



**Remarks by Rt. Hon. Dr. Sidie Mohamed Tunis
Speaker of the ECOWAS Parliament**

Inter-Parliamentary Union

**Gender Equality and Gender-sensitive Parliaments as Drivers of
Change for a more Resilient and Peaceful World**

October 11-15, 2022

***HONOURABLE SPEAKERS, DISTINGUISHED PARLIAMENTARIANS, LADIES
AND GENTLEMEN***

1. I am highly honoured to be attending the 145th Assembly of the Inter-Parliamentary Union and very delighted to be standing, as the voice of the Parliament of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). Today, I feel privileged to explore issues around gender equality and sensitivity in our Parliaments and how they can bring about desired change, thereby making the world more peaceful.
2. On behalf of the entire ECOWAS Parliament, I would like to extend fraternal greetings to each of the Distinguished Representatives of national and regional parliaments invited to this important meeting. I also extend warm greetings to the President of Rwanda, H.E. Paul Kagame, and the beautiful people of the country of a thousand hills.
3. I would like to start by stating that the Vision of ECOWAS stands in solidarity with equal rights for all irrespective of sex, ethnicity, religion, disability, and social status. ECOWAS principles establish that they promote human rights, equality and a just distribution of power and resources between all individuals, including women and men.
4. This policy lays out ECOWAS commitments to strive for a world free from discrimination based on gender, and where every human being can fulfil their potential unhindered by discriminating laws, economic and social structures. Furthermore, the policy provides a framework that will accelerate the realization of gender equality, fairness between men and women, non-discrimination, and fundamental rights in Africa.

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5. ECOWAS gender policy rests on international law and practice, as articulated in treaties and resolutions of the United Nations General Assembly and Security Council. These include, but are not limited to:
 - United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and the Covenants on Human Rights.
 - The 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and its General Recommendation 19 on violence against women.
 - UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000) on Women, Peace and Security and its subsequent resolutions 1820, 1888, 1889, 1960, 2106, 2122, and 2242 (until Nov. 2017).
 - The Conventions on the Rights of the Child (1989)
 - Beijing Platform of Action

6. In the light of the above, it is pertinent to state clearly that in the ECOWAS Parliament, we firmly believe that gender equality needs to be at the core of our work to engender democratic societies with a just distribution of resources. Discrimination does not only harm individuals, communities, and countries but also hampers development and economic growth. Gender equality is a fundamental feature of a better world for everyone.

7. The theme that was chosen for this meeting which is: "**Gender Equality and Gender-sensitive Parliaments as Drivers of Change for a more Resilient and Peaceful world**" is particularly close to my heart because of the importance it holds in enabling a prosperous society. As you know, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) provide us a roadmap to a better and more sustainable future for all, set the promotion of gender equality, the empowerment of women and girls and the

defence of their economic, political, and social rights as the fifth priority for the world.

8. ECOWAS, on its part, has made a clear commitment to prioritise gender equality and women's empowerment in the frameworks of the regional integration process. Moreover, the Supplementary Act on Equal Rights between Men and Women for Sustainable Development in the ECOWAS Region, serves as a strong legal tool that can be used to champion women development. This instrument was adopted by the 47th Ordinary Session of the Authority of Heads of State and Government, held in Accra, Ghana, on the 19 May 2015.
9. Furthermore, the election by direct universal suffrage of the Community's Parliamentarians, which we are resolutely committed towards achieving in the next legislature, would make it possible to definitively implement the provision of the Supplementary Act on Enhancement of the Powers of the ECOWAS Parliament, which requires each Member State to ensure that at least 30% of its parliamentary delegation is composed of women.

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10. It wouldn't be a gainsay to point out here that, women are more adversely affected as far as issues on gender inequality are concerned. Women are rarely involved in the decision-making processes that affect the future at all levels: local, national, and regional. This is simply because they are not significantly present in all the elected bodies and assemblies where these decisions are made. More than twenty-five years after the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, in China, which was supposed to be an unprecedented step forward for women's rights, women's

representation in the world's parliaments has only increased (on average) from 11% to 23.5%. At this rate, when will we achieve parity?

11. Socially, women's fundamental rights are still being overlooked. In many of our countries, women are still unable to exercise their freedom, including the right to live without the fear of violence, the right to education, the right to family planning, the right to own land and the right to choose their own destiny. With all the above in mind, it is obvious that we must now go beyond proclamations. It has become urgent to move from words to action.

12. At the ECOWAS Parliament, we are matching our words with action. The strengthening of ECOWAS Female Parliamentarians Association (ECOFEPA), to function as an independent parliamentary group is part of the resolve of the 5th Legislature which I head, to advance parity in the Parliament and give women more opportunities to expand and make more impact. Presently, we are pursuing 30 percent representation for women yet, we believe that it is not sufficient. Our hope is that soon, we would have 50 percent seats or more for women.

13. At this juncture, I would like to implore everyone to work towards achieving concrete progress in improving the status of women, including improving their economic opportunities, recognising, and strengthening women's legal status and rights, and facilitating women's participation and inclusion in decision making, as well as political processes. We must endeavour to carry them along in every aspect of our undertakings. We should see them as the ones who compliment us and not compete with us. We must see them as our right-hand persons and not rivals. We must see them as collaborators and not contenders.

14. In this regard, we have an important role to play as parliamentarians. We must remain aware that it is our responsibility, as legislators and politicians, to promote and protect legal and policy frameworks that not only prevent and combat all forms of discrimination against women, but also promote their empowerment. In addition, the exercise of Parliament's oversight function is an important tool in monitoring the implementation of the legislative framework at the national level and in the application of regulatory provisions adopted at the regional level. We are the guarantors of the implementation of these national and international legal instruments.

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15. Let me conclude by noting that, we in West Africa are committed towards gender equality. We regard it as a bedrock of fundamental human rights and believe that gender parity, when attained, would lead to a more peaceful society, where developmental strides would easily be attainable. Our world will surely be a better place to live in when everyone's rights are respected regardless of gender, race, color, and class.

I thank you all and wish you a fruitful deliberation.