



Inter-Parliamentary Union  
For democracy. For everyone.

# 143rd IPU Assembly

Madrid, Spain  
26-30 November 2021



Forum of Women Parliamentarians  
Item 4

FEM/32/4(c)-Inf.2  
17 November 2021

## GENDER ACTIVITIES

c) Update on recent IPU activity on gender equality

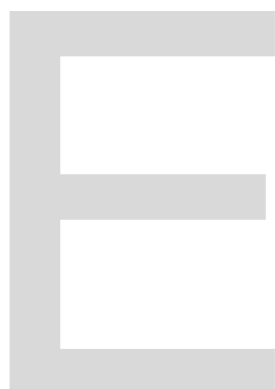
### IPU cooperation with the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women

#### I. The IPU and the CEDAW Committee

1. The IPU plays an active role in promoting the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and its Optional Protocol within the parliamentary community.
2. As part of its cooperation with the CEDAW Committee (the Committee), the IPU Secretariat urges parliamentarians to keep track of whether their countries have ratified the CEDAW Convention and Optional Protocol as well as whether their countries may have issued any reservations. (This information is available at <http://indicators.ohchr.org/>; it is broken down by country and includes entries for any declarations or reservations made).
3. To mark International Women's Day on 8 March 2019 and celebrate the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of CEDAW, the IPU and the CEDAW Committee have issued a joint statement, "*Women's political leadership: striving for balance – 50/50 by 2030*". This statement was further supported by a Joint Call in 2021 to craft and adopt National Plans of Action to reach the goal of gender parity in politics by 2030 (see annex 1). On 27 October 2021, the IPU, together with the International Gender Champions, the Arab Parliament and the Permanent Mission of Egypt in Geneva, co-organized an *Online Conference on Women's empowerment in the Arab region: Recent developments and the way forward*, which brought together parliamentarians, a CEDAW member and gender champions to exchange good practices and persisting challenges, and to build momentum to implement CEDAW in the Arab region (see annex 3).

#### II. IPU involvement in the CEDAW reporting process

4. The Convention is an important benchmark for gender equality and comprehensive in scope. The IPU therefore endeavours to ensure that parliaments and their members provide effective oversight of the Convention and contribute to its full implementation. The IPU has consistently argued for more parliamentary involvement in the Convention's reporting obligations, particularly in the work required to follow up on the concluding observations of the Committee.
5. At each Committee session, the IPU presents a report on what it has done to promote respect for and implementation of the Convention, including disseminating information about the role played by parliaments in the reporting process. This is partly done by inviting parliaments from the countries whose periodic reports are to be reviewed at the next Committee session to fill in a questionnaire. The questions cover parliamentary involvement in the reporting process and in the follow-up to the Committee's concluding observations.



#IPU143

6. The following is the list of State parties reporting to the CEDAW Committee in 2020 and 2021:

**75<sup>th</sup> Session (10 February – 28 February 2020)**

- Afghanistan, Bulgaria, Eritrea, Kiribati, Latvia, Pakistan, Republic of Moldova, Zimbabwe

Detailed information is available at

[https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/\\_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/SessionDetails1.aspx?SessionID=1380&Lang=en](https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/SessionDetails1.aspx?SessionID=1380&Lang=en)

**76<sup>th</sup> virtual Session (29 June – 9 July 2020)**

- Bosnia and Herzegovina, Hungary, Poland, Republic of Moldova, Slovakia, Switzerland, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland

Detailed information is available at

[https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/\\_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/SessionDetails1.aspx?SessionID=1388&Lang=en](https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/SessionDetails1.aspx?SessionID=1388&Lang=en)

**77<sup>th</sup> virtual Session (26 October – 5 November 2020)**

- Kyrgyzstan, North Macedonia

Detailed information is available at

[https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/\\_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/SessionDetails1.aspx?SessionID=1283&Lang=en](https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/SessionDetails1.aspx?SessionID=1283&Lang=en)

**78<sup>th</sup> virtual Session (15 - 25 February 2021)**

- Denmark

Detailed information is available at

[https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/\\_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/SessionDetails1.aspx?SessionID=2417&Lang=en](https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/SessionDetails1.aspx?SessionID=2417&Lang=en)

**79<sup>th</sup> virtual Session (21 June – 1 July 2021)**

- Belarus, Georgia

Detailed information is available at

[https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/\\_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/SessionDetails1.aspx?SessionID=2488&Lang=en](https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/SessionDetails1.aspx?SessionID=2488&Lang=en)

