms. Anita Neville, Ms. Nicole Demers and Ms. Patricia Davidson, three members of the Canadian House of Commons, shared their experiences – some similar, some different – of the struggle to combine family life and work as a member of parliament:

All three agreed that the undertaking was difficult, and that it had been even more difficult in the past. Above all, it required persistence, and constant pushing against a dead weight of resistance or indifference. On the other hand, women parliamentarians have to keep a sense of perspective and remember that it has taken decades, even centuries, to get as far as they have.

In the case of Canada, one of the main challenges is that of distance, with the capital being several hours' flying time from some parliamentarians' homes. Even at the weekends, there is still no respite. The constituents back in the parliamentarians' home towns expect them to make an appearance at whatever events have been organized for the weekend. It is essential to set aside a certain inviolate time, such as Sunday afternoons, when a parliamentarian can devote herself to her family. On the other hand, it had to be agreed that Canada has a fairly generous budget for the domestic needs of its parliamentarians, enabling them to travel home as they need to and to afford a second residence in Ottawa.

Some years earlier, a group of women from all parties came together to see whether they could make the Parliament a more family-friendly workplace. They encountered many challenges, some because of the divisions between the parties, some because of the dictates of geography, and some, it must be admitted, arising out of an unwillingness on the part of some parliamentarians to accommodate others. For example, the Canadian Parliament did not meet in the evenings, which is to the benefit of the male parliamentarians who have brought their families to Ottawa. Hardly any women have chosen to do that; they would prefer to work longer hours, make the week shorter, and get home at the weekends. But changing the working hours has been resisted.

An attempt was made to coordinate women parliamentarians' desires to be home during the school holidays, but in a large federation the school breaks are not consistent across the country. The

parliamentarians from the larger provinces tend to benefit from this attempted coordination, the others less so.

Making the necessary adjustments in Parliament's comfortable setup requires leadership from the top but also people within the political parties who are prepared to make sacrifices. There have been cases when, because parliamentarians needed to be in Ottawa for an important vote but in their province it was a school holiday, the parties organized activities for the children in Ottawa, and hired a person to look after them, while parliamentary colleagues who did not have children volunteered to take over some of the on-duty time of those who did.

All three agreed that it is very difficult, bordering on impossible, to combine parliamentary and family life when a woman has small children. On the other hand, it is in women's nature to work hard for what they believe in, and with persistence things become possible.

Trying to combine family life at home with parliamentary life in the capital definitely demands a supportive immediate family, and if the extended family is nearby, that too is a huge help. Nevertheless, being away from home at times of emergency such as illness in the family results in stress and long-distance telephone calls to arrange for solutions, and the woman parliamentarian often finds herself torn between family and work and struggling to know where she can contribute the most, knowing that she should be in one place but wanting to be in the other. It can become very stressful.

General discussion

In the ensuing discussion, delegates described their own struggles to reconcile family and parliamentary life, and the changes that had to be made, particularly as more and more women entered politics and, increasingly, they were young women with small children. In Uganda, for example, women parliamentarians have tried for four years to have a room within the Parliament for caring for children, but the plan has been resisted at every turn.

There was general agreement that women parliamentarians needed the support of their husbands and families. Otherwise, their task would be truly impossible. But it was also agreed that in a married couple where the woman is a parliamentarian, it is the woman who has to sacrifice her sleep to get everything done. Several women parliamentarians echoed the cry "I wish I had a wife" to handle all the domestic chores.

Sometimes I wish I had a wife!

Rebecca Alitwala Kadaga,
Deputy Speaker, Uganda

One delegate suggested that combining family and parliamentary life – and one's professional vocation as well – was just a matter of organizing one's time. If men could manage it, surely women could too? However, this was not a view that seemed to find general acceptance.

There was general admiration for the system, common in some Scandinavian countries, of a coalition of women coming together across party lines to work on women's and children's issues.

In some countries, women parliamentarians were reluctant to request changes to the parliamentary calendar because men parliamentarians would then accuse them of not being able to stand the pace. It was a matter of pride to show that they were up to the challenge. Then, later, conditions could be changed to be more reasonable for women. That, in turn, needed work of information and increasing awareness of the multiple burdens on women parliamentarians.

The conclusions from the debate included the following:

- Changes are needed in the attitude of the media. They need to be made to stop asking irrelevant questions about when women parliamentarians ever see their children – questions that would never be asked of a man. On the other hand, speaking to the media firmly in terms of "I am a parliamentarian but now I am going home to care for my family" can send a powerful message about women parliamentarians' dual responsibilities.
- In contrast to the experience in Canada, some women parliamentarians found it positive that their Parliaments had ceased to meet late into the night.
- In countries where polygamy was allowed, the female parliamentarian faced a particular threat: if she was too much away on parliamentary business, she would be supplanted by another wife.

- Constituents are not interested in their parliamentarians' burdens. No matter how hard the parliamentarians have worked during the week, they are still expected to attend constituency events at the weekend. Here there was an urgent need for education of the public.

Final Conclusions

Senator Pia Cayetano (Philippines), President of the IPU Coordinating Committee of Women Parliamentarians, summarized the day's conclusions as follows:

There is a need to give visibility to unpaid care work, because without visibility there is no protection, no rights, no benefits and no support. As parliamentarians we can look at our national accounts and the time-use surveys and examine how we can use our budgetary processes to give visibility to this unpaid work.

