

# THE WORLD OF PARLIAMENTS



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## Three women at the helm in Switzerland

In Switzerland, 2010 will go down unquestionably as the year of women as three of them hold the highest offices in the country. From left to right: Ms. Erika Forster-Vannini, President of the State Council, Ms. Doris Leutard, President of Switzerland, and Ms. Pascale Bruderer, Speaker of the National Council. Interview with Ms. Bruderer on page 19.



Photo IPU

## Women's issues: 15 years after the Beijing Conference

Fifteen years after the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, *The World of Parliaments* has asked a few high-profile personalities to give their views on progress in achieving gender equality and women's empowerment. Although there have been noticeable gains for women and girls in general, persistent challenges remain, such as how to put an end to violence against women. This edition also focuses on a field visit carried out by IPU President Dr. Theo-Ben Gurirab to a centre in Addis Ababa, where he met with Ethiopian religious and traditional leaders to learn more about their commitment to put an end to female genital mutilation. Several pages are dedicated to the IPU analysis on women in parliament and the newly published IPU-UN Map on *Women in Politics: 2010*. The spotlight will also be placed on the 122<sup>nd</sup> IPU Assembly, to be held in Bangkok in March/April 2010, with the expectations of the Speaker of the National Assembly of Thailand, the Host Parliament.

## “Parliament has a crucial role in balancing conflicts, including political ones”

**Q: What significance does hosting this IPU Assembly hold for the Parliament of Thailand?**

**Mr. Chai Chidchob:** The IPU Assembly, which will be held in Bangkok, is expected to bring together over 1,200 participants, so we are training a number of officers to facilitate their stay. The National Assembly of Thailand will also provide an opportunity for university students to participate in this meeting as liaison officers working with teams and delegations. The main topic of discussion is “Parliament at the heart of political reconciliation and good governance”. The Assembly will also address topics related to “Cooperation and shared responsibility in the global fight against organized crime, in particular drug trafficking, illegal arms sales, human trafficking and cross-border terrorism”, “The role of parliaments in developing South-South and Triangular Cooperation with a view to accelerating achievement of the Millennium Development Goals”, and “Youth participation in the democratic process”. The panel discussions will cover issues such as the rights of the child, the problem of water, child survival and maternal health, the possession and use of nuclear weapons and climate change. His Royal Highness, Crown Prince Maha Vajiralongkorn, will represent His Majesty the King in presiding over the Opening Ceremony. At the Meeting of Women Parliamentarians, there will be a seminar on “Combating violence against women, with a particular focus on women held in places of detention and imprisonment”. The guest speaker will be Her Royal Highness Princess Bajrakitiyabha. It is the third time that Thailand has the honour of hosting an IPU Assembly.

Photo: National Assembly of Thailand



*Mr. Chai Chidchob,  
Speaker of the National Assembly of Thailand*

**Q: The debates in Bangkok will centre around the theme of parliaments, political reconciliation and good governance. How do you see parliament’s role in relation to reconciliation in Thailand and in other countries in the region?**

**C.C.:** Since countries are composed of millions of people, there is no denying the fact that conflicts can occur in society, which are caused by divergent interests, political groups, etc. Participation of the people is a prime element of any representative democracy, which establishes a government of the people, by the people, for the people. In this context, the parliament is a key institution, which represents millions of people assembled inter alia to solve such conflicts. As a forum of representatives of the people, it has a crucial role to play in balancing conflicts, including political ones. Good governance entails holding the executive branch to account, and also encompasses gender sensitivity, consensus, accountability, transparency, effectiveness, efficiency and equitability, in conformity with the rule of law. However, in the parliamentary system, there is no clear separation between legislative and executive powers. The parliament should perform its functions

of overseeing executive action in order to ensure accountability and do all in its power to minimize corruption. It should also give a voice to minorities and eradicate all threats to society.

**Q: What are your hopes for the Bangkok Assembly in terms of combating organized crime, drug trafficking, illegal arms sales, human trafficking and cross-border terrorism?**

**C.C.:** Throughout the years, IPU Member Parliaments have recognized that transnational crime has become a serious issue, in particular, drug trafficking, illegal arms sales, human trafficking, cross-border terrorism and money laundering. These problems, which are all interlinked, pose a serious threat to international peace and stability as a whole, and require the concerted action of the international community. I hope that the parliamentarians participating in the 122<sup>nd</sup> IPU Assembly in Thailand will address these issues, assess the current situation and inform us about the progress in their country and parliamentary approaches for

*Cont'd. on page 3*

## Gender equality pays off

The year 2010 will be a crucial one for gender equality. The 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action is more than just a date to commemorate. It allows us to take stock of the progress achieved so that both halves of humanity - women and men - can have the same chances to live in dignity and achieve fulfilment in their personal and family life, and for our societies - both in the North and in the South - to achieve more harmonious development.

Although there have been some notable achievements, as the UN Secretary-General's Special Adviser on Gender Issues, Ms. Rachel Mayanja, points out, a lot still remains to be done in order for women to finally have their rights respected, especially in the workplace, because in a number of countries, equal work does not always mean equal pay for men and women. And for women to not have to deal with the threat of

violence inflicted by their spouse, father, brother or cousin in so many cases throughout the world.

It is also high time for women to be allowed to express themselves freely in all parts of the world, such as Aung San Suu Kyi in Burma, who was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1991, or former Afghan MP Malalai Joya, and high time that their opinion is listened to and respected as much as that of their men counterparts. Gender equality should no longer be considered only as a feminist slogan, but a fundamental right to democracy. According to the Universal Declaration on Democracy adopted by the IPU in 1997, "The achievement of democracy presupposes a genuine partnership between men and women in the conduct of the affairs of society in which they work in equality and complementarity, drawing mutual enrichment from their differences".

Systematic efforts must be made from the earliest years in children,

in school and in the family, to promote respect for men and women and equal opportunities in terms of education and employment. A change of mentality brought about by eliminating stereotypes about femininity, paternity, parenthood or the economic role of men is needed urgently for the well-being of us all - men and women.

How can we achieve this? By passing appropriate laws and clearly displaying and implementing political will. One country, Rwanda, boasts over 56 per cent women in parliament, and another, Norway, has recorded 55.6 per cent women in government (just behind Finland with 57.9%), a birth rate of almost two children on average and 43 per cent women in the board rooms of large companies. In the words of the Norwegian Minister for Social Integration, Mr. Audun Lysbakken, in the final analysis, equality pays off.

LB

*Mr. Chai Chidchob, Cont'd. from page 2*

the future. The meeting could identify concrete parliamentary initiatives for encouraging governments to ratify relevant international conventions against transnational crime. Parliamentarians should review or amend their national laws on drug trafficking, illegal arms sales, human trafficking, cross-border terrorism and money laundering. They should also support international cooperation on international legal instruments to prevent criminals from taking advantage of legislative loopholes.

**Q:** How can legislators stimulate the participation of young people in the democratic process?

**C.C.:** We support all activities that enhance and promote knowledge and understanding about the politics, government, and democratic regime of the parliamentary system with the King as Head of State (constitutional monarchy)

to young people. Through the Democratic Youth Programme, we have provided young people with an opportunity to be part of politics, express their opinions on politics and on the Government of Thailand and enable them to further their knowledge and experience by establishing democratic youth networks to spread democratic knowledge and perform public interest activities for communities, and the country as a whole. We passed the Bill to Promote National Development of Children and Youth B.E. 2550, which came into force in 2008, by establishing three levels of Children and Youth Councils in districts, provinces, and nationwide. Our purpose is to enable children and youth to participate in the democratic process by sharing their ideas about the development of children and youth with members of parliament as input for beneficial policies and plans.

**Q:** We will hear a great deal about the Convention on the Rights of the

**Child during the Assembly. How would you assess children's rights in Thailand?**

**C.C.:** The Convention on the Rights of the Child states that the fundamental rights of the child comprise: 1) survival, including basic health care, peace, security and development; 2) a good education, which includes a loving home and adequate nutrition; protection from abuse, neglect, trafficking, child labour and other forms of exploitation; 3) participation, which includes the right to express opinions, be listened to and take part in making any decisions that affect them. Problems affecting children's rights in Thailand consist of malnutrition, education disadvantage, human trafficking, abusive labour, sexual exploitation, HIV/AIDS, violence, drug addiction or drug-related problems, limited rights for minority groups, isolation, etc. The Thai Government, together with all sectors concerned, has taken concrete steps to help solve these problems. LB ▀

## Women's rights: 15 years after Beijing

The year 2010 will be crucial for the realization of gender equality and women's empowerment. The commemoration of the 15-year anniversary of the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action is an opportune time to assess progress made, identify good practices and lessons learned in implementation, and consider new and remaining gaps and challenges. Critically, it is the right time to close the gap between rhetoric and action, between commitments and implementation.

The Beijing Platform for Action constitutes the global policy framework for gender equality, women's human rights and the empowerment of women and girls. Since 1995, the Commission on the Status of Women has further refined and expanded this blueprint for action through its agreed conclusions on a range of priority themes<sup>1</sup>. Many stakeholders – governments, parliaments, civil society, entities within the UN system, the private sector – have worked to turn this blueprint into real and practical gains for women and girls in all parts of the world.

### Progress and gains

There have been noticeable gains for women and girls. Globally, women accounted for 39 per cent of all people engaged in paid employment outside of agriculture in 2007, an increase from 35 per cent in 1990. Women's labour force participation has reached an estimated 52.6 per cent in 2008. Access to education has increased for girls at all levels, particularly in primary

education. In 2007, there were 96 girls for each 100 boys enrolled in first grade, compared with 92 girls in 1999. In some countries, women now outnumber men at the tertiary level. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women has reached almost universal ratification, with 186 States being party to the treaty.

