



**Opening Session of the 145th Summit of the International  
Parliamentary Union - KIGALI, RWANDA  
October 12, 2022**

**Debate on the General Theme: ‘Gender equality and gender-sensitive  
parliaments as drivers of change for a more resilient and peaceful  
world’**

**HON NN MAPISA-NQAKULA, SPEAKER OF THE NATIONAL  
ASSEMBLY, PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA**

**The Honourable President of the Assembly,**

**Honourable President of the IPU, Mr. Duarte Pacheco,**

**Honourable Presiding Officers,**

**Honourable Members; and**

**Distinguished guests,**

We welcome the opportunity to address this 145<sup>th</sup> IPU Assembly on this important theme. We simultaneously want to thank our gracious host, the Parliament of Rwanda. It is appropriate to congratulate Madam Speaker for election as President of this Assembly, hosted in a country which has mastered the art of gender parity in its representation in Parliament. Being the first leading in the Chamber of Deputies with 61.4% women representation, it is therefore befitting that Madam Speaker, you chair this assembly on gender sensitive parliament. In many respects, the theme of this Assembly is at the heart of how the world pays attention to the plight of women.

Perhaps the best place to start, should be to answer the question “why”. Why is the plight of women remaining precarious despite the numerous pledges, commitments and undertakings made in multi-lateral and national levels?

Honourable President of the Assembly,

There is unprecedentedly a wide convergence of our understanding that gender equality, gender mainstreaming and women's participation should be placed higher on the developmental agenda of our nations and parliaments. We believe that Parliaments' law-making, oversight and enhancement of public participation holds hope for meaningful translation of these ideals and commitments to improve the lives of ordinary women.

We all agree that a gender-sensitive Parliament, must go beyond women's representation, which only reflects numbers. It is more about improving the lives of women, especially the poorest and the needy. We owe it to the future generation to succeed in building societies that are more fit for women. It should start with empowering both the girl and the boy child.

The IPU Women in Parliament report of 2020 is not encouraging for a world whose leaders have expressed their commitment to women's empowerment, and to ensuring a just and equitable society. The statistics also show that out of its members, more than 80 Parliaments have less than 20% representation of women. What is even more disturbing is that the report also shows that there are Parliaments with less than 5% representation of women amongst us here, including some reporting 0% representation of women. This has to change.

Unless the many systemic barriers to women's participation at the apex of political leadership and decision making are addressed, the status of women will not improve.

These barriers include disempowering legislation, patriarchal gender roles in society, conservative traditions, and religious fundamentalism that continue to reproduce undesirable stereotypes and inadequate support and recognition of women in individual households.

Honourable President of the Assembly,

Increased participation of women in parliamentary processes is critical in accelerating the transformation of our society to meaningfully change gender relations across the spectrum. Issues of child marriages and genital mutilation are critical issues we should guard against, in order to protect our girls and the future of our countries.

In South Africa, we have learned that simply depending on the whims of political parties to increase women's representation in Parliament is quite inadequate. This is because despite the ruling party having imposed a 50/50 parity in representation in all structures of leadership for itself, the South African Parliament still has less than 50 percent women representation after the last election in 2019.

In conclusion Honourable President,

I wish to reiterate what I recently said in one of our international parliamentary fora, that whilst we recognise many achievements made in the representation of women in our parliaments, we are still far from the ideal scenario articulated in numerous commitments we made.

Honourable President, I wish to move that we explore as the Assembly a possibility of imposing penalties on all parliaments who are members of the IPU who seem not to be moving to ensure there is proper gender representation in their Parliaments.

I thank you.