INTER-PARLIAMENTARY UNION

30 March 2005

REPORTS ON RECENT IPU SPECIALISED CONFERENCES AND MEETINGS

ONE-DAY PARLIAMENTARY MEETING ON THE OCCASION OF THE 49th SESSION OF THE COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN: BEIJING +10

(New York, 3 March 2005)

1. The Inter-Parliamentary Union and the United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women organised a one-day parliamentary event entitled *Beyond Beijing: Towards Gender Equality in Politics*. The meeting took place in New York, at United Nations Headquarters, on 3 March 2005, on the occasion of the 49th session of the Commission on the Status of Women, which reviewed and appraised progress made in the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcome document of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly.

2. The meeting aimed at bringing a parliamentary dimension to the debates of the 49th session. It provided a forum for debate for parliamentarians from all over the world to contribute to the review and appraisal of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. The event focused on the strategic objective that addresses the role of women in power and decision-making, and the role of parliaments in meeting this objective. Parliamentarians were invited to share experiences and reflections on the role of women in politics and consider mechanisms to strengthen parliaments' capacity to address all of the Beijing objectives.

3. The event brought together some 250 participants from 68 countries, as well as representatives of governments and international organisations.[1]

4. The meeting was opened by addresses from the Assistant Secretary-General and Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women,

[1] Participants included representatives from: Algeria, Angola, Armenia, Austria, Belgium, Burkina Faso, Cambodia, Canada, Cape Verde, Chad, Congo, Cuba, Czech Republic, Denmark, Djibouti, Eritrea, Fiji, Finland, France, Gabon, the Gambia, Georgia, Iceland, India, Israel, Italy, Jordan, Kenya, Luxembourg, Malaysia, Mali, Mauritania, Mexico, Mongolia, Morocco, Namibia, Nepal, Nicaragua, Niger, Nigeria, Norway, Palau, Pakistan, Peru, Portugal, Republic of Korea, Romania, Russian Federation, Rwanda, Senegal, Slovakia, Somalia, South Africa, Spain, Swaziland, Sweden, Syrian Arab Republic, Togo, Turkey, Tunisia, Uganda, Uruguay, Yemen and Zambia. The following regional parliamentary assemblies were also represented: Andean Parliament, European Parliament, Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, Pan-African Parliament and the Parliament of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS).

Ms. R. Mayanja, the Director of the United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women, Ms. C. Hannan, and the President of the IPU Coordinating Committee of Women Parliamentarians, Senator J. Fraser (Canada). Senator Fraser also chaired the meeting.

5. The substantive debate was introduced by the Hon. M. Mensah, Vice-President of the Member of the National Council of Namibia, Mr. A. Bengtsson, a member of the Swedish Riksdag, Professor P. Norris of the JFK School of Government, Harvard University, Ms. W. Byanyima, a former MP in Uganda and present Director of the Women, Gender and Development Directorate of the African Union Commission , and Professor R. Matland of the University of Houston, on behalf of the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA). A very lively debate ensued. Participants addressed their national concerns with regard to women in politics, and shared ideas on ways in which parliaments contribute to the effective implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action. A summary report of the proceedings is attached.

6. The latest issue of a world map entitled *Women in Politics: 2005* was released jointly by the IPU and the United Nations on the occasion of the parliaemntary event. As the previous version of the map produced in 2000, it included data on women's participation in the legislative branch of government and in the executive branch in the countries of the world. It was released in English, French and Spanish. The Arabic, Chinese and Russian versions will be produced in the coming month. Also released on that occasion was an information kit prepared by the IPU Secretariat on *Women in Politics, 1945-2005*, containing data which complemented the information on the map.

BEYOND BEIJING: TOWARDS GENDER EQUALITY IN POLITICS

3 March 2005

United Nations, New York

This parliamentary event, organized by the Inter-Parliamentary Union and the United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women, was chaired by **Senator Joan Fraser, President of the IPU Coordinating Committee of Women Parliamentarians**, who welcomed the participants and introduced the speakers.