Policies to address HIV/AIDS increasingly place specific emphasis on prevention, treatment and care for women. A growing number of States have in place comprehensive legal, policy, and institutional frameworks to end violence against women and girls, and support services are increasingly available to victims/survivors. Women held 18.8 per cent of seats in single/lower chambers of parliament in November 2009, compared to 11.3 per cent in 1995. Twenty-five countries have reached the 30 per cent threshold of women parliamentarians, a significant increase from only five countries in 1995.

National mechanisms for gender equality, including ministries and offices in the Executive Branch, as well as parliamentary committees and independent, advisory and monitoring bodies, play a key role in the promotion of gender equality. The gender mainstreaming strategy is increasingly applied across all sectors, supported by a wider range of tools, capacity-building programmes and training. Monitoring and evaluation of efforts has improved.

### Persistent challenges

Despite these advances, the Beijing Platform for Action has yet to be fully implemented. Progress in improving women's lives, eliminating discrimination and achieving equality has been uneven across countries and regions. Meeting the targets of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) is similarly challenged, and there has been almost

Photo: United Nations



*by Ms. Rachel Mayanja, Assistant Secretary General,  
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Gender Issues and Advancement of Women*

*Cont'd. on page 5*

Ms. Rachel Mayanja,  
Cont'd. from page 4

no progress with regard to MDG 5, to improve maternal health. Every year, 536,000 women and girls die as a result of pregnancy or childbirth. Women are more likely than men to be living in poverty.

Illiteracy remains a serious constraint for women, who continue to account for nearly two thirds of the 776 million illiterate adults in the world. Gender wage-gaps persist in all parts of the world. The global economic and financial crisis has created new hurdles to women's employment, and estimates suggest that unemployment rates are higher for women than men. More women than men remain trapped in insecure and often unpaid work. The deliberate targeting of civilians and the use of sexual violence against women continues on a large scale in ongoing conflicts.

Discrimination in law has not been eliminated, and discriminatory application and enforcement of laws prevents women from equal access to rights, resources and opportunities. Negative gender stereotypes based on societal beliefs and attitudes constrain their opportunities and choices. Women

continue to be responsible for most domestic and caregiving work. This unequal sharing of responsibilities negatively impacts on their educational and employment opportunities, and limits their involvement in public life.

### The way forward

Gender equality is a goal in itself, but also a means of achieving all the internationally agreed development goals, including the MDGs. It is now acknowledged that the success of policies and programme interventions aimed at eradicating hunger and malnutrition; achieving universal primary education, reducing child mortality, combating HIV/AIDS, malaria and TB, and protecting environmental sustainability will be enhanced when gender equality perspectives are taken into account.

In March 2010<sup>2</sup>, the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women will reflect on gains and challenges, what works and what more needs to be done. It will also contribute to shaping a gender perspective towards the full realization of the Millennium Development Goals. In July 2010, the Annual Ministerial Review of the Economic and Social Council will focus on gender equality and the empowerment

of women. The General Assembly will hold a high-level meeting in September 2010 on accelerating progress towards the achievement of all the Millennium Development Goals by 2015. The tenth anniversary of Security Council resolution 1325, on women, peace and security, will also be commemorated.

These occasions offer opportunities to demonstrate strong and visible leadership and commitment to gender equality, to galvanize the efforts of all stakeholders, forge strategic partnerships and improve participatory processes to achieve measurable outcomes for women. These opportunities must be seized at the national, regional and global levels to give new impetus to the promotion of gender equality and women's enjoyment of human rights. ▀

<sup>1</sup> See <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/csw/index.html>

<sup>2</sup> See <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing15/index.html>.

See also the Report of the Secretary-General, E/2010/4-E/CN.6/2010/2, at: <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing15/documentation.html>.

## Parliaments give visibility to violence against women

Parliaments around the world have responded to the IPU's call to mark the 10th anniversary of the proclamation of the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women on 25 November. More than 30 parliaments and inter-parliamentary organizations reported to the IPU on events they had conducted on or around the Day.

Special initiatives were undertaken by parliaments of the following countries: Afghanistan, Albania, Andorra, Austria, Belarus, Canada, Chile, Croatia, Cyprus, Ecuador, Finland, Georgia, Greece, Lebanon, Maldives, Philippines, Romania, Rwanda, Ser-

bia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Thailand, The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, United Arab Emirates, Uganda, Uruguay and Yemen, and by the following parliamentary associations: the East African Legislative Assembly, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe and the Parliamentary Confederation of the Americas.

Activities took many forms and yielded some tangible results. New resolutions were passed and special debates, speeches and exhibition were held in parliament. Legislators participated in workshops, discussed with women and civil rights organi-

zations and signed on to UNIFEM's SAY NO - UNiTE to End Violence against Women as a show of support. Through these actions, parliaments gave national visibility to violence against women and have helped to place the issue high on the political agenda. BF

An inventory of these events is posted on the IPU's website at: <http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/vaw/day.htm>. They are also listed as parliamentary contributions within the framework of the United Nations Secretary-General's Campaign to End Violence against Women on the website Say NO - UNiTE: <http://www.saynotoviolence.org>.

## Breaking the glass ceiling and deploying diversity in economic life: The Norwegian experience



Photo: Norwegian Ministry for Children, Equality and Social Inclusion

by Mr. Audun Lysbakken  
Minister for Children, Equality and Social Inclusion

Nations of the world will only prosper and develop if they use the talents and competence of all their citizens. There is clear scientific evidence to support the fact that the participation of women and girls in education, the workplace and the economy, along with boys and men, makes a significant difference to GNP, effectiveness, innovation and competitive edge. Countries that do not facilitate the education and employment of girls and women seem to score much lower on the United Nations and World Economic Forum scales, not to mention the Goldman Sachs ratings, than more gender-balanced societies. The right to gainful employment and a wage to sustain one's life is a basic human right, along with the right to political participation regardless of gender. The freedom for men and women alike, to have careers and families, and not to be forced to choose either or, is fundamental to modern society.

To reach this level of development, facilitating families and children along with developing the economy by employing the best talents and minds, governments need to design clever policies aimed at constructing enabling structures. These structures should enable people to make real and free choices, such as having babies *and* pursuing a career.

Norway has worked on such schemes and structures since the 1950s and has thus paved the way for making able women and girls visible in the labour market and eligible for high positions in board rooms as well as compete for top management jobs in the private and public sectors.

Five of the most important structural and universal reforms in modern Norway, initiated by the Cabinet and voted in Parliament, have been the following: The National Insurance Act (1966), the Parental Leave Provisions, or the Fathers Quota (1993), the full coverage of Early Child Care Institutions all over the country (took 25 years to complete), the flexibility in work life when having young children (Work Environment Act), and, of course, the Gender Equality Act (1979). All these reforms were negotiated through cooperation between the Cabinet and employers' and employees' associations before they became legal acts in Parliament. They are prerequisites for the now famous amendment of company laws undertaken by Parliament in 2003: the requirement for gender balance (40% women) in the board rooms of four types of companies.

Any affirmative action to obtain gender balance using all talents in

economic life and other sectors would be useless without a gender equal society achieved through such reforms/structures.

Affirmative action measures (quotas) are not legal in Norway regarding regular employment, but can be used to secure gender balance in elective positions, such as board room positions.

Such actions can help steer a society towards achieving some goals: to recruit the most able persons to carry out strategic tasks and reallocate economic power to include diverse competences in decision-making. The search has to be carried out among both halves of the population in order to find the most able persons.

All societies need political will to set goals and develop tools to achieve them. Norway has set some standards it can be proud of. But that could not have been done without long-term systematic work to promote equality and a change of mentality, culture and tradition based on undoing the stereotypes of womanhood, fatherhood, parenthood or of "the economic man". Read: male.

Norway leads Europe both in terms of fertility rate (1.96), and the percentage of women (43%) on the boards of the largest companies. Equality does pay off. ▀

## Giving impetus to women's political rights in Kuwait

In accordance with the 1962 Constitution of Kuwait, the democratic process began with elections to the first National Assembly in January 1963. Under the Electoral Act, Kuwaiti women were not part of the political process; pursuant to Article 1 of the Act, they were denied the right to vote insofar as it defined the voter as "any male Kuwaiti". Consequently, they were denied the right to stand for a parliamentary seat, as Rule 2 of the Rules of Procedure of the National Assembly provides that a candidate must first fulfil the conditions for voting.

Kuwaiti women continued to be removed and excluded from the political process until 6 May 2005, when the National Assembly approved an amendment to Article 1 of the Electoral Act, opening the way for Kuwaiti women to vote, stand as candidates and assume ministerial office. Accordingly, the first time that a woman became a minister and also a member of parliament by virtue of her position as a minister was on 14 June 2005. This appointment triggered a desire among Kuwaiti women to run for parliamentary seats in the first elections in which women participated as both voters and candidates in 2006.

Although 29 women stood, none of them won a seat, a situation that was again repeated in the elections of 2008. Then the unexpected occurred in the elections of 16 May 2009: four women were directly elected; one came first in her constituency and another second, while the third and fourth came seventh and tenth respectively in a pleasant surprise that broke the psychological barrier and stood as clear proof of impressive popular support for them.

Some were positively unhappy with this result, as signalled by the walkout



Photo: IPU/Z. Hilal

*by Dr. Masouma Al Mubarak  
Member of the National Assembly of Kuwait*

staged during the swearing-in session by parliamentarians who opposed the principle of women's participation in politics and voiced objections not only to the fact that two of the women parliamentarians were unveiled, but also to having a woman government minister.