**80<sup>th</sup> Session (18 October – 12 November 2021)**

- Ecuador, Egypt, Indonesia, Kyrgyzstan, Maldives, Russian Federation, South Africa, South Sudan, Sweden, Yemen

Detailed information is available at

[https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/\\_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/SessionDetails1.aspx?SessionID=2489&Lang=en](https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/SessionDetails1.aspx?SessionID=2489&Lang=en)

**81<sup>st</sup> Session (7 February – 4 March 2022)**

- Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Dominican Republic, Gabon, Lebanon, Mongolia, Panama, Peru, Portugal, Senegal, Spain, Uganda, Uzbekistan

Detailed information is available at

[https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/\\_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/SessionDetails1.aspx?SessionID=2530&Lang=en](https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/SessionDetails1.aspx?SessionID=2530&Lang=en)

**III. The CEDAW and parliaments**

7. At its 41<sup>st</sup> session (June-July 2008), the Committee adopted a standard paragraph on parliaments. It was to be added into its concluding observations in order to draw the attention of State parties to the importance of involving parliaments not only in the reporting process under article 18 of the Convention but also in the implementation of all the provisions of the Convention. At its 45<sup>th</sup> session (January—February 2010), the Committee issued a statement on its relationship with parliamentarians that aimed to clarify and strengthen the role of national parliaments vis-à-vis the Convention. The note is also aimed at clarifying the relationship between the Committee and the IPU. (See annex 2 for the text of the statement).

## **ANNEX 1**

### **Joint Call by the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women and the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) on International Women's Day 2021**

**Geneva, 8 March 2021**

#### ***Our shared commitments***

Since the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the United Nations Member States have recognized the equal right of women and men to participate in public affairs and decision-making bodies, positions and processes.

This fundamental right is reaffirmed in the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discriminations against Women (CEDAW Convention), the Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the Convention on the Political Rights of Women, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the Universal Declaration on Democracy adopted by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), and the United Nations Security Council's Resolution No.1325 (2000) on Women, Peace and Security.

The establishment of inclusive and representative governance is also an essential condition for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030, in particular Goal 5.

#### ***Where do we stand collectively today?***

The impacts of crises are never gender neutral, and the COVID-19 crisis is no exception. An effective response to the pandemic and its social and economic consequences requires inclusive participation and leadership for strong and sustained action that is beneficial for everyone. The goal of achieving gender parity in decision-making and leadership is more crucial than ever.

While acknowledging the advancements made towards ensuring the participation of a constantly growing number of women in political decision-making positions and processes, progress is still slow and the average representation of women in political offices remains far lower than that of men.

In 2020, women accounted for only a quarter of parliamentary membership worldwide and 36.3 per cent of elected officials in local deliberative bodies. Globally, only 21.3 per cent of ministers were women. In only 30 cabinets worldwide did women make up at least 40 per cent of ministers. Women's under-representation as health ministers was especially concerning in the midst of the pandemic: while women made up 70 per cent of health sector workers, only 24.7 per cent of the world's health ministers were women. The scourge of violence against women in politics hinders development and challenges democracy everywhere. IPU studies have revealed that more than 80 per cent of women parliamentarians surveyed had faced psychological violence, at least 25 per cent had suffered physical violence and 20 per cent had been sexually harassed.

#### ***Shifting the paradigm now***

To build back better, the world needs a paradigm shift based on inclusive and representative governance by 2030. To achieve this objective, progress towards equality in politics can no longer be simply incremental. It requires prompt and firm action. While specific action may need to take into account the individual context of States around the world, progress essentially requires a widespread move towards concrete and impactful solutions.

The IPU and the CEDAW Committee call for an acceleration towards the equal representation and leadership of men and women in political office. Such acceleration should build on establishing gender parity targets and adopting and implementing national action plans to reach the parity target.

Gender parity in political office and leadership is key to:

- Remove barriers – substantive, structural or cultural – to equality between men and women;
- Open the world of politics to women from diverse backgrounds and groups in society;
- Transform the political arena into an enabling space/environment wherein women feel comfortable to work and contribute;
- Offer a positive example to society at large;
- Address and reflect the equality demands of a modern society; and
- Make political institutions and processes more efficient, effective and legitimate.

