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15th Summit of Women Speakers of Parliament



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Opening Remarks by Dr. Tulia Ackson President of the IPU

15th Summit of Women Speakers of Parliament

“Leading for inclusive and lasting peace”

Monday, 28 July 2025

Your Excellency, Ms. Maja Riniker, President of the National Council of Switzerland
Madam Director General of the United Nations Office in Geneva,
Mr. Secretary General of the IPU,
Honourable women Speakers of Parliament,
Members of Parliament,
Distinguished guests,
Ladies and gentlemen,

It is with much appreciation that I welcome you to the 15th Summit of Women Speakers of Parliament. I am honored to share this moment with my esteemed colleague, Ms. Riniker, the President of the National Council of Switzerland and President of this 15th edition of the Summit.

Madam President, I extend my sincere thanks to you, to the National Council, and to the people of Switzerland for your gracious hospitality. I am very pleased that the Summit, in this important year for women and girls, is taking place in your beautiful country with a longstanding commitment to peace, dialogue, and mediation. I am also pleased that we are meeting in the city of multilateralism host of our shared institution, the Inter-Parliamentary Union.

This Summit carries special significance. It is a reflection of a powerful and growing reality: we are more and more women leading the institutions where democracy lives, where the people are represented, where laws are made, and policies are shaped.

As we mark 30 years since the Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action, a bold and visionary blueprint for gender equality, I welcome the rise in the number of women Speakers of Parliament. In 1995, a mere 10% of presiding officers of parliaments were women. Today, that figure stands at 23.7%. This is not only encouraging, it is transformative: the trend is clear, and it is irreversible. But the pace is too slow and the 50/50 too far of reach.

The path to leadership is not an easy one. Each of us has walked the road filled with obstacles—too many of them deeply gendered: stereotypes, bias, marginalization, double standards, and often, hostility. Often, patriarchal structures and challenging societal norms continue to push back when we lead. And yet, here we are. Not because the path was easy but because it was vital. Vital individually and collectively, vital for development and democracy.

This Summit is a unique platform for us to gather as women leaders. This year, it comes at a moment in history that calls for our full attention and collective resolve.

In too many places, women's and girls' rights, freedom, and empowerment are being challenged. In political participation, we are seeing stagnation. In rights we are seeing regression. A backlash—loud, organized, and well-funded—is pushing back against hard-won rights. It seeks to silence women's voices, reverse legal protections, and undermine bodily autonomy. It feeds on disinformation, polarization, and fear. And it has no borders.

In the face of this, we must stand firm. We will not allow decades of progress to be dismantled. And we will not allow the next generation of women to inherit a weaker, more fragile foundation than the one we fought for.

Parity in political decision-making is not just a goal. It is a matter of democratic legitimacy. It is not about symbolic presence. It is about substantive power. It is about ensuring that the laws and decisions that shape society are taken by the diversity of its people and that they reflect the needs, experiences, and aspirations of all people, leaving no woman and no girl behind.

While we face resistance, we must remember that history is still being written. Progress continues, and so do the actions that help us shape it. I welcome the IPU Plan of action for parity in parliaments adopted by the strong and visionary participants in the IPU Global Conference of women parliamentarians held in Mexico earlier this year, under the leadership of Senator Lopez Castro, the President of the IPU Bureau of women parliamentarians in her country where parity is the norm. This norm has also been enshrined by the CEDAW General Recommendation No. 40 on the equal and inclusive representation of women in decision-making systems, providing a clear roadmap for inclusive governance.

Dear colleagues,

The standards were set, we have the tools, and we know the actions.

Our parliaments must be the front line of change. To help, the IPU has selected Gender equality as a focus of its work in 2025 and we have launched a Campaign called **“Achieving gender equality, action by action”** to mobilize transformative change by parliaments and their men and women members. I urge you to join the Campaign and lead the movement to turn commitment into action towards parity in politics, gender-sensitive parliaments, and the elimination of violence and discrimination against women and girls.

Next to action we need solidarity. Because gender equality is not a women’s issue. It is a political issue and a development issue. It is also a peace and security issue.

For 25 years now, the Women, Peace and Security agenda has recognized women’s essential role in conflict prevention and peacebuilding. Where are we in the implementation of this crucial agenda? We have seen progress, notably in the adoption of National Action Plans. In Europe as well as in my own region, East Africa and the Great Lakes, regional plans of action were adopted. However, a lack of accountability and insufficient resources for implementing commitments are flagrant.

Aiming for peace also means approaching violence against women and girls with the urgency and seriousness it demands. Conflict has a profoundly gendered face: before, during, and after wars, it is women and girls who carry the heaviest burdens. They face overlapping crises. Caring for families, sustaining communities, and enduring horrors that remain unseen and unspoken.

For many women and girls, conflict resembles another world's hell, where their bodies are turned into battlefields while their suffering is rendered invisible. This violence, whether in the form of targeted sexual assault, or systemic exclusion in peacetime, is part of the same continuum of gender-based discrimination and harm. We must confront this abhorrent reality as a central political and peacebuilding priority, ensuring our parliaments respond with the full weight of political will, law and policy, resources, and accountability.

Already ten years ago, in addition to equal participation of men and women in peace and security, the IPU has also called for dedicating 15 per cent of funding related to peace and security, to supporting women's initiatives, enhancing women's participation, protecting women and girls from violence, and advancing gender equality.

Let's revive this commitment and drive it towards action!

We have the mandate. We have the momentum. And yes, we have the moral authority.

Let us get to work—together.

Thank you.