One of the women parliamentarians failed in her bid to stand as a candidate for the position of Deputy Speaker and another followed suit in her bid to run for membership of the Arab Parliament as a representative of Kuwait. The negative reaction to women has nevertheless started to diminish in severity, at least on the surface, although it has still not dissipated altogether.

The four women parliamentarians have managed to disperse themselves among the membership of the main parliamentary committees, including the Financial and Economic Committee, the Legislative Committee, the Education Committee, the Health Committee and the Foreign Affairs Committee. The same is true in the case of ad hoc committees such as the Environment Committee, the Committee for Persons with Special Needs and the Committee for Women's and Family Affairs, through which proposals for laws on the social and civil rights of Kuwaiti women are discussed and current laws are also reviewed with

a view to eliminating discrimination against women.

In addition to their participation in several parliamentary committees, women parliamentarians make an enthusiastic contribution to the oversight process by tabling questions for ministers and joining in the discussion of matters of public concern. They also play an active part in the legislative process by submitting proposals for bills, either on their own or together with other parliamentarians, as well as proposals on various economic, social, education, health and other matters.

By entering parliament, Kuwaiti women have genuinely triumphed over the social tradition that prevented them from enjoying their political rights for over four decades. They must now make concerted efforts to prove that they are up to their legislative and oversight functions, for they are under the microscope of relentless scrutiny and the verdict handed down on them and on those who take up parliamentary work in future will be determined by the performance of these four women parliamentarians.

For four women to become parliamentarians in this Gulf State is a great achievement and, at the same time, a major challenge in terms of proving that women are competent and up to the task. ▀

## Parliaments as champions of women and girls



*by Ms. Ann M. Veneman  
Executive Director, UNICEF*

Photo UNODC

Less than a year ago, the world was shocked when a court in Saudi Arabia ruled that the marriage of an eight-year-old girl to a man more than four times her age was legally binding. The fact that a court, irrespective of the circumstances of the case or the legal framework in place, would deem legal the marriage of a child is horrific; a clear violation of the child's rights and in contravention of accepted international human rights standards.

Public outcry from around the world resulted in a reversal of the court decision. But it was a clear and disturbing reminder that today, fifteen years after the first world conference on women, much work remains to be done to ensure that women and girls around the world are better protected.

Having travelled to nearly 70 countries in my five years at UNICEF, I have heard heartbreaking stories and seen the devastation suffered by many women and girls in different parts of the world. Too many girls still face violence, abuse, discrimination, sexual exploitation, female genital cutting and child marriage.

Their suffering demands our attention. Things must change. Women and girls deserve laws that protect them, and that are enforced, so discrimination and abuse can end. Parliamentary bodies have a critical role to play in that process. They have tackled some of the greatest challenges facing women, but there is much more work to be done.

More than half of the 130 million young people in the world who are illiterate are girls. They are also over-represented in tallies of the victims of physical, sexual, emotional abuse and economic exploitation. They are more likely to be trafficked or to disappear, and are too often brutalized in situations of armed conflict.

Unfortunately, this travesty does not end there. Child marriage impedes a girl's opportunity to get an education and results in early pregnancy and childbirth - significantly increasing the risk of injuries, infections and disabilities. Maternal deaths related to pregnancy and childbirth are a significant cause of death for girls aged between 15 and 19 worldwide, accounting for 70,000 deaths each year.

Girls also face discrimination and violence in places where they should normally be protected - in their homes, schools and immediate communities. The very people responsible for protecting and supporting their rights are often implicated in violence against girls. And some societies continue to accept this abuse in the name of culture, tradition, beliefs, and social norms. It is time for this to change.

Renewed efforts by all parties are needed to make this change. Parliamentary action in this area is critical. Legislators can be a driving force of progress that will greatly improve the lives of women and girls around the world.

Four core strategies can contribute to enhancing their situation. First, greater investments should be made in educating girls. This is still the best means of eliminating discrimination and breaking the intergenerational cycle of poverty.

This should include identifying ways and means to improve primary education, support increased transition to secondary schools and extend educational opportunities to all girls, regardless of their social, economic or ethnic status. Particular attention

should be paid to girls in marginalized communities.

Second, concrete action should be taken to put an end to violence against girls in their homes, schools and communities. Law enforcement agencies, health care providers and community leaders must be encouraged to take steps to protect women and girls from all forms of violence and discrimination, and provide support to victims of violence. Violators should be prosecuted and impunity must end. Public discussion and zero tolerance policies can play a key role in ending violence, including when it is perpetrated in the name of culture and religion.

Third, stronger partnerships among civil society, the private sector and government can improve girls' opportunities to make a successful transition from school to work. Building the life skills of adolescent girls is an important step in enabling them to participate in public life, including the economic life of their countries.

Fourth, promoting equal land and property rights is a significant step to eliminating gender discrimination at the household level. For legal reform to change the lives of women and girls, national laws based on equality must be upheld over male-biased customary law and traditional practices. National legal reforms in property law and inheritance rights represent one of the most direct strategies for increasing women's access to land and property.

Changes that give every person, irrespective of gender, the opportunity to become healthy and vibrant citizens of tomorrow will take time. In some cases, deep-seated practices, attitudes and beliefs must be changed and long-standing laws amended. But change is possible, and the longer the world delays, the longer gender discrimination and violations of the rights of women and girls will continue.

Parliaments, with their leadership status and their influence on policy and practice, can play a vital role in ensuring a brighter, more prosperous and better world for all women and girls. The benefits of success will be felt not only by girls and women, but by their entire communities and countries. ▾

## A challenge to the achievement of women's rights and development

Violence against women concerns us all because it poses a serious threat to human security. It is the violation of the human rights of women that takes place in both public and private life, and manifests itself in multiple forms. Domestic violence, rape, sexual abuse, prostitution, trafficking, hate crime, pornography, rape as a weapon of war, are just a few examples. Some forms of violence against women take place across borders, making them particularly difficult to tackle. Within each national context, the community and society at large often contribute significantly to the problem by sanctioning and condoning violence against women.

Although some common grounds underlying violence against women can be identified, as evidenced from the collective wisdom enshrined in the international standards and norms which have been developed during the past three decades to address the common issues, we should bear in mind that there are still important aspects which reflect each country's or each society's unique local context as a result of its own tradition, faiths, culture and economic history. In this article, therefore, I would like to present some of the awareness-raising work that I have been involved in in Thailand, along with my observations on the critical factors that contribute to the success of the campaign.

### The Thai experience

Addressing violence against women requires multiple responses, both in the formal and informal sectors. Thailand has long endeavoured to develop its criminal justice responses, but such legal and formal approaches alone will have very limited success unless we can ensure that these interventions take place in an environment that is conducive to follow-up during the implementation phase. Although Thailand

Photo UNODC



by HRH Princess Bajrakitiyabha of Thailand

has been fortunate to have strong networks of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and civil society groups, which have been consistently active in the provision of emergency assistance and victim advocacy, such a complementary approach still needs more comprehensive support from society.

In this connection, awareness-raising and advocacy campaigns in the form of a social movement can be regarded as cross-cutting approach to supplement the efforts by the public and non-public sectors. This is an important lesson I learned from working with various stakeholders to promote the cause of women's rights, especially those in the administration of justice field. In this article, I would like to share some of my experiences working with the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM). In 2008, I served as a UNIFEM Goodwill Ambassador with a view to promoting the "Say NO to Violence against Women" campaign in Thailand. Through mobilization of key stakeholders and utilization of various media, the campaign resulted in the collection of over 3 million signatures in support of the elimination of violence against women.

The campaign was successful in reaching out to society at large, thanks to great support and strong partnership among key stakeholders, ranging from the government agencies, private

sectors and NGOs. The campaign also benefited from a very clear set of objectives and goals, one of which is to reach the key target groups that have long been left out of the loop. I am talking about the boys and men, and one prime example is the project we undertook in close collaboration with UNIFEM, in which we set out to focus specifically on the prevention of violence against women among school children.

The idea is to engage school children to rethink the norms and values that condone the practice of violence against women and girls. Boys and girls are given free rein to tailor their own activities, which helps create an environment of openness and empathy in school. Through this type of youth-initiated activity and a review of the school curriculum, young students have been sensitized to the problem and to changes in the ideas, perceptions, values, and behaviours that generate gender-based violence.

### Key challenges and the way forward

One observation I would like to make here is that the above-mentioned approach taken in schools has just begun to address violence against women at

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## Universal coverage policy development in Thailand and the role of parliamentarians in achieving Millennium Development Goals 4 and 5

Thailand is one of the South-East Asian countries that has been in the process of reforming its health sector over the past decade. The country exemplifies application of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in a middle-income country which has achieved most of the MDGs ahead of the 2015 deadline. The MDG indicators were transformed in order to prevent ceiling effects on future development into so-called "MDGs Plus" for the ultimate commitment and development of the country.

Thailand's unique experience offers lessons learned for maternal health and child development. There have been many changes as a result of the health care reform process since 2001, which affect health care delivery and financing. After many years of debates and sluggish attempts to reform the health care system, the previous government implemented the "30 Baht treat all"

scheme for universal access or universal coverage (UC) to subsidize health care. In 2001, there were at least three proposals on resources needed for universal coverage policy.

The first universal coverage proposal was based on the unit cost of an autonomous hospital (AH) according to studies conducted by Chunharus et al (1998) and Pitayarangsarit et al. (2000). The autonomous hospital had been proposed as an alternative management model of public hospitals to improve its efficiency and responsiveness due to the economic crisis in 1997. It was estimated that the AH model needed 782 Baht per capita. This unit cost was used for further calculation by adding the unit cost of a health centre, which was 120 Baht per capita. Therefore, it was proposed that the resources needed for the Universal Coverage policy using the AH model was 900 Baht per capita.



