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## **Inter-Parliamentary Union**

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~Kigali, 10-15 October 2022~

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

**Honourable Speakers and Parliamentarians, distinguished colleagues, ladies and gentlemen,**

I am honoured to be addressing you today as a Member of ECOWAS Parliament, from Ghana, to offer a regional perspective of the issue of gender equality and gender-sensitive Parliaments as drivers of change.

We have all heard the saying that change is inevitable and as such, is an integral part of life. Nothing best describes this than the recent life change that occurred with the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic and its disruption of social interactions. Yet, In the midst of this life change also emerged the very best display of human nature that disregarded gender stereotypes and prejudices. What emerged under this challenging situation, was the effective roles women can play when given the opportunities. Women were present at the front lines of the COVID-19 crisis from its initial detection and made up almost 70% of the health care workforce, caregivers, community organisers worldwide and were some of the key policy makers in the response efforts.

**Honourable Speakers and Parliamentarians, distinguished colleagues, ladies and gentlemen,**

I intentionally recalled this bleak period in the world's recent history to buttress the point of the gender equality discourse and just as changes in life are inevitable so must gender equality be accepted, to properly respond to those inevitable changes that life will throw at us.

When we talk of gender equality and gender-sensitivity, in a world with global systems skewed in favour of men, we are talking about how to include more women who represent more than half of the world's population and who therefore should represent a proportional number of those in decision-making positions, to ensure equitable representation of society and communities. Conversations around the equality for women in the public space should be driven by the undeniable merit of the value of female contributions to nation building and global stability.

**Distinguished Ladies and gentlemen,**

That being said, permit me to highlight the ECOWAS Parliament's position on gender-sensitive Parliaments in the region, particularly its efforts in this regard. Since its inception, the ECOWAS Parliament has been a strong advocate for increased female participation in law-making and parliamentary services. This led to a firm commitment by Members of the first legislature of the Parliament, in 2003, to support the creation of an ECOWAS Female Parliamentarians Association commonly known as ECOFEPA. The Association, till date, provides an opportunity for Female Parliamentarians to use their collective constitutional mandates to create an enabling environment for women's effective participation in politics and political processes and increase the proportion of women in decision making levels within the ECOWAS region. The Standing Committee on Social Affairs, Gender and Women Empowerment is charged with the removal of

all constraints that inhibit women from maximizing their contributions and benefits in the sub-regional integration effort, amongst others.

Over the years, the Parliament has vigorously pursued the enhancement of its powers, desirous of legislating and election of Members of direct universal suffrage. In 2016, the Parliament gained significant grounds in this pursuit, through the adoption of the Supplementary Act on the Enhancement of the ECOWAS Parliament which conferred powers of oversight of the Community budget and Community Programme-Implementing Bodies, amongst others, on it. Article 18.1c of the Act states that, “**Each Member State shall ensure at least 30% female representation in their Parliamentary delegation**”. This means that the ECOWAS Parliament has a mandate to get involved in the efforts at Member State level, to ensure the attainment of this provision.

Furthermore, ECOWAS has adopted Texts to create the enabling environment for the realisation of gender mainstreaming. This includes the 2004 ECOWAS Gender policy, the 2015 Supplementary Act on Equal Rights between Women and Men for Sustainable Development in the Community Region, as well as the ECOWAS Gender and Election Conflict Strategic Framework.

As such, the ECOWAS Parliament advocates for increased efforts and actions for gender equality. It is kept informed on the developments in this regard through the periodic reporting by each country delegation of the Parliament on the domestication of the 2015 Supplementary Act on Equal Rights between Women and Men for Sustainable Development in the Community Region. The country reports are presented during the two ordinary sessions of the Parliament per annum.

