

*Speech by MP Fatma Oektem (Denmark) for The General Debate at the IPU-session, 11-15th October 2022, Kigali, Rwanda.*

***Education as a Prerequisite for Equality***

Chairpersons, fellow parliamentarians, ladies, and gentlemen.

I am very pleased to address this Assembly.

Not least because this month marks the 10-year anniversary of the IPU *Plan for Action for Gender-Sensitive Parliaments*.

This is a unique opportunity for us to discuss the many challenges of and solutions to the matter - and what we have accomplished during the last 10 years.

(-oOo-)

As rapporteur for equality, the topic for this debate is of great concern to me. It truly is a global challenge.

Especially because – to this day - human rights are being violated on a daily basis.

One of these is the right to education.

The right to education is a fundamental human right and indispensable for the exercise of other human rights.

It is one of the most powerful tools in lifting socially excluded children and adults out of poverty and into society.

Yet, 17 percent of the world's adults can neither write nor read. Two-third of these – almost 500 million – are women. This large share has nearly not changed during the last 20 years.

We must do better.

(-oOo-)

Around the world, women and girls who are trying to exercise their right to education are facing many obstacles – forced marriage, pressure to take on domestic responsibilities at a young age, or discrimination in the labor market.

We must strengthen our focus on women's right to education - regardless of where they live or where they come from.

(-oOo-)

In many countries, women are still fighting long and hard for fundamental human rights.

I stand in great solidarity with these women. And men. Their fights are important.

Because – as history tells us - equality between women and men benefits not only women, but also society as a whole.

Luckily, many women have succeeded in not only breaking through barriers, but also in making their voices heard and reminding us of the injustices women face worldwide.

The fact that these women and men are willing to take to the streets around the world tells me that – everywhere - the demand for freedom, equality, and democracy is not only strong. Is it also loud and clear.

(-oOo-)

It is healthy for the democratic conversation, when all perspectives are considered – women's included.

Rwanda is a prime example of this. Through a gender-responsive constitution, Rwanda has achieved gender parity in Parliament, with over 60% female members of the lower house. This achievement has had a positive impact on women's and girls' empowerment, as well as on sustainable development for all.

(- oOo-)

In my home country, Denmark, the fight for equality has been long and hard.

With our Constitution of 1849, Denmark became a democracy.

In reality, however, only a small proportion of the Danish population benefited from the new civil rights. In fact, a crucial part of the population was left out: the Danish women.

The situation did not change until 66 years later, when a constitutional amendment in 1915 ensured equal rights to vote. Then Danish women were allowed to vote in general elections.

For more than half a century, Danish women and men fought in a united front for equal voting rights.

A lot have happened since then. Today we have almost 40 percentages women in the parliament. We have 13 parties and eight of them are led by women. Our prime minister is a woman and we have a queen.

(-oOo-)

In Denmark, progress has been made in several areas concerning equality during the past 10 years: Fathers have been given the right to a greater share of the maternity leave. Greater attention has been paid to the many problems of sexual harassment. And legislation has been introduced to better protect victims of rape, psychological violence and stalking.

In a Danish context, the main goal should be to reduce any hidden inequality.

Still, women lag behind men in working life - in government and politics, in management and in research.

At the same time, men's health is worse than women's, a larger share of men are criminal, more men are homeless and less educated.

I believe we can do better.

(-oOo-)

As I see it, so far, no country has achieved full gender equality.

It can be achieved if - and only if - we embark on this journey together.

Our challenges might be different, but our common goal should be the same. And a peaceful, sustainable and resilient world, requires equal rights.

Dear colleagues, lets do this together

Lets take it from hope - to action.

Thank you.