Photo: Senate of Thailand

*by Dr. Tassana Boontong  
Vice-President of the Senate  
of Thailand*

The second proposal was developed by Pannarunothai et al., who used sickness episode and health service utilization of population by calculating the unit cost of health facilities at various levels of health care facilities from the national survey and the Health Welfare Survey, in 1996. Subsequently, the cost was adjusted to the change of the population structure in 2001, increase of insurance coverage, etc. It was proposed that the resources needed for UC amounted to between 1,482 and 2,397 Bahts per capita in 2001. This health service utilization model was based on the way the

*Cont'd. on page 11*

*HRH Princess Bajrakitiyabha,  
Cont'd. from page 9*

the fundamental level. We are still faced with tremendous challenges, given that violence against women does not take place in a vacuum, but that there are numerous contributing factors. One of the major obstacles is the notion of masculinity, which has long been ingrained in social norms and value systems, and this entails both physical and psychological domination. The notion also runs deep and manifests itself in the form of gender inequality, which in turn underlies much of the violence against women.

It is therefore very encouraging that recent initiatives have been taken

to address this particular issue at the global level. Some positive examples include those which put men and boys in the forefront against gender-based violence by fostering a culture of tolerance and respect for women. I believe that involving men leaders is the right direction to go in. The recently launched Network of Men Leaders, spearheaded by the United Nations Secretary-General, is a prime example of this new direction. With new and enlarged groups of stakeholders, and with renewed momentum, I believe the international community will be able to achieve the goals of safeguarding women's rights and promoting their development. What

we need is a new environment where men and women leaders work side by side to replace the mindset of masculinity with one of gender sensitivity.

Finally, I believe the success of our fight against gender-based violence in the long run will depend on our ability to make our agenda inclusive and relatable to a wide range of social movements, such as those advocating for empowerment and human security. If we are to find sustainable solutions to such a deep-rooted and pervasive problem as violence against women, we need a large enough well of wisdom to put up an effective fight. After all, we are all in this together. ▀

*Dr. Tassana Boontong,  
Cont'd. from page 4*

health care system, including provider payment method, was organized.

The third proposal was made by the Ministry of Public Health (MoPH) regarding the budget needed for the UC policy. This model used an approach similar to the second proposal, using the pattern of health service utilization but without any adjustment and unit cost of health facilities from the most updated study in its calculations. Additionally, the MoPH used the experience of high-cost care and accident and emergency care from the Social Security Scheme, which was incorporated into the calculated unit cost.

In March 2001, all three proposals were considered at a workshop organized by the Ministry of Public Health and chaired by the Prime Minister. At the end of the workshop, the sum of 1,202 Bahts per capita was used as the estimated starting budget for the UC policy in Thailand. After a six-month pilot study on UC policy in several provinces, the "30 Baht treat all" or UC policy was adopted whereby people co-pay only 30 Bahts (US\$ 0.89) for each visit or admission from the outset. In the beginning, the UC budget started by pooling the MoPH's budget for hospital and health facilities as well as low-income and voluntary card schemes and provided additional funds.

In short, the "30 Baht scheme" was established at the policy level and started being implemented in the absence of legislation in 2001. This process allowed time for the preparation and debate of subsequent legislation in support of health care reform. Currently, no co-payment is required. This UC policy serves more than 45 million persons, except those already covered by their employers or employees of private firms.

The main objectives and characteristics of UC policy in Thailand were: 1) universal coverage: regardless of socio-economic status or religious belief, all Thai citizens are entitled and should have equal access to quality care depending on their needs; 2) Single standard: the quality of care provided for all Thai citizens should be of the same single standard; and 3) Sustainable system: in terms of policy, financial and institutional sustainability.

## Legislation process

In order to ensure the policy sustainability of the universal coverage policy, the previous government drafted the relevant law and submitted it to the parliament for its consideration. A plan for personnel training was established to ensure institutional sustainability, which can be secured when the personnel in the system is well prepared and additional resources needed for this preparation were allocated. The National Health Security Act was passed by the parliament in November 2002 in order to regulate the quality and financial aspects. The Ministry of Public Health is the core agency implementing the universal coverage health care services.

In 2007, the National Health Act was adopted by parliament. It is the first health Act that refers to "health" as a "right of the people". Similarly, the promotion and protection of women's health is addressed in the same chapter which includes the health of children, disabled persons, the elderly, and socially deprived persons. This section demonstrates the attentiveness and the significant roles of parliamentarians in improving maternal and child health in Thailand, resulting in the country's high achievement of the MDGs.

Attempts to achieve universal coverage have encountered several obstacles over the years, but have been steadily keeping pace during the past five years. Policy development and policy decision-making was a participatory process at the beginning but was limited to MoPH personnel.

The participation of non-health actors is encouraged by the National Health Act (2007). The law stipulates that there shall be a National Health Commission, referred to as the NHC, consisting of not only the Prime Minister or the Deputy Prime Minister entrusted by the Prime Minister as Chairperson, the Minister of Public Health as Vice Chairperson, Ministers, the President of the National Economic and Social Advisory Council, the President of the National Human Rights Commission, but also representatives of local government organizations, public health professional organizations, professional organizations, professional committees, qualified persons of any field other than those of public health

professional practitioners, and non-profit organizations.

Under current government regulations, maternal and infant bonding and breast feeding support is allowed during the first three months. A government regulation established 14 years ago offers maternity leave with pay for 90 days for women government officials. Mothers who wish to extend their maternity leave for 150 days or fewer are allowed to do so, but without pay. This regulation provides the opportunity for mothers to stay at home and care for their babies longer than the two months' leave granted in the past.

## Parliament and MDGs Plus

Thailand commits itself to a set of more ambitious targets – called the MDGs Plus – that go well beyond the internationally agreed MDGs. The country already reached the international maternal and child health MDG targets of reducing by two thirds the mortality rate between 1990 and 2015. Since the rate was low at the starting point, Thailand has set MDG Plus targets of reducing maternal and under-five child mortality rates in specific populations, because of the persistent disparities among regions and groups within the country, including marginalized and vulnerable groups. Policies and resources have been increased to tackle poverty and below-average health conditions in the North-East, the remote highland areas of the North, and the three predominantly southernmost provinces, areas that are lagging behind.

The MDG report had a major impact on the development agenda in Thailand as the Cabinet's endorsement of the report transformed the MDG Plus targets into government policy. Regarding the health disparity problem, the Ministry of Public Health was the first to act. For the benefit of keeping track of the MDGs in Thailand, the government works jointly with the United Nations country team to commission studies on maternal health improvement and decentralizing social services to local administrations.

The maternal and child bonding project received not only the government's support for maternal and child health development, but also the significant support of the Royal Family. ▀

## The case of migrant women

Violence against women is beyond a doubt one of the most pervasive, global and systemic forms of human rights violations that exist today. Although there is still a lot to be learned about the scope and extent of this phenomenon, evidence suggests that the majority of women in the world will, at one point in their life, experience physical or sexual violence.

One category of women is unfortunately even more susceptible to violence of all kinds: migrant women, who today represent about 105 million people worldwide. Data from several European countries indicates that migrant women are over-represented among the women who access services for victims of gender-based violence. That does not necessarily mean that all migrant women are vulnerable victims or that migrant communities/men are more violent. Indeed, violence against women is regrettably prevalent in every society, in every part of the world. There is no single group - irrespective of culture, class, religion or geographical location - that is immune to such violence. However, there is no denying the fact that migrant women are vulnerable to violence in a very specific way.

Migrant women are doubly vulnerable to violence insofar as they are exposed to violence that reflects the status of women and gender inequalities both in the country of origin and the country of destination, while at the same time being exposed to particular forms of violence facing foreign nationals regardless of their gender. Moreover, those two main factors intersect with other risk factors that influence what forms of violence women suffer and how they experience it. These include economic status, legal status, race, educational status, ethnicity, class, age, sexual orientation, disability, nationality, religion and culture. Efforts to



Photo: IPU/G.Fortunato

by Ms. Sylvia Lopez-Ekra  
Gender Officer, International Organization for Migration (IOM)

prevent and end violence against migrant women will achieve sustainable success only if these dynamics are fully understood and acknowledged.

This issue of the knowledge gap regarding violence against migrant women was already clearly identified in the UN Secretary-General's 2006 report on Violence against Women. This is a key factor of success, since naming all the forms and manifestations of violence against migrant women, in a non-stereotypical manner, already represents an important step towards recognizing and addressing them.

When talking about violence against migrant women, the issue of trafficking of women and girls for labour and sexual exploitation immediately comes to mind. This is certainly one of the most horrendous and unacceptable forms of violence that the world has to deal with today, and the international community should be unrelenting in its efforts to put an end to this scourge. It is also important to fully comprehend that there are myriad forms of violence against migrant women and that other forms deserve equal attention. What is known is that migrant women can face physical, sexual and psychological/emotional violence in their family and communities; they can face violence in the host community as well as violence

perpetrated or condoned by the State in the host country.

In the family, the most commonly identified forms of violence are intimate partner violence and, in some communities, traditional harmful practices, including female genital mutilation, forced marriages and crimes of honour. Within the family sphere, the role played by migration as a trigger or aggravating factor in intra-family violence in migrant communities deserves greater attention from policymakers and practitioners. Migration impacts on traditional gender roles, often forcing spouses to renegotiate the distribution of power within the household, which can be a major source of domestic violence in migrant couples, especially when men have difficulty living up to a culturally defined role of the breadwinner or when women are engaged in work outside the home.