Senator Joan Fraser, President of the IPU Coordinating Committee of Women Parliamentarians, presented the Inter-Parliamentary Union's work in the field of women in politics. The IPU had closely followed World Conference on Women process. In 1994, it had adopted a Plan of Action to correct present imbalances in the participation of men and women in political life, which was also its contribution to the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing. The IPU had held special meetings on women in politics, a major one being the New Delhi conference entitled "Towards Partnership Between Men and Women in Politics" in 1997. Numerous resolutions concerning women's issues had been adopted at IPU Assemblies, including one the previous autumn in preparation for Beijing Plus 10. At the 112th IPU Assembly in April 2005, in Manila, the overall theme would be the impact of domestic and international policies on the situation of women. Thus women's affairs were one of the core priorities of the IPU and women played a greater role in the organization than they did in any other parliamentary group.

The morning's broad theme was "Improving Women's access to Parliaments," and in the IPU that had meant improving women's access to the IPU. It had taken the Union nearly a century to elect its first member of the Executive Committee, in 1987, but since then the advancement of women had progressed rapidly, with a woman being elected President in 1999. An important development had been the establishment and funding of the Meeting of Women Parliamentarians, a day-long session before the first Assembly of the year. That Meeting brought together women from all continents, who fed the results of their work into the deliberations of their respective geo-political groups; discussed the themes being debated by the Assembly; and proposed amendments to resolutions. The Coordinating Committee of Women Parliamentarians, which met at both Assemblies held during the year, planned the Meeting of Women Parliamentarians and also had significant input into the organization of various other IPU events.

The Executive Committee had a sub-committee which was specifically devoted to questions of gender partnership and it was that sub-committee that had brought an important change to the IPU a few years previously, when the rules had been changed to penalize countries that persistently sent single-sex delegations, usually all-male although occasionally all-female, to the Assembly. At the third successive Assembly to which a country sent a single-sex delegation, its allowable delegation was reduced by one person and it lost two of its basic ten votes. Similarly, single sex-delegations to the Governing Council of the IPU lost one of the allowable three delegates. The results had been striking: five years previously 27 per cent of participating countries had sent all-male delegations to the IPU meeting in Berlin. By the time of the Geneva meeting, in autumn 2004, that proportion had fallen to 15 per cent, with 28 per cent of all the delegates to the Assembly being women.

Furthermore, three of the fifteen members of the Executive Committee, in addition to the President of the Coordinating Committee, had to be women, and countries that excluded women from voting or standing for election were not eligible for membership in the Executive Committee.

This brief of overview of action taken by the IPU testified to its commitment to promote the participation of women in politics.

Ms. Carolyn Hannan, Director, United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women, commended the IPU 111th Assembly's consideration and adoption of a resolution on the ten-year review of implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action the previous September, as well as expressing appreciation for the excellent long-standing collaboration between the Division for the Advancement of Women and the IPU, including on the Handbook for Parliamentarians on the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, and the Map of Women in Politics, highlighting the current status of women in parliaments around the world.

The ten-year review of implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action clearly showed that the gap between *de jure* and *de facto* equality in power and decision-making remained wide. Only 14 countries had at least 30 per cent representation of women in parliament, which had been established as a target for 1995 and was still not achieved ten years later. However, one encouraging development was that a number of post-conflict countries had highlighted the importance of including women in reconstruction processes. As a result, Rwanda, Mozambique, South Africa, Namibia, Timor-Leste, Uganda and Eritrea appeared in the top 30 countries with regard to women's participation in legislative bodies.

Increasing women's representation in parliaments had been identified as one of the indicators for achieving Millennium Development Goal Three: Promote Gender Equality and Empower Women. The recently released report of Taskforce Three of the Millennium Project, "Taking action: achieving gender equality and empowering women", had included the increase of women's share in national parliaments and local government bodies as one of its seven strategic priorities.