### ***Our call***

The IPU and the CEDAW Committee urge parliaments and governments to craft and adopt National Plans of Action setting concrete objectives, strategies, actions and deadlines suited to their national context. They should also regularly monitor and evaluate progress towards the goal of gender parity in politics by 2030. National Action Plans should aim to accelerate progress to reach gender parity by 2030, including by:

Reforming legal and policy frameworks to achieve gender parity:

- Adopting electoral gender quotas to reach the gender parity target;
- Reforming or repealing laws that discriminate against women and adopting comprehensive legislation that guarantees gender equality in all areas of life;
- Capping spending on electoral campaigns; and
- Adopting laws to prevent and criminalize gender-based violence against women in politics, including harassment and sexual harassment, and ensuring reparation for survivors.

Making institutions gender-sensitive and gender-responsive:

- Adopting the target of parity in all spheres of public life, including in political and administrative, as well as executive, legislative and judiciary bodies, at both the national and subnational levels;
- Ensuring that internal rules and codes of ethics help prevent all forms of discrimination and gender-based violence against women and provide for effective mechanisms to address them; and
- Mandating, institutionalizing and resourcing dedicated mechanisms for gender mainstreaming in state institutions.

Ensuring a conducive environment for gender equality:

- Fighting against negative gender stereotypes;
- Mobilizing all media formats and technological tools;
- Mobilizing and incentivizing political parties;
- Implementing information campaigns, raising awareness and training;
- Protecting and supporting women's human rights defenders and NGO representatives;
- Ensuring gender parity in peace and constitution-building processes; and
- Promoting human rights education and gender equality in education curricula.

**ANNEX 2****Statement adopted by the Committee on  
the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women**National parliaments and the Convention on the Elimination of  
All Forms of Discrimination against Women

1. At its forty-first session, the Committee adopted a standard paragraph on “Parliament” in its concluding observations in order to draw to the attention of State parties, the importance of involving its parliament in the reporting process under article 18 of the Convention and the implementation of all the provisions of the Convention.
2. The aim of the present note is to clarify and strengthen the role of national parliaments vis-à-vis the Convention. The note is also aimed at clarifying the relationship between the Committee and the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU).

**I. Role of Parliaments in the process of ratification of the Convention and its  
Optional Protocol and withdrawal of reservations**

3. The procedure for ratification/accession to international instruments as well as the withdrawal of reservations varies from State to State. In most States, approval by Parliament is necessary before the deposit of the instrument of ratification to the Secretary-General of the United Nations. Similarly, decisions concerning reservations as well as their withdrawals are also taken in Parliament. This Parliamentary procedure also applies to the Convention and its Optional Protocol. Consequently, Parliaments have a strategic role to play with respect to the ratification/accession of the Convention and its Optional Protocol. As the Convention and its Protocol have not attained universal ratification, Parliament can play a significant role in encouraging their State in becoming a party to the Convention and its Protocol. Similarly, as the Convention is the treaty body with the largest number of reservations, Parliament can also play a significant role in their withdrawal.

**II. Parliaments and the implementation of the Convention**

4. Parliaments and their members have a vital role to play in ensuring respect for the principles enunciated in the Convention and they have a wide range of tools at their disposal to do so. In discharging their traditional duty of overseeing the work of Government, Parliament can ensure that States parties comply fully with the provisions of the Convention. Parliaments and their members have a fundamental responsibility in their role of “constituency”, which is the basis of the legal system. The functions of Parliaments — notably legislative and budgetary functions and oversight of the executive branch of the Government — are at the heart of the implementation of the principles and rights enshrined in the Convention. The implementation of the Convention includes the incorporation of the principle of non-discrimination against women in national legislation, including in the Constitution of the State party. It also imposes an obligation on the State Party to condemn discrimination against women, to abolish all discriminatory laws and to adopt, whenever appropriate, temporary special measures to accelerate de facto equality between women and men. It also obligates States Parties to adopt appropriate policies and establish mechanisms aimed at promoting equality between sexes. As such, Parliamentarians can take active measures to ensure that national laws, policies, actions, programmes and budget reflect the principles and obligations in the Convention.

The budgetary functions and the monitoring of governmental action are vital for a better implementation of laws relating to equality between sexes, through the approval of adequate budgets and a regular oversight of the impact of governmental measures with respect to the condition of women.

Parliament, as an organ representing the population as a whole, reflects the diversity of opinion and interests in the country by reason of its privileged access to the whole population. As such, Parliamentarians can be key players in raising awareness of the Convention and its Protocol to the population at large and to women in particular.

