

Mr President

Madame Chair

Colleagues,

I'm probably one of the newest members here. Not necessarily the youngest.

It's a pleasure for me to address the General Assembly on such an important topic.

We are two weeks away from the 75th Anniversary of a historic general election in Malta. The general election of 1947 saw women voting for the first time in history.

Moreover, that same election saw the first female Member of Parliament elected.

From that day onwards, although female participation by vote has been steadily very high, the number of female MPs in my country has been very low. Not more than 15%.

That's until finally we realised that our highest institution cannot remain a boys' club.

Following historic and unanimous changes to our Constitution, a new mechanism entered into force in this year's general election. 12 additional seats were added and assigned to the under-represented gender.

This mechanism, albeit controversial, has challenged 7 decades of status quo. It has shot up the number of female MPs in Malta to 28%.

Still unacceptably low.

But let's not talk solely about the numbers.

Dear colleagues,

In our gender equality policies, we must focus more on intersectionality.

People are not homogeneous.
Women are not homogeneous.

It's useless boasting about equality between genders, when this is not representative of the unique differences in our populations. Including age, sexual orientation, disability and others.

Moreover, you don't make parliaments more gender-sensitive solely by increasing the number of women. We have to fix our institutions which are masculinised, and not fix women to fit our institutions.

I look forward to discussing recommendations of a gender audit of Malta's Parliament, conducted in collaboration with the Council of Europe, in the coming weeks.

I also refer to the General Secretary's speech earlier, and look forward to Malta's Gender National Action Plan for the mainstreaming of legislation, policies and services, because we need to ensure that equality is behind every decision we take.

And this takes me to healthcare.

I really enjoyed yesterday's side event hosted by the WHO on universal healthcare, and sexual and reproductive health and rights. It is our duty to ensure access to healthcare services by everyone. Including women. And I find it troubling to see some countries taking back rights from women.

On violence, it's been more than 11 years since the Istanbul Convention has been adopted. But unfortunately, this Convention was not ratified by all Council of Europe members, and by the European Union.

I renew my country's call to fellow members of the EU and the Council of Europe to ratify the Convention if we want to be taken seriously on this issue.

In June this year, Malta's Parliament unanimously approved the introduction of femicide in our Criminal Code, as an aggravating offence of homicide.

It is estimated that around 137 women are killed every day around the world, often by their partner or a family member. That's 50,000 women killed every year. And what's worse? That most of these femicides are preventable.

And we cannot let the usual deniers stop us in our quest for equality.

Let's not beat around the bush. Women are at a far greater risk of violence and discrimination in our patriarchal environment.

And violence can take so many forms. Not less through the words we speak.

Malta has a strong law against hate speech, and a new bill on cyber bullying is in the pipeline.

Dear colleagues,

I cannot end this speech without expressing my genuine support to our Ukrainian colleagues.

I come from a non-aligned country with neutrality obligations laid down in our Constitution. But what's wrong is wrong and must be called out. That's why we supported Chile's motion yesterday. That's why we keep pushing for peace.

I would also like to show solidarity with the families of the victims of the shooting in Bratislava, outside a gay club yesterday.

And on a general note, I've just been to the Genocide Memorial and my thoughts are:

How can we allow hate and greed to win over our message of love and support?

My final message is this:

Women are fighting important fights all around the world.

Whether it's the patriots fighting for their country in Kyiv.
Or the brave women protesting in Iran.

From the activists of the Me2 Movement, to the brave activists advocating for more rights to sexual and reproductive health in Malta.

Ultimately, this is not an issue of left against right.
Of the north against the south.
It's not an issue of religious people against atheists.

It's an issue of human rights. And human rights must win.

Thank you very much.