As well as making an important contribution to the ten-year review during the current session of the Commission on the Status of Women, the findings from the event would also provide input to preparations for the consideration by the 50th session in 2006 of the theme: "Equal participation of women and men in decision-making processes at all levels".

Ms. Rachel Mayanja, Assistant Secretary-General, Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women, noted that the occasion gave an opportunity to reiterate the great importance that the United Nations attached to strengthened cooperation with national parliaments and the IPU in achieving the Millennium Development Goals and giving full meaning to the Millennium Declaration. The United Nations Charter proclaimed the equal rights of men and women. Women's equal political participation and equal entitlement to leadership positions were addressed in the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, which had now been ratified or acceded to by 179 States.

The Beijing Platform for Action made clear that women's lives should be viewed as part of the social, economic, and political framework of society. It reaffirmed that women's equal participation in decision-making was not only a demand for simple justice, but a necessary condition for women's interests to be taken into account. Ten years after Beijing, low representation of women persisted in political and public life, including the legislature, policy-making and administrative positions in public and private-sector employment, trade unions and the judiciary. However, of the 58 countries that had held parliamentary elections in 2004, 49 had shown an increase in the percentage of women. The biggest regional change had been a doubling of the share of women MPs in the Arab world, from 3.5 to 6.5 per cent.

A further aspect of equal participation involved ensuring that women Members of Parliament had an impact on policy decisions. Currently, women were often assigned to "soft" areas dealing with children's or women's affairs, social affairs, education and health, and were much less likely than men to be minister of defence or their country's top foreign affairs representative.

The cycle of United Nations conferences, in particular the Fourth World Conference on Women, had identified critical barriers to women's equal participation in politics, deeply rooted in feminization of poverty, violence against women, illiteracy, and stereotypical attitudes resulting in women's exclusion from political systems and creating a pervasive climate of discrimination. What measures could be taken to improve the situation?

In its resolution 58/142 on political participation, the General Assembly had made it clear that education was a key factor in the empowerment of women and girls, as educated women tended to participate more actively in political parties and public life. Secondly, gender quotas had demonstrated their effectiveness at increasing women's representation, whether constitutionally or legislatively mandated or in the form of political parties' voluntary quotas.

Third, programmes for leadership education were needed to provide women candidates with specialized campaign skills, including on policy development, debating, networking, strategic planning and public speaking. Fourth, by offering provisions for childcare and other family support, Governments would encourage more women to play a greater role in public life. Fifth, a policy of zero tolerance of all forms of political violence, especially violence and harassment against voter women, should be established and strictly enforced. Mechanisms should be set up to protect women who had gained political visibility, particularly in countries emerging from conflict. Sixth, women and men candidates had to have equal access to party resources, and finally, political parties needed to be more active in promoting women candidates and addressing gender issues in their platforms and manifestos.

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Session one: Improving women's access to parliament
Key topics: progress and setbacks of women in political life; electoral systems, political parties (structures, positions, agendas), dissemination of information, work and family balance, gender-balanced candidate lists, quotas, critical mass, communication strategies, training and mentoring, solidarity among women, awareness-raising, legislation change.

Dr. Pippa Norris, of the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University; Dr. Richard E. Maitland, of the Department of Political Science at the University of Houston, speaking on behalf of the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA) ; and Senator Margaret Mensah-Williams, Vice-Chair of the National Council of Namibia, addressed the parliamentarians and exchanged views with them.

Winning a seat: barriers, techniques and alternatives
To what extent are political parties facilitating or hindering women's entry into parliament? What examples of 'best practices' can be found? To what extent do political party structures still need to be changed to allow women's equal participation? Are quotas the way forward? To what extent do women succeed under quota systems, and which systems have proved most effective?