**Distinguished ladies and gentlemen,**

I wish to share some of the information brought to attention the Members of ECOWAS Parliament by the respective country delegations:

**In Cabo Verde:** The Parliament adopted a Gender Equality Act in 2019. The Act fixed the minimum threshold for the representation of men and women on the lists of elected bodies at 40%. As a result, 27 women were elected out of 72 MPs, which corresponded to a rate of 37.5%, during the last elections. In addition, the current government has 9 women out of a total of 27 members, which corresponds to 33.3%.

**In The Gambia:** The recently inaugurated sixth legislature of the National Assembly has dedicated a select committee called the Gender Committee that has the exclusive mandate to address and advance the course of women at the level of Parliament. There are still challenges of women representation into elected offices and at high levels of decision-making. Figures from the recently concluded legislative elections show that, at least 19 women vied for constituency seats either under a party ticket or independent. Only 3 of the 19 were elected and another 2 were nominated by the President.

**In Ghana:** Although women since the inception of the 4<sup>th</sup> Republic in 1993 have occupied key governance positions such as Speaker of Parliament, Chief Justice, Chairperson of the Electoral Commission, Chairperson of the National Council for Civic Education (NCCE) and Government Statistician, women are still underrepresented in leadership positions. To this end, the Government has made a commitment to pass an Affirmative Action Bill. The Bill when passed, will seek to promote a progressive increase in the active participation of women in public life and

bridge the gender imbalance between men and women. The Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection (MoGCSP) in collaboration with CSOs and NGOs organized a series of advocacy and sensitisation programmes for political parties and the electorate to increase women's participation in Parliament during the 2020 General Elections. Although the two major political parties, the NDC and NPP do not have quotas for women, they reduced the cost of filing fees for women parliamentary contestants in the 2020 elections to encourage women's participation in politics. Currently, forty (40) female parliamentarians translating into approximately 15 percent of the 275 Member Parliament are represented in the 8<sup>th</sup> Parliament of the 4<sup>th</sup> Republic of Ghana.

**In Niger:** The government recognises that the country's sustainable development goals can be achieved only with the full participation of women and girls. A quota law (25% of women in appointive positions and 10% in elective positions) was passed in 2000 and its implementation decree in 2001. This law was amended in 2014 to increase the quota for elective positions from 10 to 15%. In 2019, the same quota law was amended to increase the quota for elective positions from 15 to 25% and that of appointive positions from 25 to 30%. The number of women in the previous legislature in Niger was 29. This number has risen to 51 in the current legislature.

**In Senegal:** Following the recent legislative elections that held, more than 44% of seats in the National Assembly are held by women, the biggest share of any country in the region. This translates to 73 out of 165 parliamentary seats are held by women. Senegal is ranked 4<sup>th</sup> in Africa and 18<sup>th</sup> in the world for gender parity in Parliament, ahead of Switzerland, France, Britain and the US. Senegal's high share is explained by a 2010 law requiring "absolute gender parity" in all elective institutions, with candidate lists alternating between men and women. The latest tally of legislators is 2 more than previously, and the highest ever under the parity rules.

**In Sierra Leone:** the Government has developed the Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Bill to improve women's political and economic empowerment. The bill has been laid in Parliament. Among other things, the bill would mandate that 30% of seats in Sierra Leone's 146-seat Parliament be occupied by women, as well as 30% of appointive positions, including cabinet posts. The bill also aims to improve women's access to finance, and to link government spending to improving gender equality. There are currently 19 female MPs in Parliament, representing about 13 % of the total number of 146 MPs.

**In Togo:** the National Assembly is headed by a female Speaker and is undertaking the revision of some of its major national texts, and the establishment of institutions for the promotion of gender and women's rights.

**Distinguished ladies and gentlemen,**

Let me close by recalling the spirit which we so often encourage, the spirit of carrying everyone along and not leaving anyone behind. The way peace reigns. I believe this is the exact spirit of the theme of meeting and the onus is on each of us to ensure we, as parliamentarians adopt this spirit so that we play our representative role better.

**I thank you for your kind attention.**