

145th Assembly of the Inter-Parliamentary Union

Kigali, Rwanda, October 2022

General Debate

Contribution by Senator Fatima Payman

Senator from Western Australia, Australian Delegation

Gender equality and gender-sensitive parliaments as drivers of change for a more resilient and peaceful world

Mr President and fellow delegates,

I am pleased to be able to participate in this debate as the fifth-youngest senator in Australian history and the youngest in the current Parliament. It is important to me that we consider gender sensitive parliaments from the perspective of our youth, and particularly the perspective of young women whose political inclusion and engagement is vital for our democracy.

Today in the Parliament of Australia, women make up 45 per cent of all parliamentarians. In the Senate, I am one of the 43 women who comprise a majority of senators. That is a great achievement for women in my country. But we need to do more to address the barriers that stand in the way of young women seeing politics as a legitimate career option and Parliament as a place that they will be welcomed, valued and encouraged.

A major review conducted by the Sex Discrimination Commissioner, which received more than 1700 individual contributions, revealed that gender inequality and power imbalances are key challenges that require action. The 28 recommendations that arose from the review are to be implemented in phases over two years and have the support of all political parties in Australia. These recommendations provide a road map for change to make our Parliament a more diverse, gender equal, and family friendly workplace.

The measures we have committed to include education, training and mechanisms to strengthen respectful workplace behaviour. To advance gender equality, the Parliament has committed to targets and legislative reform to achieve gender balance and diverse representation amongst parliamentarians and those who work for them.

It is important that young women and people of diverse backgrounds have political role models because you can't be what you can't see.

I am pleased to acknowledge that change is already occurring as today, the Australian Parliament is the most diverse in our history, reflecting Australia's multicultural society.

I, myself represent this modern Australia as I was born in Afghanistan, raised in Australia, practice my faith as a Muslim and have strong Australian values as a Labor Senator.

It is my hope and expectation that as the reforms take hold and the culture of Parliament changes with its growing diversity, young Australian women will see a place and space for themselves in our political system.

Thank you.