In examining the strategies that can be used to increase women's representation in parliament, it is essential to know how the rules work, and to look very carefully at the most successful examples. It used to be assumed that improved economic development would automatically improve women's representation in politics, but if the proportion of women currently in parliaments is tabulated

against countries' GDP, it can be seen that there is not a strong correlation between them. Amongst the richer countries, for example, Japan has a very low percentage of women MPs, while among the poorer countries, Rwanda has the highest figure of all, with almost 50 per cent.

The second aspect of increasing levels of women's representation is to work on changing the culture, as expressed in attitudes, values and ideals. The need is to disseminate the idea that women should have a role equal to that of men. It is a process that can help the position of women in politics, but it is a laborious one, as a country's culture changes only slowly.

The third strategy is to work on the electoral systems. Major opportunities arise whenever some form of constitutional reform is undertaken, as in the case of Afghanistan and Iraq. It is well known that proportional systems tend to benefit women running for elected office, while "first past the post" systems are extremely disadvantageous to them. With longer party lists, too, on average twice as many women are elected as when the lists are short. Achieving electoral reform is also a very long-term process.

The fourth way to increase the percentage of women's representation is by means of legal gender quotas, applicable to every party in a country's electoral system. Legally binding or constitutional quotas are not common in single-member district, or majoritarian, electoral systems. Important determining factors are how such quotas are implemented; whether effective penalties are included; the actual level of the quota; whether the women have to be ranked on the zippering or the zebra principle, or simply included; and whether the lists are open or closed.

The fifth strategy involves voluntary quotas, where the parties themselves change their rules to specify that a minimum proportion of women must be included as candidates for elected office. For voluntary quotas to work, a number of conditions
have to be present, one of them being a fairly large district magnitude, expressed in terms of the number of seats elected in each district. The higher the magnitude, or the longer the lists, the greater the chance that women will be elected.

Reserved seats, the sixth strategy, have been a popular option in many Arab and Muslim states. Where it is not possible to establish quotas in parties, particularly if the parties themselves are not effective organizations, an alternative is to reserve certain parliamentary seats for women. The system can take two forms, depending on whether the women are appointed or elected. In the first case, there is a danger of the MPs' being seen as mere tokens, lacking an independent base from which to criticize the leadership that has appointed them. If they are elected, on the other hand, then their democratic legitimacy will allow them to articulate genuine concerns and play a genuine political role.

In addition to taking different forms, quotas can also be applied at different stages of the process of legislative recruitment. Aspirant quotas, which affect the first stage are fairly rare and of limited effectiveness. They tend to appear in single-member districts where there is considerable pressure to enhance women's representation but at the same time an institutional context making it difficult to do so. They are found among parties on the left in democracies in the English-speaking world, such as Labour and Liberal Democrats in the United Kingdom, Labour in Australia, the New Democratic Party in Canada, and so on, all of which have established some form of policy stipulating that the short list of aspirants has to include women. Much more common are candidate quotas, affecting the second stage. These are most often used in proportional representation systems, and in their legally-binding variant are quite common in Latin America.

Successful use of quotas requires good-faith compliance by parties, which may be achieved either because the parties actually support the policy or because they are legally bound to do so.

Meaningful sanctions are also needed, perhaps taking the form of a prohibition on parties that do not observe the rules on quotas from fielding any candidates at all.

The important issue is how to persuade male MPs, already sitting in parliament, to pass quota laws. The first argument that can be used is the simple assertion that it is the right thing to do. That can be a powerful argument, especially with left-leaning parties who argue that they provide a voice for those who have been shut out of the system. Secondly, it can be argued that it is the politically astute thing to do: a way of attracting voters, and of avoiding the risk of losing pro-women voters if the party obstructs the passage of quota laws. Supporting quota laws also provides the party with a chance to present itself symbolically as modern and – for example in Eastern Europe – as having western attitudes. It can even be argued, finally, that supporting quota laws is the only thing a party can do: if such requirements are going to be set down in national law anyway, that makes it easier for otherwise-reluctant parties to go along.