We also must reduce the burden and promote equal sharing of responsibilities between men and women. We should look at the possibilities and think innovatively, making use of the current debates on energy, the crisis and other opportunities to create change. We should also look at the current frameworks and protection mechanisms, including maternity leaves, parental leaves, breastfeeding arrangements, and so on.

It is important for us as parliamentarians to check on the international commitments that our countries have made and to make sure we meet them.

As we heard throughout the day it is important that bear in mind that what we are looking for is gender equality and a sharing of responsibilities, not just rights for women. We must also promote men's rights and responsibilities in care giving. And we must meet the obligation to redistribute care work between men and women and between households and the State.

We have also to address gender stereotypes. There are various campaigns that are challenging existing stereotypes and it is important that we make this part of policy, including it in our grassroots programmes.

Lastly, we need to look at our parliaments and other institutions and examine how gender-sensitive they are, always looking to make improvements. We as parliamentarians must lead by example.

STATEMENT

**by Senator Pia Cayetano (Philippines)
President of the IPU Coordinating Committee of Women Parliamentarians
to the 53rd Session of the Commission on the Status of Women
United Nations
New York, 5 March 2009**

Mr. Chairman,

Yesterday, the Inter-Parliamentary Union and the United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women organized a parliamentary meeting focusing on the role of parliaments in promoting equal sharing of responsibilities between men and women. I would like to thank UNDAW for its cooperation. It was the fifth annual parliamentary meeting of its kind jointly organized on the occasion of the CSW. I would like to state how important it is for parliamentarians to participate in the process of the Commission, contribute to the debate and learn from the information, exchanges and meetings that take place. It is also important for parliamentarians to go back home with the commitment to ensure national follow-up to the decisions that have been taken here.

Our meeting was a success, with the participation of over 100 parliamentarians from 45 parliaments. I will report now on some of its results.

Let me begin with one general comment: when going through the Draft Agreed Conclusions, we noted that parliaments have a contribution to make in most, if not all, of the recommendations put forward, whether in terms of legislation, adoption of the budget, changing mindsets or overseeing government action. We therefore encourage the Commission to acknowledge this role in the text. This would certainly provide parliamentarians with an incentive to follow up the Conclusions within their respective parliaments.

More specifically several priority areas emerged during our debates which I would like to bring to your attention. Some reinforce already existing recommendations in the Draft Agreed Conclusions, whereas others fall more directly in the ambit of parliament.

The first point is the need to recognize and make more visible unpaid care work. Parliamentarians feel strongly that this should be upheld as a general principle, regardless of whether it is performed by women or men, although we all know that the majority of unpaid care work is performed by women. Without visibility there can be no protection, no rights, no benefits, no inclusion, and no support.

As parliamentarians, we can go back to our countries and examine the tools at our disposal to showcase the value of unpaid care work. We need to question our national accounts systems, make use of time-use surveys and most importantly, use the national budgetary process to take into account the contribution of unpaid care work and provide support to those who perform it.

The second point is the need to reduce the burden of unpaid work and promote equal sharing of responsibilities between men and women in the field of care. To achieve this, existing legislative frameworks have to be reviewed and national policies and laws have to be brought in line with international commitments, particularly those aimed at protecting and supporting women workers. Most countries have ratified international labour conventions related to workers with family responsibilities, maternity protection, hours of work, etc. Policies must translate into action on the ground and parliamentarians have a fundamental role to play in this respect.

But how many countries have actually developed and enforced the required national legislation and policies needed? We have examine closely our policies, for instance on parental leave, breastfeeding and discrimination against women workers. On this point, we underscored the

importance of a gender-balanced approach to care-giving and the need to develop measures to support a more active role of men in care-giving.

The third point relates to changing mindsets and addressing gender stereotypes. As opinion makers, parliamentarians can make a difference by challenging existing gender stereotypes and prompting a change of mentality. This begins with education and promoting gender equality in school curricula and grass-roots programmes. In addition, addressing gender stereotypes from a policy perspective is also required. As parliamentarians, we need to publicly highlight the value of care and draw attention to the role and responsibilities of men.

The fourth point relates to institutions and, in particular, the institution of parliament. There was much debate about how the workplace, and in our case parliaments, can become more gender-sensitive and family-friendly. One of the primary obstacles to women's political participation is their difficulty in balancing family responsibilities with political commitments. We examined some reforms implemented by parliaments, but to be honest, examples are few and far between. Parliamentarians need to lead by example. Therefore, one of our specific responsibilities is to start implementing family-friendly measures within our own parliaments, and become measures of good institutional performance.

The world today is undergoing a major economic upheaval. In such times of uncertainty, there is a need to ensure that public expenditure related to social development and gender equality is safeguarded and not forfeited because of competing priorities. A key concern is that reductions in public expenditure could result in additional pressure on households and therefore on unpaid care work.

While this is undoubtedly a time of crisis, it is perhaps also an opportunity to change and review discriminatory and outdated economic concepts. It is our hope that the response to the current situation and the resulting economic world order will address current imbalances and misconceptions, recognize and reward women's various contributions to the economy and promote a more gender-balanced sharing of societal roles.

As far as the IPU is concerned, we will be addressing this aspect during our up-coming international parliamentary conference on the global economic crisis. We will hence also seek to provide relevant input to the preparatory process for the UN high-level conference on the world financial and economic crisis, to be held in New York later this year.

Let me end by highlighting the interest expressed by the many parliamentarians present yesterday and their commitment to follow up in their respective countries some of the debates held. They also committed to follow up the Agreed Conclusions from the CSW in their parliaments. We are convinced that if each of us plays our part, progress can be achieved.
I thank you for your attention.