### **III. Role of Parliaments in the drafting of reports and follow-up to the concluding observations of the Committee**

5. States are not legally obliged to involve Parliaments in the drafting of reports under article 18, as it is the State which has the primary responsibility of doing so. However, as the Convention is binding on all branches of Government, it is desirable that States parties involve Parliament in the reporting process under Article 18 of the Convention, the implementation of the Convention and the follow up to the concluding observations of the Committee. States parties are strongly encouraged to establish an appropriate mechanism to facilitate collaboration between Parliament and Government with regard to the input of its Parliament in the elaboration of reports, and its role in following up on the concluding observations of the Committee. The monitoring role of Parliament with respect to the compliance by the State of its international obligations could considerably enhance the implementation of the recommendations of the Committee.

6. Consequently, it is necessary for States parties to urge Parliament, many of which now have some structures in place, such as Parliamentary Committees focusing on human rights including gender equality, to take an active part in the work of the Committee in general, as well as in the implementation of its provisions in their own country.

### **IV. Action of the Inter-Parliamentary Union and its relationship with the Committee**

8. IPU has always strived to bring a parliamentary dimension to international cooperation and the work of the Committee. It is playing a key role in disseminating the Convention and its Optional Protocol among parliamentarians. During its conferences and the sessions of its Assembly, the organization regularly invites States that have not ratified the Convention and its Optional Protocol to do so. It also encourages States parties that have made reservations to the Convention to withdraw them and to fulfil their obligations. The Secretary- General of IPU writes to the presidents of the legislative assemblies to inform them about the upcoming consideration of the report of their country by the Committee. Once the Committee's concluding observations are available, a letter is sent to the parliament concerned to bring to its attention the recommendations adopted. In 2003 IPU, with the assistance of the Division for the Advancement of Women, published a practical guide for the use of parliamentarians on the Convention and its Optional Protocol. Every year, IPU organizes briefings on the Convention, addressed to women parliamentarians in particular. IPU also provides, in collaboration with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, technical assistance programmes in order to build the capacities of parliaments and help them fulfil their role regarding the implementation of Convention and its Optional Protocol. Since 2006, IPU also provides Committee with country specific information including data on the political participation of women in Parliament and in Government as well as at the local level with regard to States whose reports are under consideration by the Committee.

### **V. Recommendations**

8. The Committee recommends that States parties ensure the full participation of Parliament and its members in the reporting process and the full implementation of the Convention and its Protocol.

9. Given the key role of Parliament, the Committee recommends that States parties ensure that Parliamentarians, as representatives of the people, be made aware and informed of the Committee's work so that they may take it into account in their legislative functions and relay it to their constituencies and to the public at large.

10. The Committee recommends that State parties ensure that all relevant information is made available to Parliamentarians on a regular basis through appropriate Parliamentary support services.
11. The Committee further recommends that information received by Government on its obligations as a State party and other matters of concern are brought to the attention of Parliamentarians.
12. The Committee recommends that whenever members of the Committee are invited to visit a State party, it is desirable that the State party organize meetings with Parliamentarians.
13. The Committee encourages States parties to include in their reports, information on all parliamentary initiatives in the elaboration of laws in order to ensure full incorporation of CEDAW provisions into domestic legislation.
14. The Committee reiterates the importance of strengthening the national machinery dedicated to equality at the level of Parliament, such as Commissions on gender equality, missions and information on inquiries relating to violence against women, and improvement of legislation on equality between women and men.
15. The Committee draws the attention of States parties to the fact that institutional linkages and informal relations with civil society and women's organizations are fundamental to the promotion of women's rights by the Parliament.
16. The Committee encourages States parties to include in their delegation before the Committee for the examination of their report, members of Parliament as well as a special advisor in charge of relations between the Government and the Parliament in order to improve the visibility of parliamentary responsibilities.
17. The Committee calls on State parties to evaluate its collaboration with its national Parliament and other Parliaments and to take appropriate measures to enhance cooperation between Parliaments in order to exchange best practices on the implementation of the Convention.



**ANNEX 3**

**Summary Report**  
***Online Conference on Women's empowerment in the Arab region: Recent developments and the way forward***

**27 October 2021**  
15:00 – 17:00 (CEST)

**Overview**

In recent years, the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region has experienced some of the largest gains in the share of women MPs. In 2020, Egypt attained a record high of 27.7 per cent women parliamentarians elected in the lower chamber as a result of its 25 per cent quota law<sup>1</sup>. Since 2019, the United Arab Emirates has been home to the third most gender-balanced parliament, currently at 50 per cent women. Following parliamentary renewals in 2020, 19.9 per cent of parliamentarians in Saudi Arabia are women, thanks to policies on reserved seats. The speaker of parliament of Bahrain made history by being the first woman to lead her parliament and the second in the Arab region.

