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## Speaking Notes

Ms. Tone Wilhelmsen Trøen  
Chair of the Summit

Opening session of the  
*13th Summit of Women Speakers of Parliament*  
Vienna, Austria

6 September 2021

Mr. President of the Austrian National Council,  
Madam Director-General of the United Nations Office at Vienna,  
Mr. President of the IPU,  
Mr. Secretary General of the IPU,  
Dear Speakers of Parliament,  
Distinguished guests,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am honoured to be opening the 13th Summit of Women Speakers of Parliament here in Vienna.

I'd like to begin by thanking the Parliament of Austria for hosting this very special occasion that brings us all together.

While many of our parliaments have learned to adapt to virtual settings, speaking to you here today reminds me of the unique and irreplaceable value of in-person gatherings. Finally being in the company of fellow Speakers of Parliament, I feel the significance of what we have been through during the past year and a half of the pandemic — and of the decisions we have had to make to come this far.

Preparation for the Summit and the Speakers' Conference was a months-long process, comprising several virtual meetings of the Preparatory Committee, which I chaired, involving representatives of parliaments from all over the world. While we have achieved a lot to arrive at this point, the real work for us starts today.

The theme of today's Summit is *"Women at the centre: From confronting the pandemic to preserving the achievements of gender-responsive recovery"*.

The outcomes of today's deliberations will contribute to the proceedings of the Fifth World Conference of Speakers of Parliament, taking place tomorrow and Wednesday. This gives us an opportunity to make gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls a priority on the agenda of all parliaments, especially as we recover from the pandemic.

As many of you know, women have been a key strength in our collective confrontation of the pandemic, but this has largely gone unrecognized. The crucial role of women from all walks of life in pandemic response and recovery is something we want to recognize today.

Due to lockdowns, women have been taking on a larger share of unpaid domestic care work. They do 2.6 times more unpaid care and domestic work than men. Women are also prominent on the frontlines of the pandemic. They make up 70% of the world's health and social care work force. In addition, more women than men are employed in the informal sector, which holds up the economy in many developing countries.

In many ways, we have seen that women are sacrificing their health and safety for the wellbeing of society. But they are not always adequately supported and protected.

As always, these gendered impacts are felt more harshly by women in difficult circumstances — those in situations of displacement, women with disabilities, young women, elderly women and indigenous women.

Thus, as leaders of our Parliaments, we must act now to recognize the unique role of women.

We must also determine how we can preserve our progress towards gender equality in recent decades through a gender-responsive recovery from the pandemic.

The gendered impacts of the pandemic require gender-responsive actions. They also require strong and inclusive leadership.

Women's leadership in decision-making is particularly important around times of crisis. For example, greater gender equality in legislatures and female-headed health agencies were associated with earlier adoption of stay-at-home orders during the pandemic.

Earlier this year, the IPU released a publication on Women in Parliament. It revealed that the global proportion of women in parliament has reached a record 25.5%, and 20.9% of all Speakers of Parliament in the world are women. More women than ever before are at the highest levels of political power.

However, women's participation and leadership in politics has not been saved from the impact of COVID-19. Progress remains slow and in some cases has reversed. We have seen that COVID-19 disrupted parliamentary elections and created more obstacles for women running for office. Reports of online violence and harassment against women in politics have increased.

Thus, as Women Speakers of Parliament, we must ensure that a key element of a gender-equal recovery agenda is to ensure gender parity in political participation and leadership. Gender-balanced parliaments translate to more gender-responsive policies that can help with a holistic recovery from the pandemic.

As leaders in parliament, we must strive to make our institutions gender-sensitive by creating an enabling environment for all. We must legislate measures that level the playing field and open politics to women from diverse backgrounds. We must address the barriers that deter or limit gender equality, including gender-based discrimination, sexism and harassment.

Our influence should also extend to the global community, especially to countries where women are in danger. We are hearing chilling reports of women's rights and freedoms in Afghanistan being threatened. While some have fled the country, women MPs and activists have stayed, risking their lives to protect the rights of women and girls. These individuals are calling on the international community for support, and it is our duty to answer the call.

As the country aims to build a new future, we need to ensure women and girls retain access to health and education in order to prevent a lost generation of girls and young women. This is a great threat to gender equality and to the advancement of the country as a whole.

Dear colleagues and friends,

As we begin the exciting debates for today, keep in mind that no recovery agenda can succeed without going hand in hand with the gender equality agenda.

Only then can we properly address and reflect the demands of society during this transformative time.

Only then can we create more efficient, effective and legitimate political institutions that can withstand future crises.

Thank you for your attention and I look forward to a fruitful debate.