Greater participation of migrant women in the labour market is a trend that can have a positive impact in terms of women's empowerment, but it is also linked to many instances of economic exploitation. In a number of European countries, the domestic service sector is the most important employment category for migrant women. This is typically a poorly regulated, low-wage sector where workers are highly vulnerable

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Ms. Sylvia Lopez-Ekra,  
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to exploitation and ill-treatment.

The picture would not be complete without mentioning a form of violence that is particularly worrisome and still receives far too little attention: violence perpetrated by States through their agents, in particular law enforcement officials, social security officials, prison guards, officials in places of detention and immigration officials. This type of violence is unfortunately not anecdotal. States may also passively condone violence against women through inadequate laws or ineffective implementation of laws, effectively allowing perpetrators of violence against migrant women to go unpunished for their acts.

The question of impunity is extremely important since violence

against women will go unabated as long as perpetrators are not appropriately punished and women survivors do not receive proper redress. In the case of migrant women, this is a challenge in itself since migrant women face various hurdles in accessing support and seeking redress. What makes them more vulnerable to violence is also very often the very thing that prevents them from seeking help. Migrant women rarely report their situation out of fear, due to a lack of trust, the belief that the authorities cannot, or will not help, ignorance of the law, language barriers, feelings of shame, fear of rejection by their families, etc. ... Having one's status tied to a main migrant, being in an irregular situation, facing unprepared service providers as well as isolation and lack of supportive social networks do not

help either. For all these reasons, it is feared that migrant women may stay in abusive relationships longer than native-born women and suffer graver physical and emotional consequences.

For the International Organization for Migration, putting an end to violence against migrant women is a priority. It deserves and gets the Organization's full attention and efforts, first as a migration management issue but also as a human rights issue. That is why, in November 2009, when a group of parliamentarians gathered in Paris at the invitation of the Inter-Parliamentary Union came to the conclusion that addressing violence against migrant women called for a human rights approach and insisted that human rights considerations should prevail in all instances, I silently breathed a sigh of relief. ▀



## Temporary exhibition on FGM on 5 February 2010

Photo IPU/G. Fortumato

A temporary exhibition of objects and material related to FGM was presented at the Museum of Ethnography of Geneva (MEG) on 5 February 2010, on the occasion of the International Day of zero tolerance to FGM.

## In the press

### FGM: The involvement of men is crucial to ending the practice

The fight against female genital mutilation (FGM) in Africa can in no way circumvent the decisive involvement of men, said experts and actors in the field on the eve of the International Day of Zero Tolerance to FGM. "If the men decide to do away with the practice, for sure the women will follow suit, because until now, I have only seen one woman step into the breach to demand that "Our girls must be excised!". That was the explanation provided to the AFP by Dr. Omar Mariko, a physician and MP from Mali. "Who steps into the breach to say it is our tradition, our culture? It's the men", he told the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) in Geneva. In Mali, over 90 per cent of women aged between 15 and 49 years have mutilated genital organs according to WHO, which recalls that female genital mutilation affects between 120 and 140 million women and girls in 28

countries, especially in Africa and the Middle East. "This traditional practice is a serious violation of the fundamental rights of women and girls" and "has grave consequences for their health," causing intense pain and sometimes bleeding, sterility or death, according to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). Dr. Mariko deeply regrets that there is no anti-FGM law in his country, but draws hope from a few targeted initiatives, such as this meeting organized by a group of 200 traditional hunter chiefs, during which a film to sensitize the audience about the issue was shown, followed by an evening of talks. "The hunters gathered around their cult objects and swore to no longer excise their girls", he recounted jubilantly.

*Agence France Presse (AFP) - 5 February 2010*

## Female genital mutilation: Men take action

How can the process of putting an end to female genital mutilation (FGM) be accelerated? One way is by encouraging men to take action alongside women, according to the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the Inter-African Committee on Traditional Practices Affecting the Health of Women and Children (IAC) and the Human Rights Office (ODH), Geneva Department for Security, Police and the Environment (DSPE).

For the third time, the four partners have joined efforts to heighten awareness of this pressing issue. This year, they held two events in Geneva: a panel discussion entitled *Men take action*, at the University of Geneva - with an audience of more than 250 people - and a temporary exhibition of objects and material related to FGM at the Museum of Ethnography (MEG).

The purpose was to explore in greater depth the often positive role that men can play in putting an end to this practice, which affects between 100 million and 140 million girls and women throughout the world, and which each year threatens three million girls in Africa, certain countries in Asia, the Middle East and Europe - within some migrant communities. The panellists included Dr. Oumar Mariko, a physician and a member of parliament from Mali, who underlined the need for genuine political will in order to eradicate this practice. The IPU video, entitled *FGM: Men take action*, was shown to the public. It was also broadcast at the Museum of Ethnography and to the 75 Active European Broadcast Union's Members from 56 countries in and around Europe and 43 Associate Members around the world.

### FGM: The case of Mali

According to Dr. Mariko, Mali still has not passed any laws banning FGM, but

Photo IPU/G. Fortunato



***Dr. Oumar Mariko,  
physician and Member of Parliament from Mali.***

the debate on excision has been a long-standing one. "Public opinion tends to show a strong tendency against the practice, but the political leaders, who represent all tendencies - those for and against the practice - still have not managed to have an anti-FGM law passed in the National Assembly. But the problem has been raised and everyone is talking about it".

In the words of this physician, member of parliament and former presidential candidate of Mali, who had included the abolition of FGM in his election campaign, "there is an intentional mixing of religion and culture. From the religious perspective, it is interesting to note that in regions such as Timbuktoo, a highly religious town, excision is not practised. Nowadays, the tradition is no longer respected by the very persons who wish to have it applied".

Dr. Mariko recalls that "excision in Mali was not carried out on babies or young girls but rather on teenage girls between 13 and 16 years old, who, once excised, were married off. The practice wasn't carried out in the village itself, but outside it. There was a special knife to perform the excision, which was blessed by the spirits, and therefore a whole ritual surrounding it. In the village, the girl's parents didn't know if their daughter would come out safe and sound from that ceremony. Several songs evoke the pain, the anxiety and the fear of the parents who had remained behind in the village, waiting

to see in what condition their daughter would return".

Excision did not only entail the cutting of an organ; it was also a test of endurance and a rite of passage. "Nowadays, this is no longer the case; we are no longer in the past but are caught in the vestiges of a tradition", says Dr. Mariko, adding that "there is a reaction to the cultural domination of very powerful countries. People feel that it is because we want to mimic rich countries that we want to put an end to excision. This is a way of denying one's socio-cultural experience although, in practice, it has already been denied because as a cultural experience, it is outdated".

The MP from Mali concludes by saying: "One can understand that passing a law will cause a commotion but there will not be any big fight to restore the practice. If you ask women what are their priorities, excision does not figure among the top five". LB



Two Somali men living in Geneva say no to FGM.

## IPU President meets with Ethiopian traditional leaders on FGM

During the 120<sup>th</sup> IPU Assembly in Addis Ababa, IPU President Dr. Theo-Ben Gurirab, who is also Speaker of the National Assembly of Namibia, accompanied by the Vice-President of the IPU Executive Committee, Greek legislator Ms. Elsa Papademetriou, visited a centre of the Inter-African Committee on Traditional Practices Affecting the Health of Women and Children (IAC). They exchanged views with Ethiopian religious and traditional leaders on how to put an end to female genital mutilation.

President Gurirab and Ms. Papademetriou also met with two former women practitioners who had decided to abandon their knives and benefit from an IAC reconversion programme, which allows them to now run a shop in the outskirts of the Ethiopian capital.

FGM is an ancient practice which dates back to pre-Islam and pre-Christianity. Contrary to popular belief, it is not encouraged by any religion. According to Dr. Gemal El Serour of Al-Azhar University in Egypt, "When we come to the first of primary source of Sharia, the Koran, we find that there is

no mention whatsoever of female genital mutilation explicitly or indirectly".

These traditional practices can be eradicated only if people get information and knowledge, explained Mr. Negese Negewo, an Ethiopian Traditional Chief. Moreover, in Ethiopia, a committee of intellectuals has found that circumcision goes against the doctrine of the Church, added Dr. Agedew Redie, a representative of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church.

If religious sources do not mention this practice, why do women continue to perform it? Just to please men? For Ms. Abebech Alemneh Belay, Programme Officer at the IAC, "It is because of the social pressure. Women do

it to please the men, but most of the time the men say indirectly that they are not so pleased. They can tell the difference between circumcised and uncircumcised women".

Dr. Morissanda Kouyate, Director of Operations at the IAC, says that today men accept to marry girls who are not excised. "If you present the disadvantages and the consequences of this harmful practice, they will say: Ah! If it is like that, I prefer to protect my wife, I prefer to protect my daughter, and they accept now to marry girls who are not subjected to FGM". He added that in 17 countries in Africa there are specific laws against FGM. At the African Union level, the Heads of State adopted the Maputo Protocol, which fully condemns female genital mutilation. "So from 100%, the trend is now going down everywhere".