Progress has included the adoption of gender-responsive legislation in areas such as protection from gender-based violence, and the development of national plans to advance women's empowerment in several countries throughout the region, in compliance with the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).

Despite progress in several countries, taken as a whole, the proportion of women in parliament in the region is still the lowest among all regions. Women's representation in parliaments in MENA had reached 17.8 per cent by the beginning of 2021. Although the region has come a long way from its previous average of 4.3 per cent women MPs in 1995, gender-based challenges for women in politics are still extensive.

Parliaments have a key role to play in consolidating existing gains and achieving new ones in women's empowerment. In this vein, the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), in collaboration with the International Gender Champions (IGC), the Arab Parliament, and the Permanent Mission of the Arab Republic of Egypt to the United Nations and other international organizations in Geneva, brought together MPs and international leaders to take stock of progress made and lessons learned, and charter new paths for the promotion of Arab women's empowerment.

The event built on the review of Egypt in October 2021 by the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW Committee), during its 80th session. The CEDAW Committee monitors how far countries are complying with and implementing the Convention. The Committee is the only UN treaty body to have adopted a policy on cooperation with parliaments and with the IPU.<sup>2</sup>

The IPU similarly has existing partnerships with the Parliament of Egypt and with parliaments from throughout the Arab region in the area of gender equality, with a previous regional conference co-organized in Egypt on SDGs and Gender Equality in 2018. The IPU also has an ongoing cooperation agreement with the Arab Parliament on women's empowerment, which aims to strengthen gender equality efforts in the region.

---

<sup>1</sup> IPU. *Women in Parliament in 2020*. <http://www.ipu.org/women-in-parliament-2020>

<sup>2</sup> OHCHR. *National parliaments and the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women*. <http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/HRBodies/CEDAW/Statements/Parliamentarians.pdf>

The Online Conference on *Women's empowerment in the Arab region: Recent developments and the way forward* followed through on these existing partnerships by providing a global and regional perspective on women's empowerment. It was an avenue for the exchange of good practices and perspectives of how this collective goal can be achieved nationally and within the Arab region as a whole.

### **Executive summary**

On 27 October 2021, members of the IPU Bureau of Women Parliamentarians, members of the Arab geopolitical group of the IPU, chairpersons and office holders of IPU committees, bureaus and working groups, members of the Arab Parliament, and International Gender Champions, as well as representatives of international organizations and permanent missions, took part in a Conference focused on women's empowerment in the Arab region. The event was well attended, with 85 participants, including 36 members of parliament from both the Arab region and around the world. The Conference looked at recent country developments towards women's empowerment and envisioned a way forward to strengthen efforts in the region.

Welcoming remarks were given by Ms. Hala Ramzy Fayez, MP from Bahrain and First Vice-President of the IPU Bureau of Women Parliamentarians, Mr. Adel Abdulrahman Al-Asoumi, Speaker of the Arab Parliament, Dr. Ahmed Ihab Gamaleldin, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of the Arab Republic of Egypt to the United Nations and other international organizations in Geneva, and Mr. Martin Chungong, Secretary-General of the IPU and Global Chair of the International Gender Champions.

The opening remarks revolved around recognizing the path taken to reach the current status of women in parliament, as well as what still needed to be done for the realization of full gender equality. While it was well noted that many Arab countries had witnessed steps towards women's empowerment in recent years, the road to gender equality remained long and paved with challenges. Cooperation at the global level was crucial in creating lasting change. The IPU had supported the Parliament of Egypt in efforts towards gender parity and was an ally of the Commission entrusted with drafting the electoral law in 2014. The IPU had supported measures that were tailored to the electoral system in place, the new Constitution, and the reality of the political context on the ground. That recipe had allowed for long term results and a record high of 27.7 per cent women parliamentarians elected in the lower chamber in 2020. Experience had shown that parliaments which were open to partnering with others and learning from others were able to achieve stronger results in the long term.

Furthermore, the IPU's cooperation agreement with the Arab Parliament was aimed at bringing diverse stakeholders to the table in order to achieve parliaments' goal of being democratic and more equal institutions. **Mr. Martin Chungong** noted that the objective to strengthen gender equality efforts in the region could be achieved through strong partnership at the regional level. **Dr. Ahmed Ihab Gamaleldin** stressed the need to focus on parliamentary efforts to devise policies that empowered women. Building on this, **Mr. Adel Abdulrahman Al-Asoumi** proposed the creation of a parliamentary action plan which Arab countries could look to for inspiration.

