

Address to 145th Inter-Parliamentary Union Assembly, Kigali, Rwanda

Madam Chairwoman, Mr. President, other distinguished members of the Head-table, Colleagues, I bring you greetings from the President, Government and people of my country, the Cooperative Republic of Guyana, South America. Permit me to thank you, Madam Chair, and the Government and people of Rwanda, for the exceptional hospitality, which you have so graciously extended to us.

We meet here in Kigali under the theme '*Gender Equality and Gender Sensitive Parliaments as drivers for a more resilient and peaceful world*'. I assure you, that the Government and country I serve, support equality and equal treatment in all its facets and across every sector of society. Concomitantly, we eschew and strike down the scourge of discrimination whenever it raises its ugly head in any form or fashion. Naturally therefore, we embrace the thematic objective of this conference and we pledge our unwavering support to the IPU Assembly as it strives to prosecute this noble ideal.

I am reminded of the sagacious admonition of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. who once said that "*peace is not the absence of war but the presence of justice.*" Inequality in any form, including gender inequality, is the very anthesis of justice. Without justice, there can be peace nowhere. The theme of this conference therefore, requires no underscoring on my part. It sells itself. Gender parity in Parliament, in government and indeed, at every level of public decision-making, is indeed, a *sine qua non* of democracy, social progress, justice and peace. Without them comes dictatorship, stagnation, violence and anarchy.

Although gender equality is entrenched in the **Charter of the United Nations**, and forms part of the fundamental guarantees of governing instruments of similar organisations across the globe; and are ensconced in the Constitutions and laws of most countries, the reality paints a starkly different picture, in particular, as it relates to the membership of Parliaments around the world. For example, only 3 in 193 countries surveyed, have a

50% or more female membership in their Parliaments. 143 countries have below 30% of female membership, and still yet, several countries have no women representation in their Parliaments. These are staggering statistics in a world where the female gender outnumbers the male.

Women are the source of life and the reason for our existence. We are all nurtured and groomed by women. It is said that the housewife of the average worker, in a world of rising cost of living but stagnant wages, is the world's greatest economist. Women have repeatedly shown in almost every area of human endeavour that they are equal to men. In the salutary words of President Paul Kagame:

"We cannot be satisfied when women perform over two-thirds of the world's work, produce over half of the food we eat, yet just a meager tenth of global incomes belong to them... 'Imihigo' should serve as our new metric for Rwanda's commitments to better the lives of our girls and women".

There is simply no rational basis to resist greater gender balance in Parliaments. To do so, we are not only being unfair to women, but we are shortchanging ourselves and undermining human progress as a whole. It is no coincidence that Rwanda, the country in the world with the highest number of women in its Parliament – that is, over 60% - is not only the fastest growing economy on the continent of Africa, but indeed, in the world.

So, colleagues, we have much more work to do. A good start is to push for legislation to be implemented in Member States that would engender greater gender parity in their Parliaments, while we continue to canvass for the removal of all institutional and systematic structures, legislation, policies and programmes which perpetuate gender inequality across the States' apparatus.

My country, Guyana, has begun this process a long time ago, but admittedly, it remains a work in progress. Today, one third of Guyana's Parliamentarians are women. It is a

requirement by law that one-third of the list of candidates contesting the General Elections must be women. By our Constitution, the supreme law of Guyana, the State guarantees to every citizen, equal treatment and protection against discrimination, as fundamental rights and freedoms. We have broad-based commissions established by the Constitution such as the Women and Gender Equality Commission and the Rights of the Child Commission, designed to promote issues such as gender parity and to preserve and protect the rights of women and children.

Additionally, we have a strong network of legislation, policies and programmes that outlaw gender and other forms of discrimination and which protect women and children from ills such as sexual abuse, domestic violence and trafficking in persons as well as human trafficking. In short, we are playing our small part and I wish to assure this Assembly that it has a willing partner in Guyana, and I daresay, the entire Caribbean region.

Let us, therefore resolve to move resolutely to make the theme of this conference a reality. Our failure will certainly result in greater human rights' tragedies, societal stagnation and indeed, the global peace for which we strive, will continue to elude us.

13th October 2022