IPU President, Dr. Theo-Ben Gurirab, believes that FGM is a "community and culturally entrenched practice; they use religion, they use customs, they brainwash women so that they can be shaped and follow; that is what their grandmothers did, that is what their mothers did, and that is what their sisters do, so of course they will do it. At the end of the day, it is legislation [that matters]. The constitutions are there but we must adopt laws that specifically tackle that. There must be people not only of vision but of courage to enforce them, to impose them". LB



Photo: IPU/K.Jabre

*From left to right, IPU President Dr. Theo-Ben Gurirab, Mr. Negese Negewo, Dr. Agedew Redie, and Greek legislator Ms. Elsa Papademetriou.*



Photo: IPU/K.Jabre

IPU President Dr. Theo-Ben Gurirab and Ms. Elsa Papademetriou exchanged views with IAC representatives and two women practitioners who decided to abandon their knives.

# Women in Parliament in 2009: The Year in Perspective

According to the statistics prepared by the IPU, the year 2009 was marked by continued progress for women in parliament. The global average for the proportion of women in parliament reached an all-time high of 18.8 per cent.

In January 2010, there were more women Presiding Officers than ever before. Women held 35 (13.0%) of the 269 top posts in parliaments around the world. This is an improvement on the 1995 total, when 24 women held this post.

Women make up 30 per cent or more of the members in 44 parliamentary chambers – 26 single or lower and 18 upper houses. This is a six-fold increase over the 1995 total, when just seven chambers achieved this goal.

## Figures at the regional level

Africa achieved some impressive gains for women in 2009. On average, 29 per cent of the seats renewed in the 10 chambers went to women, bringing the overall average there to 18.7 per cent at the end of 2009. This is nearly double the 1995 average of 9.8 per cent. In South Africa, women took 43.5 per cent of the seats in the lower house election, placing it third in the global ranking.

Europe continued to perform well, with 26 per cent of the seats renewed in 2009 going to women. Similarly, the Americas maintained steady progress, with 25 per cent of the nearly 1,800 seats up for renewal going to women.

There were mixed results in 2009 for women in the Arab region. For the first time, four women were elected to Kuwait's parliament, but no women were appointed to the Consultative Council in Saudi Arabia. Nonetheless, the regional average of women parliamentarians is 9.5 per cent, more than double the 1995 rate of 4.3 per cent.



Photo AFP  
A woman voting in South Africa.

## 15 years of progress

In 1995, at the Fourth World Conference on Women, the Beijing Platform for Action called on States to increase women's participation in decision making and leadership and to ensure women's full participation in political life. At that time, women held 11.3 per cent of parliamentary seats. In just seven chambers (3%) women comprised more than 30 per cent of the membership, and nearly two-thirds of all chambers had 10 per cent or less women members. At the leadership level, 24 women held the post of Presiding Officer in parliament. Women constituted just 6.4 per cent of Heads of State or Government.

Taking stock 15 years later, the parliamentary landscape has changed markedly. A new global high for women in parliament is heralded at the close of each year. By the end of 2009, the global average for the proportion of

women members reached an all-time high of 18.8 per cent – a gain of 75 per cent compared to 1995. The number of chambers that have reached the 30 per cent target now stands at 44 (26 single/lower and 18 upper houses), or 16.7 per cent of the total. The number with a membership of 10 per cent or less women has halved from 141 in 1995 to 71 in 2009 (27%).

However, it is clear that challenges to women's political empowerment remain. In several parliaments there have only ever been a handful of women, and the number of parliamentary chambers where no women hold seats has not dropped dramatically (from 13 in 1995 to 10 in 2009). Women's advancement into leadership positions has been at a much slower pace than the improvement in parliamentary access. Although an increase from 24 in 2005 and the highest number reached thus far, there are still only 35 women Presiding Officers at the helm of parliaments. JB

## Comparative Situation of Women Parliamentarians, 1995 and 2009\*

1995	Overview	2009
11.3%	Proportion of seats held by women in all houses	18.8%
<b>7 out of 229 (3.0%)</b> - 5 single or lower houses - 2 upper houses	Chambers with 30% or more women members	44 out of 263 (16.7%) - 26 single or lower houses - 18 upper houses
<b>141 out of 229 (61.6%)</b>	Chambers with 10% or less women members	71 out of 263 (27.0%)
<b>13</b>	Chambers with no women members	10
<b>24 (10.5%)</b>	Women Presiding Officers	35 (13.0%)
<b>12 (6.4%)</b>	Countries with women Head of State and/or Government	16 (8.3%)

\* The figures do not take into account parliaments for which data are not available.

## Parliamentary renewals in 2009

During 2009, 54 parliamentary chambers in 48 countries were renewed. Women took 1,886 of the 9,143 seats renewed, or 20.6 per cent. This is the same proportion as in 2008. Of the women who gained seats, 1,804 were directly elected, 70 were indirectly elected and 12 were appointed.

### 44 chambers surpass 30%, and 11 surpass 40%, women members

Increases in women's participation were registered in 57 per cent of the chambers renewed in 2009. Ten chambers achieved 30 per cent or greater female membership in their 2009 renewals, bringing to 44 the number of chambers that have reached this milestone – five more than a year ago. Three chambers surpassed 40 per cent women members – Iceland and South Africa's single/lower houses and Bolivia's upper house.

The range of 30 per cent-plus chambers is diverse and includes 16 in Europe, 13 in the Americas, 11 in Africa and four in the Asia-Pacific region. New to the list in 2009 were Bolivia and Ecuador after both countries adopted electoral gender quotas with enforcement mechanisms. Several lower houses came close to achieving the 30-per cent target, including Mexico, Namibia and Portugal.

### Stagnation and setbacks in 40% of the chambers renewed in 2009

Although women increased their overall share of seats in 2009, a breakdown of the results shows that such gains need to be considered together with stagnation and even reversals in some parliaments. In nine of the chambers (17%) renewed, no progress was made and the proportion of women members remained unchanged. Worse, reversals were registered in 14 (26%) of the chambers renewed, leading to fewer women compared to the previous renewal.

In three chambers, no women were included in the 2009 renewals: the Comoros, the Federated States of Micronesia and Saudi Arabia. In the Comoros, there has only ever been one woman elected to parliament. The election in the Federated States of Micronesia was the only one to take place in the Pacific in 2009. There has never been a woman candidate for parliament in Micronesia. There has never been a woman member of the Consultative Council in Saudi Arabia, where all members of the Council are appointed by the King and there is no universal suffrage. A trend of stagnation and reversals in 40 per cent of the parliaments renewed has been recorded for the past six years.

Electoral systems alone do not determine the level of representation of women, but they are important because they can be changed and amended to accommodate the implementation of special measures. Gender-sensitive electoral arrangements and political will at the highest levels are paramount for overcoming the imbalances in the world's parliaments. JB

## Latest news

### Japan 98th in terms of female lawmakers

A record 18.8 percent of lawmakers around the world are women, an Inter-Parliamentary Union survey showed Japan ranked 98th at 11.3 percent with 54 of its 480 Lower House seats held by women. A year earlier, Japan placed 104th at 9.4 percent. Japan trails China, in 55th, North Korea, 78th, and South Korea, 82nd. "The year 2009 was marked by continued progress for women in parliament," said the report by the Geneva-based IPU, which tracks women's progress and setbacks in the political arena. "The global average for the proportion of women in parliament reached an all-time high of 18.8 percent." The data represented the percentage of women in unicameral parliaments or in the lower houses of parliament, and reflected elections that took place up to last Jan. 1. Rwanda led the world with women accounting for 56.3 percent of its lower house parliamentarians, followed by Sweden at 46.4 percent, South Africa at 44.5 percent, Cuba at 43.2 percent and Iceland at 42.9 percent. *Kyodo News - 5 March 2010*

## Women Presiding Officers in Parliament

On 1 January 2010, women held 35 (13.0%) of the 269 Presiding Officer posts in parliaments around the world, the highest number reached. This is nearly double the 2005 total, when such posts were held by 18 women. The post is important as it is the highest position of power in a parliament. Women are slowly making inroads in this area, which has historically been dominated by men. In addition to playing a facilitating role in the chamber by moderating debates between rival political groups, Presiding Officers are well-placed to highlight outside the chamber the problem of gender inequality and to promote the interests of women.

In 2009, women took up Presiding Officer posts for the first time in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Botswana, Bulgaria, Gabon, Ghana, India and Lithuania.



Photo Parliament of Uruguay

Ms. Ivonne Passada, Speaker of the Chamber of Representatives of Uruguay (right), together with Senator Lucia Topolansky (left), who was President of the Uruguayan Senate from 15 to 28 February 2010.

## 24 Presiding Officers in single or lower houses of parliament

Albania (People's Assembly); Antigua and Barbuda (House of Representatives); Austria (Nationalrat); Bosnia and Herzegovina (House of Peoples); Botswana (National Assembly); Bulgaria (Naradno Schranie); Dominica (House of Assembly); Estonia (Riigikogu); Gambia (National Assembly); Ghana (Parliament); Iceland (Al-

thingi); India (Lok Sabha); Lesotho (National Assembly); Lithuania (Seimas); Pakistan (National Assembly); Romania (Chamber of Deputies); Rwanda (Chamber of Deputies); Saint Lucia (House of Assembly); Serbia (Narodna Skupstina); Switzerland (National Council); Turkmenistan (Mejlis); United States of America (House of Representatives); Uzbekistan (Legislative chamber); and Venezuela (Asamblea Nacional).

## 11 Presiding Officers in upper houses of parliament

Antigua and Barbuda (Senate); Bahamas (Senate); Belize (Senate); Gabon (Senate); Grenada (Senate); Netherlands (Twede Kamer der Staten Generaal); Saint Lucia (Senate); Swaziland (Senate); Switzerland (Council of States); United Kingdom (House of Lords); and Zimbabwe (Senate). JB

## Ministerial positions

For women in the Executive and Heads of State, overall progress is even slower than at the parliamentary level. As shown in the World Map, women account for just nine out of the 151 elected Heads of State (6%) in 2010, up from just eight women leaders in 2005.

