

145th IPU Assembly - General Debate
Statement by the Head of the Austrian Delegation
Mr Reinhold Lopatka, MP
Kigali, Rwanda, 13 October 2022

Check against delivery

Honourable President Duarte Pacheco,
Honourable Speakers,
Colleagues and Friends,

At the outset, let me thank our Rwandan hosts for their hospitality and congratulate Rwanda for all its achievements.

Yes. We are currently facing a multi-crisis. War in Europe with Russia's nuclear threat and countless other armed conflicts worldwide prevent our peaceful coexistence. In Iran, innocent protestors and human rights defenders were killed by security forces in the last weeks. Especially brave Iranian women deserve our solidarity.

The Covid pandemic and its social and economic consequences are yet to be overcome. We are experiencing the highest inflation rates in decades, while climate change has simultaneously led to extreme droughts and massive floods in many of our countries like Pakistan and Nigeria.

All of these crises involve strong gender dimensions. Since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic, women have been impacted by increases in gender-based violence, unpaid care work, and poverty. In this context, let me mention that the Austrian Parliament has addressed gender-equality issues in numerous ways. In 2021, the National Council unanimously called for women-targeted support measures in the Covid-19 pandemic. In April 2022, parliamentarians of all parties unanimously agreed on the need for a women's health report, with the aim of improving women's health and gender sensitive medicine. Finally, the last federal budget approved by the Austrian Parliament increased the "women's budget" for the third consecutive year; over half of these financial resources will be allocated towards protection against violence.

Austria has made remarkable progress in the past 10 years since the IPU released its 2012 Plan of Action for Gender-Sensitive Parliaments. Austria has taken a great stride in "*strengthening gender equality legislation and policy*". I am happy to report that with the Federal Budget Act of 2013, gender budgeting has been enshrined in law, ensuring that the budget is gender-sensitive. Gender equality is taken into consideration in all phases of public administration – from goal-setting over implementation to evaluation. In practice, this means that all ministries and supreme

bodies, including the Constitutional Court and the Parliament, must set gender equality as one of their five outcome goals.

Austria has also tackled “*gender-sensitive infrastructure and parliamentary culture*” with great success. First, the Parliamentary Administration has been following a comprehensive women’s advancement plan since 2015. It covers gender-sensitive language, training, career planning, and measures to facilitate work-family balance. Second, since 2018, a contact point offers men and women working in Parliament comprehensive support regarding sexual harassment and abuse of power.

Democratic parliaments must represent their citizens; more than half of our population is female, 50,8% out of 9 million inhabitants. We have come a long way, but have not yet reached equality. We note with delight that the current number of Austrian female MPs in the National Council is at a historic high at 75 of 183, having increased from 29% women MPs to 41% between 2010 and 2020. This places Austria well over the world average and the European average. But there is still room for improvement – especially if we look at the impressive number of more than 60% women MPs in the Parliament of our host country: Rwanda.

In 2019, the Austrian Parliament amended its parliamentary group financing law; since then, parliamentary groups with more than 40% women MPs receive a financial bonus.

We remain committed to further encouraging female political leadership, especially among young women; empowered women and girls create empowered societies!

We are going through difficult times, and we need to solve multiple problems simultaneously. Let us seize the momentum of change to drive forward gender equality for a better future for all of us!

Thank you.