



Parliaments Take Action on Violence against Women IPU Campaign and Programme

Launched in 2008, the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) programme on violence against women supports parliaments in their efforts to prevent and address all forms violence against women (VAW) at the international, regional and national levels. It is part of a wider approach taken by the IPU to create a political and legislative environment through parliaments that is conducive to women's rights and gender equality. The IPU strategy to drive change involves both men and women parliamentarians and builds on their political leadership, their role and responsibility within the policy-making process and their relationship with constituents. The IPU implements this strategy through the provision of capacity-building and support to parliaments and parliamentarians, technical expertise on policy and legislation, tools and training material, and advocacy and mobilization.

Priority 1: Peer-to-peer engagement and development of regional strategies

In order to sensitize parliaments and their members to violence against women and girls and strengthen their knowledge to prevent and counter such violence, the IPU organized five regional seminars for parliaments. These were held in **Europe** (on VAW and migration), **Latin America** (on enforcement of anti-VAW laws) and **Arab countries** (on CEDAW and VAW), **Central and Western Africa** (legislating against violence), **Asia** (on legislation and effective enforcement to prevent and respond to VAW), and **East and Southern Africa** (on how to prevent and respond to violence against women and girls through effective enforcement of legislation).

Those events gave rise to in-depth discussions, an exchange of experiences, peer-to-peer engagement and learning, and the identification of common strategies to tackle similar situations and specific forms of violence affecting all the countries in a given region. As a follow-up to these regional seminars, parliamentary activities at the national level are carried out in many countries with a view to facilitating and securing implementation of the conclusions of those seminars.

Priority 2: Targeted national parliamentary action

One of the main challenges encountered in addressing violence against women and girls has to do with the fact that it is a sensitive issue, entrenched in gender inequality, discrimination and stereotypes. Developing concrete national initiatives that take into account this wider political and social context serve, therefore, to accelerate progress in ending this scourge.

The IPU provides assistance to parliaments in identifying and addressing discriminatory legislation and practices against women and girls. It also supports parliaments that have before them bills on violence against women or those that are drafting a relevant law. In these endeavours, the IPU's main role is to strengthen the institutional and technical capacity of parliaments and parliamentarians, encourage cross-party alliances among parliamentarians, and promote cooperation between parliamentarians and civil society and grass-roots organizations.

a. Elaboration of legislation on violence against women

- **Maldives: Private member's bill on domestic violence enacted into law**

In 2012, the Parliament of the Maldives enacted into law a domestic violence bill which the IPU helped draft and review by providing guidance, access to expertise and comparative global information on domestic violence legal frameworks. The bill was a good example of collaboration between political parties and between men and women parliamentarians for a common cause. It was an initiative of the opposition party women's wing, proposed by a young woman MP and drafted by a man MP. It received the support of the ruling party and both parties worked together to get the bill passed successfully. Follow-up support is under discussion to help the Parliament take the lead in fostering an efficient and coordinated response for the implementation of the new law and in legislating on sexual violence and sexual harassment.

- **Burkina Faso and Togo: Comprehensive bills on violence against women and girls submitted to parliament**

The National Assembly of Burkina Faso and the IPU staged a two-day public consultation focusing on the different forms of violence, their causes, prevalence, consequences and the challenges in addressing them. It was the first step in the drafting of a new bill on tackling violence against women and girls in the country. This led to the creation of a drafting committee composed of MPs and civil society representatives, who drew up the bill with IPU assistance. The bill has been tabled in parliament and sent to the government for its comments and amendments. The bill seeks to provide a comprehensive response to violence against women and girls by including provisions not only on cracking down on perpetrators but also on prevention, protection and assistance to victims. It covers several forms of violence, including domestic violence, early and forced marriage and other harmful practices, marital rape, sexual violence and sexual harassment.

Similar IPU support was provided to the National Assembly of Togo, where a bill has been tabled in parliament and is awaiting committee review. The IPU is currently helping the Women's Caucus to develop and implement an advocacy strategy for the adoption of the bill.

b. Engaging with constituents

- **Mali: Parliamentary consultations to legislate on female genital mutilation (FGM)**

Before the conflict in Mali erupted, the IPU had supported parliamentary outreach visits on eliminating female genital mutilation. These visits were carried out in Bamako, Kayes, Sikasso and Ségou. They marked the start of a public consultation process on an anti-FGM bill. Today, discussions are underway with the Parliament on the organization of training sessions for parliamentarians on implementing UN Security Council resolutions 1325 and 1820, in particular regarding women's participation in peace-building efforts and preventing and responding to sexual and gender-based violence in conflict and post-conflict situations.

- **Burundi: Parliament to pass a law on gender-based violence**

In Burundi, the IPU has been supporting women parliamentarians and the parliament on questions related to women's rights and gender equality. Since 2007, several meetings were organized to discuss legislative priorities for women between MPs and government agencies, civil society organizations (CSOs) and women's associations. A study on legislative priorities helped the different stakeholders set the agenda. In 2009, the Criminal Code was up for review in the Burundian Parliament, with amendments made by women MPs aiming to sanction various forms

of violence against women. The IPU helped parliament organize a consultative seminar on gender-based violence. The wide-ranging consultations brought together about 100 stakeholders from the parliament, government ministries, human rights bodies, law enforcement agencies, civil society and the media. The seminar resulted in heightening awareness of the need to pass a law on gender-based violence by placing it high on the national political agenda. The Minister of Human Rights and Gender submitted a draft law on gender-based violence to the Council of Ministers for initial examination before being presented to parliaments. The IPU provided training to parliamentarians to help them sensitize the public to anti-gender-based violence legislation in the community and to challenge attitudes and socio-cultural barriers that condone such violence.

c. Amending discriminatory laws

Inequality and discrimination having been identified as the leading causes of violence against women, the IPU provides support in the form of training for parliamentarians and parliamentary staff on implementing CEDAW and identifying and amending discriminatory legislation. **In Jordan**, for instance, long-term IPU support has consolidated links and enhanced cooperation between parliamentarians, ministers and representatives of civil society in a bid to review and weed out discriminatory legal provisions.

Priority 3: Speaking out on violence against women

The ability of parliamentarians to shape public opinion and lobby to ensure that violence against women is addressed as a matter of priority is crucial. The IPU uses every opportunity to raise parliamentarians' awareness of the extent of the problem and the actions they can take to establish an effective legal framework, monitor its implementation and build public understanding and support.

Every year, the IPU encourages parliaments to organize special events to mark the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women and the 16 Days of Activism against Gender Violence. As a result, new resolutions were passed and special debates, speeches and exhibitions were held in parliament. Members of parliament participated in workshops, press conferences, radio and TV shows, and held discussions with women's associations and CSOs.

The way forward

The programme will engage increasingly with parliaments at the national level and on a more long-term basis. The IPU will continue to assist parliaments in different regions in strengthening their capacity to build a strong and effective legal framework to prevent and address all forms of violence against women and girls. New activities are foreseen to strengthen the role of parliaments in monitoring the enforcement of existing anti-VAW laws with a view to ensuring constant improvement of the laws. This will include technical assistance to parliamentary committees or caucuses tasked with monitoring implementation and assessing the impact of legislation on VAW, specific training on costing VAW and gender-responsive budgets, and support to parliamentary outreach missions to sensitize and engage the wider public in an open debate on changing social norms and discriminating attitudes.

Efforts aimed at raising awareness and providing greater access to comprehensive information among parliamentarians at the regional level will be pursued, notably by developing and disseminating easily accessible information for MPs and policymakers on lessons learned and strategies.

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