The opening remarks were followed by a panel discussion that focused on a regional approach to women's empowerment. The discussion took place among panellists with expertise in the field. **Dr. Maya Morsy**, the President of the National Council for Women (Egypt), shared the story of women's empowerment in Egypt, where legislated quotas and a series of legal reforms had made the most difference. Constitutional quotas for women and youth in politics backed by national machineries had worked to create more inclusive decision-making. Moreover, political will was essential. Egypt had seen such achievements because of a strong commitment from leadership that had launched a national strategy with women's political participation and economic empowerment as pillars.

**Dr. Mastoura Al-Shammari**, Chair of the Arab Parliament's Gender Equality Committee, echoed the discussions during the opening session by stressing the need to coordinate work done nationally and create a common Arab vision. Understanding and valuing the unique role of Arab women parliamentarians needed to be complemented with different partnerships, both with the IPU and with different UN agencies.

**Ms. Zeina Hilal**, Manager of the IPU Gender and Youth Programmes, presented statistics on women in politics at the global, regional and national levels. While the Middle East and North African region had seen some gains in women's representation as of the beginning of 2021, it still remained the region with the lowest proportion of women in parliament. Along with the negative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on women's participation in politics, such statistics only stressed the urgency of stepping up efforts and expanding them across all countries of the region. **Ms. Nicole Ameline**, member of the CEDAW Committee, strongly encouraged parliaments to create a space to collaborate with civil society in order to accelerate progress. While CEDAW was focused on the law, the elaboration and reform of laws should also be high on the agenda of parliaments. Beyond political will, the introduction of strong special temporary measures, combatting stereotypes and promoting education were necessary strategies. Having a global approach was also important, and the CEDAW committee was ready and able to lend support to law-making initiatives.

The panel discussion was followed by an experience-sharing session on women's empowerment in the Arab region. The session focused on national approaches to women's empowerment, looking at how specific countries had successfully developed policies towards achieving gender equality, including in political representation. **Ms. Hala Ramzy Fayez**, MP from Bahrain and First Vice-President of the IPU Bureau of Women Parliamentarians, said that legal reform in Bahrain focusing on domestic violence and psycho-social support for survivors was key to countering violence against women and girls in the country. Such legislation, backed up by strong policies, was a strong pillar of Bahraini women's empowerment. **Dr. Aida Nassif**, MP from Egypt and Member of the IPU Bureau of Women Parliamentarians, stressed that women's empowerment hinged on ending traditional stereotypes. Egypt's constitutional and legal framework to support women's political leadership was a crucial step towards more empowerment for women and parity in all fields of life. **Ms. Mira Al Suwaidi**, MP from the United Arab Emirates and Member of the IPU Bureau of Women Parliamentarians, further echoed the need for a holistic approach to attain gender equality. In 2015, the UAE had launched a nationwide project to bridge the gap between men and women, especially in the political sphere, including a strong focus on youth participation, education and health.

Conference participants also contributed to the discussion by sharing perspectives from their countries. **Ms. Lammali Behdja**, MP from Algeria, noted that female MPs were the catalyst in changing the political environment for women at the political, educational and even sporting level. The government had invested in women's political participation, and in turn women politicians had cultivated seeds for further empowerment. **Dr. Hamda Al-Sulaiti**, MP from Qatar, also aimed to have a comprehensive vision for Qatar in terms of women's empowerment, and saw that a public-private partnership was a good step in bringing such a vision to life. **Ms. Fatemah Khamees**, MP from Syria, reminded the participants that the situation of women in conflict situations was affected due to the COVID-19 pandemic; a factor that national interventions had to take into account. **Ms. Adji Diarra Mergane Kanouté**, MP from Senegal, stressed that civil society involvement was important, and also spoke of her interest in holding similar dialogues in different regions, including Africa.

The Conference succeeded in its objective of being a platform where experiences among parliamentarians were shared, common challenges identified, and solutions collectively devised. As a whole, the Conference helped showcase the importance of forging partnerships with other parliaments and with civil society, having strong political will to effect key legal reforms, and establishing holistic approaches to further women's empowerment in the Arab region. It also brought MPs together to join forces in strengthening action towards women's empowerment in parliaments in the Arab region.