



Inter-Parliamentary Union
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Tenth Meeting of Women Speakers of Parliament INNOVATING FOR GENDER EQUALITY: *Making development, peace and democracy a reality for women and men*

United Nations Headquarters, New York, 29-30 August 2015
Organized by the Inter-Parliamentary Union

Summary Report

**by Ms. S. B. Hanoomanjee, Speaker of the National Assembly
(Mauritius)**

We, women Speakers of Parliament from 23 countries gathered on 29 and 30 August 2015 on the occasion of our 10th Meeting of Women Speakers, organized by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) at United Nations Headquarters in New York.

We debated “Innovating for gender equality”, with a view to identifying key strategies and action to step up progress. Our debates also aimed to feed into the deliberations and outcome of the Fourth World Conference of Speakers of Parliament.

Gender equality is at the heart of democracy, peace and sustainable development. It is a matter of human rights, human dignity, justice and good governance. It is undeniable that progress has been achieved at many levels and in many spheres but today no country can claim to have realised full equality between men and women. Women account for half the world’s population, two parliaments have a majority of women in parliament (Rwanda and Bolivia) and one has equal numbers of men and women members (Andorra) but yet women make up only 22 per cent of parliamentarians worldwide and 16 per cent of Speakers of Parliament. Women continue to earn systematically less than men for the same work, and millions of girls are prevented from attending school. The scourge of violence against women remains a key issue in every country and internationally.

Gender inequality holds all our countries back, and the struggle to overcome it must therefore be a priority for each and every one of us - both men and women - as we embark on and commit to the achievement of the sustainable development goals.

The power of collective action

We strongly believe in the power of change and collective action.

For this power of change to make a meaningful impact, women’s share in politics has to be equal to men’s share. There can be no democracy without equality between men and women in decision-making in all spheres and at all levels. Efficient policy-making is handicapped by not being sufficiently representative and inclusive.

Affirmative action has paved and continues to pave the way for progress. Maximizing its impact will require political will and effective enforcement. In our Parliaments and Governments, we need to open up all policy areas, including finance and defence, to the contribution of women. We also need to ensure that the work environment is conducive to the participation of men and women and transform institutions, such as parliaments, into gender-sensitive ones.

The power of change is also contingent on our collective action. Solidarity among women has proven to be key to many successes on the road to gender equality. Experience-sharing and strategizing together are first step. Developing platforms for common action, such as women’s parliamentary caucuses, is another.

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We firmly believe, however, that collective action for gender equality is not the exclusive preserve of women; men, boys and girls are also key stakeholders and partners. As women leaders, we invite our male colleagues to be at the forefront of our collective engagement for equality. We recognize the value of campaigns such as the IPU's *My power for women's power* campaign and UN Women's *He for She* Campaign, as platforms to generate exchange and common action.

We call on men Speakers and men parliamentarians to become advocates for gender equality, to persuade boys and men that our countries and our world can only benefit from equal opportunities and rights and to lead by example by condemning all forms of discrimination, stereotypes and violence against women.

Investing in women's empowerment

Empowering women is a determining factor of progress. As long as inequalities between men and women remain in the economic sphere, the family, schools and universities, science or access to technology, all of our countries will not reach their full development potential. Gender-sensitive policies need to become the norm instead of the exception.

Women's rights cannot be forgotten even before they become a reality. Yet many women are not aware of their human rights. Education and awareness-raising are key to building knowledge among women on their socio-economic, cultural, civic and political rights. This knowledge has to reach all women, and in particular the most vulnerable groups such as rural women, women with disabilities and the poor.

The economic empowerment of women is a priority, without which women cannot reach their potential and contribute to their country's development, especially as they are more vulnerable to abuse and discrimination. We need to craft policies and legislation that secure access to property and land rights for women, as well as access to loans.

Changing mentalities

The swift progress we desire for gender equality implies challenging mindsets and changing mentalities.

There are persistent and deep cultural practices and beliefs that constitute major challenges to achieving gender equality in all spheres and all countries. We need to step up both our collective and individual action to change mentalities, challenging traditional social and gender roles.

Communication is at the heart of change. The media and social media could be better used to communicate more on gender equality. These can be powerful vehicles for change if used in a responsible and non-discriminatory manner, avoiding stereotypes. Our parliaments should develop stronger communication strategies on gender equality, open spaces for debates on electronic platforms and reach out more proactively to communities and the grassroots.

More attention needs to be paid to working closely with communities – bridging the gap that is often felt by citizens between them and their representatives. Bringing parliaments, and in particular women Speakers, to the people, will help change mentalities. Initiatives aimed at facilitating access to Speakers, such as Speaker time, enhancing interaction between MPs and citizens, such as rural parliaments, should be further developed.