Women and politics in post-conflict situations

Why have women in post-conflict countries often been able to achieve higher levels of parliamentary representation than women in established democracies and can this trend be sustained? What were the specific needs of women parliamentarians in post-conflict countries?

In recent years, the long and bitter liberation struggles that have been seen in South Africa, in Namibia, and elsewhere have been aimed not only at ending colonial occupation and apartheid but also at bringing about social transformation. Men and women have shared trenches and fought together as freedom fighters, as equals in sacrifice and vision. After achieving independence they have continued to be guided by the spirit of equality and mutual respect, with the solidarity that has been shared between men and women during the liberation struggle continuing in the newly-independent country.

In post-conflict situations, women have played a major role in the reconstruction of the country. In Namibia, for example, since independence in 1990, the ruling SWAPO party has initiated legal reforms aimed at ensuring social justice, a goal that has entailed the enhancement of women's social and economic status. The most vocal of these reforms is the 50/50 Campaign, that aims for 50 per cent of candidates for all elections to be women. Traditionally, the political arena has been a male sphere, but of late women have made inroads. For example, in the Parliament of Namibia, while the First National Assembly of 1990-1994 had five women Members of Parliament out of a total of 78, the Fourth National Assembly, 2005-2009, will see about 18 female MPs.

Despite progress, gender inequality is deeply entrenched in policies, legislation, attitudes, traditions and institutions, and the challenges are still formidable. Building peaceful and more democratic societies involves gender-sensitive budgeting, awareness-raising, advocacy, monitoring and programme delivery.

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General discussion

In the ensuing discussion, many delegates recalled the struggles that they or other women in their country had had to endure in order to attain parliamentary status. Several paid tribute to the strong women who had gone before them, blazing the trail.

Several reported, too, on the difficulties that women were still facing in their countries in being accepted as credible parliamentary candidates, in asserting their rights to quotas, and in being taken seriously once elected.

Others, while acknowledging that difficulties persisted, described the approaches their countries had taken to surmount such difficulties.

Among the conclusions and recommendations reached in the general discussion were:

- Parliamentary representation for women should not be seen as an end in itself, but as a way for women to be able to propose solutions to the issues that concern them: poverty, hunger, disease, the sufferings of children, trafficking in human beings, and so on.
- In order for women to make true progress, they have to face their situation as it really is, and tell each other the truth about it. Without honesty, it will not be possible for women to confront the issues.
- Voluntary quotas are preferable to legally-binding ones, although the latter may well be necessary in certain countries with a deep cultural resistance to women's advancement.
- Quotas alone are not enough; the way the quota is calculated has a profound impact on its effectiveness. If it is calculated too high, there is a danger of attracting unqualified and uninterested women candidates, just in order to meet the required numbers.
- Reserved seats were considered by some delegates to be a bad option, since women should be, and are, capable of taking on and beating male parliamentarians on equal terms.
- If reserved seats are used, it is definitely better for their occupants to be elected, not appointed.
- Continuing efforts are needed to persuade women to put themselves forward as candidates, to persuade women to vote for women, and to ensure that instruments such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, or the Beijing Plan of Action, are well known.
- There is a need for equal education opportunities for women, and also for orienting young women towards running for public office.
- Greater funding has to be provided for the political campaigns of women, especially poor women.
- Women candidates should seek support from other organizations, such as trade unions and women's groups.
- Women do not need to be satisfied with the "soft" ministerial portfolios. In South Africa, for example, the "hard" ministries are nearly all headed by women, and a similar picture is seen in Uganda.
- Workshops and seminars could be organized on how women can break out of the roles that stereotypes assigned to them, and take on such non-traditional ministries.
- After the present figure of 30 per cent, the next target should be 40 per cent representation for women.

In the view of some delegates, women should not be unnecessarily modest – the proper situation, representing the realities of society, is a 50-50 representation for men and women in parliament.