On average, women hold 16 per cent of ministerial posts. In total, 30 countries have more than 30 per cent women members, with Cape Verde, Finland, Norway and Spain achieving over 50 per cent women ministers. At the other end of the spectrum, the number of countries with no women ministers has increased — from 13 in 2008 to 16 in 2010. The majority of these States are

found in the Arab region, the Caribbean and the Pacific Islands.

Compared with 2008, there is more diversification in terms of the portfolios held by women. As with previous years, however, women tend to dominate portfolios related to social affairs, children and youth, women's affairs, and increasingly the environment. JJ

Detailed information and comparative regional analyses can be found in the IPU's *Women in Parliament in 2009: The Year in Perspective*, and the IPU-UNDAW *World Map of Women in Politics 2010*: <http://www.ipu.org/splz-el/csw10.htm>

## Three women at the helm in Switzerland



Photo IPU/G.Fortunato

### *Ms. Pascale Bruderer, Speaker of the Swiss National Council*

In the history of Swiss politics, 2010 will go down unquestionably as the year of women as three of them hold the highest offices in the country: Doris Leuthard is the current President of Switzerland, Pascale Bruderer is the Speaker of the National Council (Lower House of Parliament) and Erika Forster-Vannini is the President of the State Council (Upper House). This in a country that only granted women the right to vote and stand for office in 1971 at the federal level, while at the cantonal level, Appenzell (Inner Rhoden) granted women the suffrage as late as 1990.

Ms. Bruderer will also preside over the Sixth Meeting of Women Speakers of Parliament, which will be held in Bern this summer, on the eve of the 3<sup>rd</sup> World Conference of Speakers of Parliament, organized under the auspices of the IPU from 19 to 21 July at the United Nations Office at Geneva.

Although Swiss women only started becoming active in politics relatively late, they managed to make up for lost time and are now making their voices heard at the highest level of this multilingual and multicultural country. The presence of Pascale Bruderer (32 years

old) at the helm of the National Council is but one example of this. During an interview given at the *House of Parliaments* a few months ago, she admitted that she had learned a lot from her meeting with the Women Speakers of Parliament in Vienna last year. "These women Speakers, from different walks of life, from developed and developing countries, are faced with very different situations".

In Vienna, the Women Speakers and Deputy Speakers agreed that violence against women was an issue that affected them all. "What we can do, at the level of parliaments, is to pass laws that guarantee better protection against violence, but that is not enough. We must also place the emphasis on prevention, so that people understand that this problem is not just a private matter. After all, violence occurs as much in the street as in the home", added Ms. Bruderer.

When asked if the Swiss parliament was gender-sensitive, this was her reply: "I would like to say yes. It is in some ways, but better solutions have to be found. And if we want to change the reality of the situation, we need the means to do it ". Pascale

Bruderer is of the opinion that a gender-sensitive budget is a key factor and the presence of women in parliament is another.

"We need visible examples in order to motivate young women and encourage them to become interested in political issues. The year 2010 is significant, because the visibility of women presiding over both chambers of the federal parliament and a woman President shows women that we can make things happen by holding the highest offices in the country".

Pascale Bruderer is keen on continuing the dialogue with young women. "Sometimes we think that we will never be able to be in politics. I try to show young people that being a politician is not something far removed from people, but that politics is part of our day-to-day life and that it can change the daily reality of citizens. The fact of whether or not there will be a school in a given neighbourhood is a political question. I want to show that anyone can become interested in politics," concluded the young Speaker of the Swiss National Council, who is also very attentive to the cause of the disabled. LB

## The IPU supports women MPs

Women represent 18.6 per cent of parliamentarians in the world but above and beyond these figures and the difficulties they encounter during elections, once they are elected to parliament, they are faced with a host of new challenges.

The first challenge is that they enter a domain set up and managed by men. "Do you know which is the largest majority party in the world? It's the over-40 male party", affirms Croat Member of Parliament Marija Lugaric. As women MPs are often newcomers to the world of politics, they also lack experience. Although newly elected men MPs also lack experience, the challenge nevertheless remains greater for women. They are often entrusted by their electorate with the task of advancing the situation of women and feel that they have to prove themselves. As a woman MP from Burundi explains: "Sometimes, timidity and fear of failure prevent women MPs from proposing bills" as women often lack self-confidence.

To use their work in parliament to enhance the situation of women, women MPs must become familiar with the rules that govern the way parliament works - usage, practice, regulations and procedures. As Ms. Margaret Mensah-Williams, Deputy Speaker of the National Council of Namibia, puts it: "Not only do you have to know the rules and procedures, you also have

to master them and use them to bring about change" and ensure that gender issues are taken into consideration in politics and bills.

The IPU assists women MPs in their efforts to familiarize themselves with and use these rules to promote gender equality. This form of assistance holds a prominent spot on the agenda of the world organization of parliaments. It is provided under technical cooperation programmes designed most often at the request of parliaments or women parliaments and adapted to the needs of each country.

This support may take the form of orientation workshops on the workings of parliament and information seminars for women and men parliamentarians on gender-related or women's rights-related questions. The IPU organizes, for example, capacity-building sessions in communication, leadership and legislative drafting.

Such activities have been conducted recently in Burundi, Cambodia, Jordan and the Arab Gulf States.

## Concrete action

During the communication and public-speaking workshop (September 2008), the women members of the Parliament of Burundi honed their skills in speech writing and delivery, managing stage fright, how to support their opinions with relevant arguments and how to hold a captive audience. At another workshop, they put their know-how to

work in drafting bills or amendments to promote gender equality (November 2008). The women parliamentarians greatly appreciated the workshops, made notable progress in their legislative work and sent several messages via the media to defend women's interests. Two women legislators admitted that they no longer hesitated to speak to the media about their position on issues such as domestic violence or inheritance rights.

Women MPs from Jordan developed a group strategy to enhance their relations with the media during a capacity-building workshop organized by the IPU, the Parliament of Jordan and UNDP (October 2009). The purpose of the workshop was to better understand how the media works and the best way of sending messages through them. Remaining objective and the need to maintain contact with journalists were identified as key elements, apart from the actual message. Women legislators must send messages with all the pride of being women and representing both men and women in the society in which they evolve. Their message must necessarily be based on reliable, verified information and be well structured.

## Retreat for women MPs in Cambodia

In Cambodia, a two-and-a-half-day retreat for women MPs was organized by the IPU, UNDP and the Legislature Assistance Programme (LEAP), to build their leadership and communication skills. Philippines Senator Pia Cayetano, President of the IPU's Coordinating Committee of Women Parliamentarians, shared her experience in communication with the participants. She highlighted the importance of gathering all information necessary to master a topic, identifying one's own style of communicating, obtaining training in public speaking, learning to argue for or against a topic based on relevant texts, policies and national and international practice, and especially to be vigilant during the debate, by taking notes and being attentive to other speakers by asking questions.



Photo IPU/Z-Hilal

IPU workshop on communication for women members of the Parliament of Burundi

Cont'd. on page 21

In Cambodia, as in Jordan, Burundi and elsewhere, the IPU is supporting partnerships among women parliamentarians. As there is strength in unity, cooperation among women might serve to offset their small numbers in parliament. These assistance programmes facilitate concerted action through regular meetings (Burundi and Jordan), retreats (Cambodia) or through technical and logistical support to associations of women parliamentarians (Burundi and Rwanda).

These programmes aim to strengthen partnerships between women and men legislators by including men MPs in debates on gender issues. They also seek to facilitate an exchange of experiences and good practices among women legislators of different countries and regions. The IPU is instrumental in strengthening the ties between women parliamentarians,

Photo Parliament of Cambodia



representatives of government agencies, civil society and international organizations with a view to promoting women's rights and gender equality.

Women's influence in parliament will be heightened if they are represented in larger numbers, if they ac-

A retreat for women MPs was organized in Cambodia to build their leadership skill.

cede to decision-making posts and if they are supported in their capacity to represent and defend their interests and the issues that concern them. ZH

## Democratic Republic of the Congo: identifying priority actions for 2010

Under the partnership agreement signed in May 2009 with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) to provide assistance to the national and provincial legislative assemblies of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the IPU dispatched a team to Kinshasa from 11 to 19 December 2009 to identify, along with the beneficiaries and UNDP, the activities to be implemented in 2010. Five major areas of action were identified as follows: parliamentary diplomacy, oversight of executive action, gender, strengthening the documentation centre in terms of professionalism and personnel, and a review of the legal instruments governing both chambers of the national

parliament. The mission also enabled the IPU and UNDP to take stock of the status of implementation of the partnership agreement over the past seven months. During that period, the IPU had organized all the activities foreseen for 2009, namely: an organizational audit of the parliament's administration (June 2009); a training session in legislative research techniques and producing topical dossiers (September 2009), a training session for committee and plenary advisers (October 2009), a technical evaluation of the methods used to transcribe proceedings (November 2009) and, finally, a training session in parliamentary communication techniques (December 2009). LM

## Central African Republic: assessing the needs of the National Assembly actions for 2010

From 2 to 10 December 2009, the IPU undertook an exercise aimed at taking stock of and assessing the needs of the National Assembly of the Central African Republic with a view to drawing up a draft programme of assistance. Such a programme should allow the institution to carry out in an efficient and effective manner its principal functions of representation, oversight of executive action and legislation, and enable it to take its rightful place in the governance architecture of the country, notably in the areas of reconciliation and dialogue. The IPU mission

took place simultaneously with the mission to review the strategic framework of the UN Peacebuilding Commission, and the IPU took advantage of the opportunity to point out that, as the body that represents the people, the National Assembly was the instrument of political dialogue par excellence and, by extension, the appropriate forum for discussing peacebuilding and governance on the whole good. The IPU continues, therefore, to advocate for the Peacebuilding Commission to provide financial and material assistance to the Central African Republic. LM



Photo Council of Representatives of Iraq

Entrance of the building of the Council of Representatives of Iraq

## Iraq

On 12 September 2009, the government presented a draft electoral law to be used in the 2010 parliamentary elections. It provided for a proportional representation open-list system instead of the previous closed-list one. Under the new system, voters would be able to vote for both political parties and individual candidates. On 8 November, the Council of Representatives passed the new electoral law. However, Vice-President Tariq al-Hashimi (a Sunni Muslim) vetoed it twice, on 18 November and 3 December. He argued that Article 1 did not give a voice to Iraqis abroad, many of whom are reportedly Sunni Muslims who fled the country during sectarian fighting after the fall of Saddam Hussein's regime. On 6 December, the Council of Representatives adopted an explanatory memorandum to the electoral law. The statutory number of seats will be raised from 275 to 325. A total of 310 seats will be directly elected from the provinces. In all, 15 seats will be reserved for ethnic minorities as compensatory seats, seven of which will go to ethnic Kurds. Following the vote, the Vice-President withdrew his veto. On 9 December, the Presidency Council called parliamentary elections for 7 March 2010. They had been initially scheduled for January.