The most pressing priority is to reach out to girls and boys and to educate them about gender equality. We firmly believe that gender equality should be part of school curricula. Educating boys and girls on human rights and gender equality from an early age would help to instil a culture of non-violence and respect in relations between the sexes. Educational materials used in the schools must also be reviewed in order to eliminate stereotypes. Beyond the education system, our young need to learn by seeing men and women leaders, as well as men and women in their communities, lead by example and promote equality and respect in their speech, behaviour and acts.

We have the power to open a space for debate and as leaders and women Speakers, we have the responsibility to place sensitive issues squarely on the political and public agenda, tackling taboos and

encouraging dialogue and exchange. Issues that have been perceived until now as private matters such as marital rape or child marriage should be on the public agenda if we want to curb existing practices and behaviours that hold women back. Debate is the starting point for building understanding and effecting a change in mentality. We should lead the way in prompting such dialogue.

Ending violence against women - A priority

The most extreme violation of women's rights is violence against women. No nation is spared; the latest global and regional estimates by the World Health Organization show that one out of every three women worldwide has experienced intimate partner violence or sexual violence by someone other than a partner.

Whether in the public or the private sphere, violence against women and girls in all its forms and manifestations robs them of their dignity, violates their fundamental rights, damages their health, reduces their productivity and prevents them from achieving their full potential. It also has significant consequences for peace and security and a negative impact on development.

Addressing violence against women is a complex issue that requires profound change. It means looking at power relations, addressing patriarchy, changing mentalities, and challenging the social roles and stereotypes that we have internalized, including those related to men. It also means enabling women to take ownership of their lives, their bodies and their destinies.

Addressing violence against women requires crafting comprehensive legislation and policies that address all forms of violence and include prevention, criminalization and reparation. More generally, a legal framework that is non-discriminatory, supports women's empowerment and addresses all forms of discrimination contributes to achieving gender equality and eradicating violence against women. Parliamentary and governmental action can build on international and regional commitments such as the Convention for the elimination of all forms of discriminations against women and the Istanbul Convention.

Discrimination and violence against women and girls are exacerbated during conflict. Fighting the root causes of such practices will ultimately make for more peaceful societies.

2015 marks the 15th anniversary of United Nations Security Council resolution 1325 on Women, peace and security. This provides a perfect opportunity to take stock of progress made, build on best practices and ensure renewed commitment in this area. Only a small group of countries have so far developed national action plans on this resolution. We need to take this up in our respective countries and see to it that appropriate legislation and resources are secured to facilitate the implementation of this and other resolutions on women, peace and security.

In light of the alarming reports of current violations of women's rights in conflict situations, we must take urgent action at the national, regional and international levels to protect women and ensure that survivors receive the support they require.

Prevention should be enhanced through the training of peace-keeping missions on gender equality and violence against women. These should include a gender unit to better meet the needs of women and girls who face increased risk of violence in conflict situations. Some countries innovated by sending all-female peace units to conflict areas, sending a strong signal about what priorities need to be addressed. These missions should be held up to the highest standards and accountable for any crimes committed.

Early warning systems should be developed or strengthened to prevent violence. In specific contexts such as camps, initiatives focusing on men, providing them with support and attention, have proven to be useful.

For victims first and foremost, additional efforts must be deployed to ensure they have access to justice and reparation and perpetrators are prosecuted. Post-conflict trauma should be given more attention as part of a common strategy to provide victims with medical care and counselling and so help them rebuild their lives.

Achieving gender equality and ending violence against women is the responsibility of both men and women. It is a public issue. Men are part and parcel of the solution; they should take an active part in the debate and stand up for women's rights. The silent majority of non-violent men must speak out now and assume their responsibilities alongside women.

Oversight role of parliaments

As women Speakers and parliamentarians, our action for gender equality has to be vocal both at the local and the global level. We hold our governments to account on all matters and should exercise our oversight on gender equality. We need to question policies and legislation from a gender perspective and to mainstream gender in the functioning of our parliaments.

To take up this task, it is crucial to be able to rely on sex-disaggregated data and gender impact studies. Such tools can better inform our debates and decision-making in all matters before us. Assessment of the implementation of policies, legislation and plans of action are key steps in policy-making for gender equality. We need to draw conclusions and policy orientations based on lessons learned. Here again, political will and commitment among politicians are crucial ingredients.

Financing for gender equality

It is undeniable that advancing gender equality will require adequate financing. Gender budgeting needs to become a norm as it can provide a comprehensive and coordinated framework to set gender equality objectives, allocate adequate resources and monitor progress.

Development cooperation can and should also embody and deliver for gender equality. International financial institutions can greatly contribute to placing gender equality at the heart of development policies, programmes and plans.

We are convinced that joint, coordinated and strong action will bring about change and request the parliamentary community to work together to achieve gender equality in one generation.