

## Keynote address during the 13<sup>th</sup> Summit of Women Speakers of Parliament

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Ms. Trøen, Speaker of the Parliament of Norway, and the distinguished Chair of  
this Summit,

Mr. Sobotka, President of the National Council of Austria,

Mr. Pacheco, President of the Inter-Parliamentary Union,

Distinguished Speakers and Members of Parliament,

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is truly an honour to address the 13th Summit of Women Speakers of  
Parliament, and I am grateful for your invitation.

Allow me to take a moment to celebrate and commend you, and all those who  
have kept the world going throughout the pandemic:

The women leaders and politicians who steered countries firmly and humanely,  
while facing a new and unknown threat;

The women who shouldered the burden of unpaid care work at home;

The women who make up 70 percent of workers in vital health and social sectors;

And the many other heroes, too numerous to name - both women and men,  
including the men who have supported women to lead and make their essential  
contributions.

I believe women parliamentarians represent crucial agents for the progress we  
need, and I am pleased that we can come together to discuss how we can keep  
women, and their voices, rights, and contributions, at the centre in the post-  
pandemic recovery and beyond.

To begin, let's start with numbers.

This year, on International Women's Day, we welcomed the highest-ever number of women parliamentarians, with the global average rising to 25.5 percent – not nearly high enough, but still a needed improvement.

Women parliamentarians are gaining the critical mass and the power to enlarge the space for action, to influence legislation, strengthen oversight, and create the conditions for further change and progress.

In my own country, women's representation in Egypt's parliament reached historic highs after a constitutional amendment was approved in 2020 to allocate one-quarter of seats in the House of Representatives to women.

A further presidential decree appointing 20 women to the Senate doubled women's representation in the upper chamber.

I am a firm believer in affirmative action and quotas. Numbers matter, and we need to do more to get more women in parliaments, governments, and business, and in leadership roles.

Numbers can also help us to understand our world by providing a snapshot of the challenges women are facing. And the data shows us that progress towards Sustainable Development Goal 5, on gender equality, has stalled or fallen back in the pandemic.

According to ILO, men will regain the jobs they lost, but 13 million women who worked in 2019 will be without employment in 2021.

More women – and up to 92 percent in developing countries – are employed in the informal sector, without social protection. Exclusion from formal social safety nets and public support in a pandemic has left many millions more vulnerable to exploitation.

The pandemic has further exposed and worsened cruel inequalities, and severe vaccine inequity is perpetuating the crisis and hardship.

Just two percent of the over five billion COVID vaccine doses administered globally have been given in Africa. 42 out of 54 African countries are off track to meet vaccination targets.

For every 100 men, aged 25 to 34, living in extreme poverty in 2021, there is an estimated 118 women. If we cannot stop new variants and new waves of the virus, COVID will continue to widen the gender and poverty gap.

Moreover, sheltering at home has not helped to shelter women from domestic violence, with reports of increased violence against women at a time when pandemic restrictions have reduced access to justice, aid, and services.

Even before the current crisis, one in three women experienced different forms of violence in their lifetime. More than 80 percent of female homicide victims die at the hands of their intimate partners.

Numbers matter, but we must also remember that global averages do not give us the full picture.

We need to dig deeper, to see and hear the true stories of women and girls, in different places, to understand their specific challenges so we can provide meaningful support.

And what we see in many parts of the world is that the basic security and human rights of women and girls are under threat.

Even as we meet here, women and girls in Afghanistan are facing daunting risks and an uncertain future. Millions of people have been displaced, and 80 percent of the newly displaced are women and children.

In recent conflicts in Africa, rape and sexual violence are being used as weapons of war, brutally destroying lives, and tearing apart families and communities for generations.

If we are serious about leaving no woman and no girl behind, we need countries to take concerted action across the UN pillars, to provide security, to protect human rights, and to confront inequalities through a renewed commitment to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

First and foremost, if we want more women in parliaments, in government, and in business, we must empower girls from the moment they are born.

Governments, communities, mothers, and fathers need to give girls the opportunity to go to school; to get to school safely and without fear of harassment; to play sports and compete; to learn skills to gain self-confidence, and find their path in life. While this may sound basic and natural in many developed countries, it is not so in less developed countries, or in countries in conflict.