- Political leaders should emulate the example of the leaders of the Southern African Development Community countries who have committed to parity of representation in both cabinet and parliament by 2005.
- The media have to be encouraged to give a fairer and more positive portrayal of women and their political efforts. The message should be that the participation of women in democracy is natural and essential.
- It is necessary to recognize that what is achievable, and the rate at which it can be achieved, varies with each country's situation. A country at war, or suffering natural disaster, for example, will inevitably make slower progress towards truly egalitarian democracy.
- Similarly, there is a need for patience and understanding, in order to take into account specific cultural contexts and traditions.

- A key element in the progress of women is political will. If the situation is changing too slowly, that means that political will is lacking.

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Session two: Strengthening parliaments' capacity to address the Beijing objectives
Key themes: gender-sensitive parliaments, institutional change, caucuses and committees, leadership and capacity training, work and family balance, women's issues, transparent criteria for promotion, mentoring and political campaigning, public speaking and self-assertion, inclusive processes.

Mr. Anders Bengtsson, of the Swedish Parliament (*Riksdag*) and Ms. Winnie Byanyima, formerly of the Ugandan Parliament and now Director for Women, Gender and Development at the African Union, addressed the parliamentarians and exchanged views with them.

Gender issues as "people's issues" : the role of male parliamentarians
Are "women's issues" solely the domain of women or have men also begun to champion these issues? To what extent are men parliamentarians challenging traditional perceptions of men's and women's societal and cultural roles? How successful have men been in sensitizing parliaments on gender issues?

Elected representatives in national parliaments have the privilege and the obligation to safeguard democratic values, one of the most important of which is equality between men and women. But gender equality is not a static situation that can be measured only in quantitative terms; it is a process that calls for continued and qualitative evaluation, and its level can be perceived quite differently depending on the angle from which it is viewed.

Sweden is commonly considered to be one of the most gender-equal countries in the world, largely on the basis of its high representation of women in the Parliament. The country has also been a strong advocate of ensuring that the EU agenda includes gender equality, which is now one of the core values of the new EU constitution. Female representation among the Swedish Members of the European Parliament totals 58 percent, by far the highest share.

The factors behind Sweden's high proportion of female Members of Parliament include the proportional electoral system; powerful and assertive women's groupings, both party political organizations and independent women's movements; the early development of a welfare state, with extensive child care, that created greater opportunities for women to take paid employment, and the abolition of joint taxation which made it financially worthwhile for them to do so.

In November 2003, representatives of the Swedish Social Democratic Party submitted a series of proposals to the Parliamentary Board on how to improve gender equality in parliament. Despite many years of quite successful political activity for gender equality, much remained to be done. Gender inequalities were still occurring in parliament, in terms of a structural problem and as a result of subtle expressions of discrimination emanating from hidden structures, unspoken rules and traditional patterns. Sweden's high quantitative level of equality did not automatically lead to qualitative equality. Gender equality is often described in quantitative terms, with the Beijing Platform for Action, for example, concentrating on increasing the quantitative level of female representation in decision-making bodies, but what do we mean by qualitative equality? A definition might be the ability among both men and women to make use of the knowledge, the experience and values of both genders when dealing with various aspects of society.

A number of concrete proposals to this end, covering a wide range of areas, were made in the Swedish Parliament, for example that a specific gender equality programme should be launched for every term of office to monitor and increase relevant activities; or that seminars should be organized on related themes for the standing committees in parliament, where working methods, cultural aspects and other issues could be discussed, for example through role plays. Other proposals were to focus on how to safeguard valuable experiences from resigning MPs, both male and female, and to pay greater attention to the family situation of MPs when drawing up committee schedules, travel plans, and so on.

Male parliamentarians had been proud of the high level of female representation in the Swedish Parliament, and surprised to find that inequalities still persisted. Evidently, some men still hold obsolete attitudes on gender equality, and all, not least male parliamentarians, have a responsibility to try to change such antiquated views. In Sweden, a network of male parliamentarians is just about to be launched, with 27 MPs so far announcing their interest in working actively to promote gender equality in parliament through this forum. Traditionally, it has been women who have been actively involved in gender equality issues, while men have often been absent from these endeavours, but if gender equality is to become a reality in all areas of society both men and women must be willing actively to seek change.