## Kenya

On 17 November 2009, the Committee of Experts tasked with preparing a new constitution published a consolidated draft constitution. It provides

for a bicameral Parliament comprising the National Assembly and a new Senate. Under the new constitution, the National Assembly would comprise a maximum of 295 members, of whom a majority would be directly elected from single-member constituencies (currently there are 222 constituencies, but this number will be reviewed). In addition, there would be 70 women representatives elected by the county assemblies (one per county) and eight disabled persons elected at the regional level. The Senate would comprise a maximum of 94 members. A total of 70 members would be elected by the county assemblies. Each of the eight regions would elect two women and one disabled person. The President would remain the Head of State but would be a largely symbolic figure. The Prime Minister would be the Head of the Government. The President would appoint the leader of the largest party in the National Assembly as Prime Minister. If the National Assembly fails to approve the appointment within 60 days, a fresh general election will be called. A public consultation on the draft constitution started in November. A revised draft is expected to be submitted to the National Assembly by March 2010 and a constitutional referendum is expected in the latter half of 2010. If approved, the President must then proclaim the Constitution within 14 days.

## Romania

On 24 September 2009, President Traian Basescu sent a letter to parliament asking for an advisory opinion on holding a national referendum on parliamentary reform. The reform would transform the current bicameral parliament – comprising the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate – into a unicameral one and reduce the number of parliamentarians from the current 471 to a maximum of 300. On 21 October, parliament issued a negative opinion on the matter. It argued that no referendum could take place since several articles of the Referendum Law had been declared unconstitutional and needed to be revised.

On 22 October, President Basescu nevertheless signed a decree calling for a referendum that would initiate

the constitutional review process. He argued that a unicameral parliament would allow for faster decision-making. Senate President Mircea Geoana urged citizens to vote against the proposals. On 22 November, the referendum was held jointly with the presidential elections. The proposal for a unicameral parliament received over 74 per cent approval and the reduction in the number of parliamentarians was approved by 88 per cent. On 26 November, the Constitutional Court confirmed the referendum results. President Basescu pledged to revise the Constitution in view of parliamentary reform. On 6 December, he defeated Senate President Geoana in the run-off presidential election. On 15 December, the Constitutional Court confirmed Mr. Basescu's re-election, dismissing Mr. Geoana's claims of election fraud. Mr. Basescu was officially sworn in on 21 December 2009.

## Saint Vincent and the Grenadines

On 16 September 2009, Prime Minister Ralph Gonsalves tabled a bill in the House of Assembly proposing to organize a constitutional referendum on 25 November. The following day, the House of Assembly adopted the bill. The new constitution was drafted by the Constitutional Reform Commission, established in 2003. It provides for a President as the Head of State instead of the Governor General, as stipulated in the current 1979 Constitution. Under the new constitution, the President would be elected by the National Assembly, the new legislative body. Prime Minister Gonsalves' United Labour Party (ULP) claimed that the new constitution would bring true independence to the country. The opposition National Democratic Party (NDP), led by Mr. Arnhim Eustace, urged voters to reject the proposed constitution, arguing that it did not include a provision to reduce the powers of the prime minister. He accused the Prime Minister of using the referendum as a strategy to win the next general elections. During the 25 November referendum, the proposed constitution was rejected. Only 43 per cent of voters supported it whereas it needed two-thirds of voters to approve it. HY



*The new President of the IPU Committee on the Human Rights of Parliamentarians, Senator Aquilino Pimentel (Philippines), briefed the press at the United Nations in Geneva in January 2010. He was accompanied (on the left) by Senator Rosario Green (Mexico, Vice-President of the Committee) and by Canadian Senator Sharon Carstairs (former President of the Committee and current member).*

## In the press

### Burmese MPs still languishing in prison after many years

According to the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), the situation of the Burmese parliamentarians is one of the worst in the world. At least 13 members of parliament, elected in 1990, have been languishing in prison for many years without trial. And this in spite of the IPU's many efforts. "Some are tortured and two were assassinated in China and Thailand", explained the President of the IPU's Committee on the Human Rights of Parliamentarians, Philippines Senator Aquilino Pimentel, in Geneva. All of the efforts made by the IPU have gone unheeded, he lamented, appealing for international mobilization. Yet another example of the violation of the rights of parliamentarians.

*Journal Le Courier and Agence télégraphique suisse (ATS) - 22 January 2010*

### Study: Human rights of hundreds of Members of Parliament violated

The Inter-Parliamentary Union says more than one-third of the cases it deals with of human rights violations against members of parliament are in Africa. The IPU Human Rights Committee, which has ended a review of 273 cases of parliamentarians in 29 countries, is appealing to these governments for clarification of their situation. Members of the Inter-Parliamentary Union's Human Rights Committee are highlighting the case of Eritrea, which it calls an orphaned country because no one is paying attention to what is happening there. Senator of Mexico and Vice-President of the Committee, Rosario Green, says the Inter-Parliamentary Union has had no information regarding the condition of 11 Eritrean parliament members who were imprisoned eight years ago.

*Voice of America VOANews.com - 21 January 2010*

## In Memoriam

### Mr. Rafael Caldera, Former President of Venezuela and President of the IPU Council

Mr. Rafael Caldera, President of the Inter-Parliamentary Council from 1979 to 1982, passed away on Christmas Day 2009. Founder of the Christian Democratic party COPEI in 1946, Mr. Caldera was twice President of Venezuela: between 1969 and 1974 and from 1994 to 1999, this time with a new political party called Convergence. He was one of the most influential political figures in his country and in Latin America in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The IPU sends its condolences to Mr. Caldera's family and to the Parliament of Venezuela.

### Ms. Judith Kanakuze Member of the Parliament of Rwanda

Rwandan legislator Judith Kanakuze passed away in February 2010. She was actively involved in promoting the cause of women in Rwanda and made a number of contributions to IPU activities in her capacity as a parliamentarian. The IPU Secretary General, Mr. Anders B. Johnsson, presents his condolences to the Parliament of Rwanda and to Ms. Kanakuze's family.

# A call to action from MPs on climate change in Copenhagen

At the Parliamentary Meeting held on the occasion of the Climate Change Conference (COP 15) in Copenhagen in December 2009, parliamentarians met under the auspices of the Danish Parliament in a joint initiative organized with the IPU. Away from the spotlight of the Convention Centre, several hundred members of parliament from over 60 countries gathered at the Folketing to discuss a post-Copenhagen agenda and parliaments' contribution to its implementation. The meeting provided valuable input for future work in this area.

Mr. Mohamed Nasheed, President of the Republic of Maldives and a former parliamentarian, said that governance is a key element in any climate change policy. Without good governance, countries would not be able to deal with climate change. He gave as an example the experience of the former authoritarian governments of the Maldives, which had adapted to change to some extent but, because government posts had been given without transparency and without consultation, all those governments had failed. As the President of a small island developing State that risked disappearing altogether, he reminded his fellow parliamentarians that, for the people of the Maldives, climate change was not an abstract concept but a very real threat to their survival. He felt that strategies

to deal with climate change could not be reduced to a political deal.

Senator Loren Legarda from the Philippines urged the parliamentarians present to go beyond words and make sure that their actions were independent of the size of their countries, because the effects of climate change would be felt by all. She agreed with President Nasheed that good governance was crucial, adding that the problem of climate change was not a problem of the future, but one that was already leading to an increase in natural disasters. Senator Legarda stated that the politics of climate change were interconnected with the politics of poverty, and with the need to support the fight against corruption.

Mr. Saber Chowdhury, an MP from Bangladesh, encouraged his fellow parliamentarians to draw up a code of ethics related to activities aimed at dealing with the effects of climate change. He suggested that the IPU could provide guidance on such an endeavour. Mr. Chowdhury reminded delegates that their oversight function would be vital, as only parliaments had the power to hold governments to account, and that was important in the work on climate change since there would be millions of dollars involved. EA

The report of the meeting is available on the IPU's website at: <http://www.ipu.org/splz-e/cop15/report.pdf>



From left to right: President Mohamed Nasheed of the Maldives, IPU President Dr. Theo-Ben Gurirab and Mr. Kristian Pihl Lorentzen, President of the Danish IPU Group.

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