Increased support is urgently needed. 130 million girls worldwide were already out of school before the pandemic, and 11 million girls may not return to education after the disruptions caused by the crisis.

I therefore call on all parliamentarians to do more to advance girls' access to education and training.

Second, parliamentarians can promote greater justice in the COVID response and recovery by helping to ensure that relief packages meet the needs of women and girls, by prioritizing issues of safety, and by tackling gender-based violence.

Studies from the World Bank have shown that legislation protecting women from violence positively influences economic outcomes.

There are more women owners of businesses where workplace sexual harassment laws exist.

Legislation to protect women from gender-based violence and sexual harassment is associated with improvements in gender equality and a reduction in discrimination in the labour market.

Advancing laws that protect and empower women, in line with international commitments and UN Conventions, is good for men and women, and better for our economies and societies as a whole.

Third, we need to take determined steps to strengthen implementation and enforcement, in order to translate this legislation into effective practice. To do this, my Office, the UN Office on Drugs and Crime, provides normative assistance to countries across our mandate areas of drugs, organized crime, corruption, and terrorism.

Our work builds on the UN Conventions against transnational organized crime and corruption, the international drug control conventions and legal framework against terrorism, and the UN standards and norms on crime prevention and criminal justice.

UNODC legislative assistance is complemented by research and technical assistance, channelled through global, regional, and country programmes and a field presence covering 156 countries.

Our Office has collaborated closely with IPU to strengthen international cooperation and national responses based on shared legal frameworks. These efforts include our continuing initiative to support victims of terrorism, including victims of sexual and gender-based violence.

I am committed to elevating our partnership further still. Working together, we can enable and enhance the work of parliaments to tackle organized crime, illicit drugs,

and terrorism, and to promote rule of law- and rights-based responses to crime prevention, criminal justice, and other challenges.

Parliamentarians are also central to preventing and combatting corruption, and strengthening accountability in the management of public finances – a discussion UNODC will take forward at the ninth session of the Conference of the States Parties to the UN Convention against Corruption in Sharm El-Sheikh in Egypt in December 2021.

Furthermore, UNODC and IPU are exploring a new and expanded framework to provide comprehensive and integrated assistance to parliamentarians, and we are pursuing enhanced cooperation with regional parliamentary assemblies.

Fourth and finally, on a more personal level, I would like to speak about the role of women leaders and parliamentarians in changing the way women and girls view themselves in the world.

In my work and in my personal experiences, I have seen how women can touch and change lives by acting as role models, by speaking up for each other, and by supporting other women.

US tennis player Serena Williams is a 23-time Grand Slam champion who understands that being excellent in competition does not mean bringing other women down. She said, and I quote: “The success of every woman should be the inspiration to another. We should raise each other up.”

If women parliamentarians are to act as inspirations and catalysts for change, we need to see more women helping women to get elected and get inside parliaments.

We need more women helping women within parliaments, bridging ideological divides to champion the legislation and priorities that matter more than politics.

We need women to help women between parliaments across the world. Networks are essential conduits for learning, sharing know-how, and mentoring – for everyone, and especially for women.

In this regard, this Summit and this week offer a timely and much-needed platform for exchanging views and experiences, and for uniting action for gender-responsive global governance.

I also welcome the fact that the deliberations of the 13th Summit of Women Speakers of Parliament will feed into the 5th World Conference starting tomorrow.

Gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls belong on the agenda of all parliaments and parliamentarians, men and women.

Women need to support other women, and men need to do more to support women, to encourage and work with them, thereby enlarging the public and political space for women to act and lead with confidence, for the benefit of all, and leaving no one behind.

Ladies and gentlemen,

These past two years have brought unspeakable tragedy and continued suffering. They have shaken the foundations of our societies to their very core.

At the same time, the pandemic has shown the value of women's leadership, and the value of women's work.

Throughout the crisis, women have kept hospitals and homes running, and hopes alive.

The world as we know it has changed forever, and it is up to us to change it for the better.

We need you – women speakers, women parliamentarians, legislators, leaders, community members, mentors, and role models – now more than ever.

I look forward to joining forces with you, to make our world safer, more resilient, and more just.

And I look forward to seeing you again at the next summit, which will only grow in size and strength as more women speakers and women parliamentarians join your ranks and take action.

Thank you once again for inviting me, and I wish you successful and impactful deliberations this week.