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General Debate

ICELAND.

Mr. President, dear colleagues.

It is a great pleasure for me to say a few words about of our very vital theme:

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

Gender equality is an important policy priority for the Icelandic Government, both domestically and in our foreign policy. A great effort has been put into advancing public debate and research on gender issues. This subject remains an integral part of our policy to strengthen social well being and securing equal opportunities for all genders.

Iceland has topped the World Economic Forum Global Gender Gap Index for thirteen years in a row, making it the country with the narrowest gender gap in the world. In particular, we rank high on women's educational achievement and women's political empowerment. Today, 47,6% per cent of the Parliamentarians in Iceland are women, as well as our Prime Minister.

Of course, it's great news that we are at the top again, but it does not mean that gender equality has been achieved. It imposes a responsibility on us as a leading state to do even better and set a good example.

Promoting gender equality in Icelandic is based on the conviction that gender equality is a human right. Moreover, evidence shows that in societies where the struggle for gender equality has been most successful, the social and economic rights of the public are greater.

I also want to stress the significance of engaging men to promote women's rights and gender equality. This involves challenging notions of traditional perceptions of manhood and requires men to question power dynamics in their actions. Men need to be engaged as gender advocates – speaking out as active agents whom can transform social norms and gender stereotypes that prolong inequality.

Recently the government of Iceland has introduced many legislations aiming to increase equality and end sexual and gender-based violence - most recent being legislative changes in the penal code to tackle the increased online gender-based violence. Also Iceland passed a law in 2010 requiring company boards to have a minimum of 40% of women or men.

Another important key to end gender inequalities is women's financial independence. For women to take equal part in the labor market, we must create environment that enables them to do so.

The issue is complex, but we do have some affective tools to guide us, for example paid parental leave - for all genders - and affordable childcare. None of those tools were major political issues until women became involved in politics. But when those tools were used correctly not just women gained more oppertunities but men also got involved in embracing evolution of equality.

Moreover, women's increased participation in peace processes and in post-conflict reconstruction is vital for creating sustainable peace. The Icelandic Government has advocated that women participate equally with men in peace processes and that women participate in all formal and informal peace negotiations, peace agreements and peace-building.

Mr. President, dear colleagues.

The global pandemic of COVID-19 has taught us many important lessons. One of them seeing how vulnerable the gains we have made toward gender equality truly are. The pandemic has fundamentally impacted gender equality in both the workplace and the home, rolling back years of progress.

Furthermore, the climate crisis is already having destabilizing effects on peace and security. When people are displaced, women and girls are inherently subjected to vulnerable situations and are therefore under greater threat of gender-based violence.

This is now tragically on display in Ukraine because of Russia's horrendous invasion. Millions have fled their homes to seek shelter in the neighboring countries. Our thoughts are with the innocent people of Ukraine who are suffering and those who are displaced, seeking shelter. The horrific invasion has had devastating consequences and I greatly appreciate that IPU is on its way to make a clear statement on the war in Ukraine.

Thank you.

(650 words)