Gender-sensitive parliaments: mechanisms and challenges

To what extent are parliaments gender-sensitive? Does the parliament need to become a less aggressive, combative arena before more women will participate? How effectively do parliamentary committees on gender issues mainstream a gender perspective into the work of the parliament? Can women act in concert through all-party caucuses?

Women's right to vote came after the struggles of the suffragettes in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, but parliaments and parliamentary procedures long predate that era. Commonwealth countries, for example, base their parliaments on the British Parliament that has been in existence for centuries. Thus parliaments by their very nature are not gender-sensitive institutions because they predate the women's movement and the rights of women to participate in them. There is thus a tension between tradition and transformation, a vision of change that is a source of inspiration. This tension is always present and is what has to be managed in developing gender-sensitive parliamentary institutions. Moreover, parliaments are the embodiment of the sovereignty of nations. Symbols of power, symbols of conquest and victories, are evoked to instil the spirit of nationalism, and thus parliament becomes a male-oriented institution, one where militarism, war and conquest are often a part of the definition.

More women have come into parliaments, but it is not necessarily true that simply adding women makes for gender-sensitive parliaments. Where changes in parliamentary organization of work have come about - for example adjustments in parliamentary working hours to suit the multiple roles of women; parliaments becoming more sensitive to children and providing childcare facilities, and so on – this has occurred because the women themselves are organized and confident enough to demand them.

Research undertaken in Uganda some years ago by a feminist scholar examined the question of why women parliamentarians tended to make fewer contributions from the floor than their male counterparts. The response was that, largely, they saw no need to speak if somebody else had already expressed their opinion. By contrast, many men took the floor and would begin their speech by saying "As my honorable colleague has said….I would like to say for the record….". However, the same researcher also observed that women parliamentarians were very active in committee; in the smaller setting they gave their ideas and participated freely.

Change does not come just from numbers. It comes from having the critical eye, the vision for change and the willingness to organize for that change. In a number of African countries, committees have been established for gender-related issues, such as the Committee for Equal Opportunities in Uganda. Another strategy for achieving change is to seek to place women in the leadership of all committees, so that women's interests will be represented in all committee work. For this to succeed, there is a need for Members of Parliament with the capacity to analyze bills and policies from a gender perspective. Without that requirement, there is no accountability. There is also a need to prioritize gender issues–women's land rights, violence against women, and so on–as Members of Parliament, men or women, will not necessarily be motivated to pursue gender issues if their parties do not make them a priority.

Uganda pioneered a non-partisan women's caucus in 1994/95, when the country was drafting a new constitution, and the experiment was very successful. However, the conditions were very specific to the making of a new constitution. Similar experiences have been seen in Kenya and in Botswana. But outside such special circumstances, there is a temptation for the ruling party to dominate the caucus, making the opposition parties suspicious and less interested in participating. Thus the precondition for successful use of this strategy is gender sensitivity on the part of party leaders, to allow and encourage the women of their parties to join a cross-party caucus. Also important is to have a limited and well-articulated gender agenda, one without issues that will cause cross-party disputes and covering only those issues that are of common interest to all involved political groupings. Non-partisan leadership of these caucuses, which can be difficult to achieve, is essential and leaders who are committed gender activists have the greatest chance to succeed.

