

PARLIAMENT OF MALAWI

SPEECH BY THE RIGHT HONOURABLE SPEAKER DURING THE GENERAL DEBATE AT THE 145TH GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE I.P.U. IN KIGALI, RWANDA.

- **The Right Honourable Donatille Mukabalisa President of the 145th General Assembly of the Inter Parliamentary Union.**
- **Mr. Duarte Pacheco, President of th I.P.U.**
- **Fellow Honourable Speakers, Presidents and Leaders of delegations from all Member Parliaments here assembled,**
- **Honourable Members of Parliament in various delegations,**
- **International observers and all distinguished representatives of various Non-Governmental Organisations attending this General Assembly,**
- **Ladies and Gentlemen.**

I feel greatly honoured to stand before this honourable Assembly which is meeting in this green city of Kigali to contribute, from a Malawi perspective, to the topic on the floor. Before my substantive contribution, allow me to thank the Parliament of Rwanda and through the Speaker to the Government of Rwanda for the warm welcome and excellent facilities provided in hosting us. Thank you Rwanda.

Madam President,

It is clear that gender inequality is not only a pressing moral and social issue but also a critical economic challenge especially in developing countries. Gender norms and power dynamics shape how women and men of different backgrounds experience or contribute to decisions especially during various crises currently affecting the globe such as climate change, migration and pandemics.

Madam President,

Of late, efforts to decrease gender parity have relatively proved futile as nations have been hit by these crises exacerbating gender inequalities in households and work environments. Gender inequality therefore becomes one of the big factors that cause conflicts across the globe.

Madam President, I strongly believe that empowering women is one major step in building sustainable peace from grassroots level up to decision makers considering that women central when it comes to taking care of families as well as being advocates for peace.

Madam President,

I stand here with total conviction that, we parliamentarians are critical actors in mitigating gender inequality through our representative, legislative, budgeting and oversight roles. Members of Parliament are mandated to pass legislation which must ensure equal representation of women and men in Parliamentary seats and other institutions to ensure gender-sensitive decisions are made. Parliamentarians can also consider allocating substantial amounts of money in each budget specifically for gender equality programs to ensure that

resources are available for research, policy review as well as implementation and follow-up.

Madam President, in Malawi, the male-female ratio in schools, universities and higher positions in public and private sectors generally favour the males. Consequently, cases of gender based violence particularly against women and girls, are common even though Government is doing all it can to redress the situation. In order to do away with problem of gender inequality, the Parliament of Malawi passed a law which dictates a 60/40% representation, either way, in all public service positions.

Madam President, *so far we have noticed a lot of political will led by His Excellency the President through his adherence to the 60/40% gender parity law whenever he makes public appointments.*

As Parliament through our oversight role we continue to ensure that all other public institutions adhere to the law and follow the good example set by our President.

Madam President,

As Parliament of Malawi, we have tried our best and continue to do so to provide leadership and allocate resources, within our constitutional mandate towards mitigating conflicts and suffering that has been caused by gender inequality.

*As legislators mandated to approve the national Budget, Parliament of Malawi has been in the forefront in encouraging Government to allocate enough resources in various Ministries and Government Departments that deal with gender equality. However, due to numerous competing needs in the country, these allocations suffer reductions leaving Ministries and departments that deal with gender issues in very challenging positions. In this case, **Madam President**, as Parliament we have intensified our oversight mandate to ensure that even the limited resources made available are effectively and efficiently used.*

Madam President,

I believe that for Legislatures to effectively deal with conflicts caused by gender inequalities, each country needs effective legislation which ought to mirror the progressive global thinking as promulgated in various international policies, treaties or protocols on gender equality. Various international bodies and institutions provide a lot of valuable information and research on gender equality which, as Parliamentarians we need to harness and come up with legislation where need be and to ensure that our governments implement them.

On this note, **Madam President**, allow me to report to the Assembly, that Parliament of Malawi has enacted laws which support gender equality.

Madam President, as a result, Parliament of Malawi passed the following Bills in a bid to protect the rights of women and children:

1. The Gender Equality Bill in 2013 which provides for the 60/40% gender balance in all public institutions
2. The Marriage, Divorce and Family Relations Bill; whose central theme is to protect the vulnerable women and children and
3. The Trafficking in Persons Bill.

In addition, Madam President, Parliament of Malawi has a Women Caucus comprising forty female Members of Parliament who include the Speaker, Second Deputy Speaker, and female cabinet ministers. The Caucus advocates for best results out of the women parliamentarians during general elections. The Caucus also works closely with the Ministry of Gender on various programs including the “50-50” and “He for She” campaigns.

Madam President, these two programs are aimed at raising awareness among communities on the importance of voting for more women in Parliament. All these efforts strengthen the institution's capacity to promote the gender equality agenda in line with the IPU Plan of Action for Gender-Sensitive Parliaments (GSP) which was adopted at the 127th IPU General Assembly held in October, 2012 in Quebec City.

Madam President,

On the international level, Malawi ratified the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa on 20th May, 2005 and deposited it on 29th June, 2005. Malawi also ratified the SADC Protocol on Gender and Development.

Madam President, parliamentarians have the mandate to influence the development of national negotiating positions in such Protocols and other international agreements on gender equality. Furthermore, as parliamentarians, we should be able to provide oversight on the implementation of the international agreements and Protocols that we accede to as nations.

Madam President,

I also believe that Parliaments should also be exemplary by ensuring that their institutional infrastructures should bare testimony to what we are debating on today. The infrastructure must be inclusive, address barriers and account for diverse needs which enhance access to quality services and development opportunities for all, including women and girls. Such structures must include children care centres and proper hygiene and sanitary facilities.

Madam President, Gender-blind infrastructure in institutions, fail to consider the different roles and needs of women and this puts them at risk in terms of health, security and assertiveness during social and economic upheaval as well as full participation in parliamentary activities.

Madam President.

Another very crucial role for parliamentarians is oversight. For policies, budgets and implementation of numerous programs on gender equality to bear fruit, parliaments are supposed to and should oversee what and how governments are implementing various action plans within approved legislative and budgetary framework.

Madam President, it is not enough for us as parliamentarians to pass the numerous pieces of legislation without ensuring that they are implemented but above all monitoring their effects. Through committees of parliament, we can ensure that the policies are having a positive impact in addressing the gender imbalances and ultimately the social conflict that are caused by such inequalities.

Madam President,

In conclusion, kindly allow me, to thank the Executive Committee for coming up with this topic during a crucial time when the world is facing numerous crises which are negatively impacting on the rights of women and girls. Malawi therefore calls upon all delegates to the 145th General Assembly to embrace this opportunity and come up with resolutions that would assist our parliaments to mobilize resources, renew our commitment, and zeal in dealing with gender inequality.

Madam President and distinguished delegates,

I thank you for your attention.