General discussion

In the ensuing discussion, many delegates reported on their countries' efforts to create a gender-sensitive parliamentary environment, the difficulties encountered, and the successes achieved. Among the conclusions and recommendations reached in the general discussion were:

- Women should be encouraged not to vote for parties that do not present female candidates.
- There is a need to be aware of and on guard against double standards. Some countries, for example, will reject a woman MP who has had a child out of wedlock, but will have no objection at all to a male MP in the same situation.
- Every political party that has a male candidate for senior office should present a female candidate for the deputy's office, and vice versa.
- Whatever policy issues divide them, on women's issues female MPs tend to find common ground across party lines. It can even be hoped that they will find common ground across the frontiers of nations at war.
- Every body carrying out peace negotiations should have a female membership of at least 25 per cent.
- Where countries have national commissions on the status of women, their reports should be submitted to and thoroughly examined in parliament.
- Consideration should be given to the creation of a certificate of compliance with CEDAW, which should accompany bills submitted to parliament for approval.
- Sensitization of the population, including human rights education in primary and secondary schools, remains a critical need.
- Publicity needed to be given to woman's parliamentary work – men seem better than women at publicizing themselves.

Conclusions

Having listened to comments and contributions from the floor, the panelists drew some general conclusions from the day's debate.

Overall female representation in national parliaments had not jumped dramatically: ten years earlier it had been at 11.3 per cent, currently it was at 15.7 per cent. However, it appeared that there was greater cause for optimism than those numbers implied. Ten years before, if parliamentarians were looking for models that could be copied in their own country, almost the only place to look had been Scandinavia. But today there were many more models that could be emulated: Argentina, Belgium, South Africa and more. The countries that had made dramatic improvements in women's representation over the past ten years had done so in different ways, all of which were worth examining to determine which applied best in any given country.

The steady increase in numbers of women in parliaments was causing changes in how parliamentary work was done, both in the more obvious ways such as the provision of childcare facilities in parliaments, and in less immediately visible ways like greater inclusion of women in decision-making processes. The challenge was to work to keep the numbers growing and also to work on the hidden issues that impeded women's effectiveness, such as sexual harassment at work or violence against women.

Many examples had been given of innovative structures that had been put in place for gender mainstreaming. The challenge was to integrate the responsibility for promoting gender equality in parliament into every structure: not to marginalize the responsibility to one structure, but to build a system of accountability throughout all the structures of parliament.

Laws were changing: more laws were coming into place to promote gender equality in parliament, and discriminatory laws were being repealed. Here it was essential to follow the money, to examine the budgets and ensure that budgets addressed the needs of both men and women in an equitable way.

Quotas were not a panacea and certainly not the only solution[2], but they could be helpful.

It made sense for women to work towards greater democracy in their countries. As a country moved towards greater democracy, that tended to equalize powers between women and men. Inversely, a greater participation of women in politics, made the political system and process more democratic.

There was also a need for North-South support. The seventh African Regional Conference, which had considered Security Council resolution 1325, had passed a resolution calling for a special dialogue on peace, specifically with women from the North. The objectives would be to strengthen advocacy for peace in Africa, greater solidarity between the women of Africa and those of the North, to highlight the responsibility of government both in the North and in Africa, and to create an international women's movement on peace.

Another aspect to be explored further was the role of political parties in promoting women's political participation. Many women worked within political parties, often as volunteers. It would be reasonable for them to demand that, in return, the parties should add more women candidates to their lists.

The overriding message that had emerged from the debate was how important it was that Parliaments ensured that that the Beijing objectives were followed through. All parliamentarians who were able to do so, should follow the debates at the United Nations Commission for the Status of Women because it was very important to ensure that the parliamentary perspective was maintained.

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[2] Further information on quotas can be found on International IDEA's website, and quota database (www.idea.int).

The IPU needed to pursue its action to mobilize parliaments in this field. There had been strong and repeated calls for follow-through from the meeting, and for a clear message to be given to the United Nations on the position of women in parliaments. The first of those messages would come the following Monday, when Senator Margaret Mensah-Williams, Deputy Speaker of the Namibian Upper House and member of the Coordinating Committee of Women Parliamentarians, would report on the present meeting to the Commission on the Status of Women, and when the message from the day's discussions would be heard, loud and clear.

Senator Fraser concluded by thanking participants, panelists and International IDEA, and reiterated her appreciation for the very good cooperation the IPU enjoyed with UNDAW.