

Parliamentary engagement in CEDAW implementation, reporting and follow-up

IPU webinar series for parliaments of States scheduled for review in 2022

Webinar 1: CEDAW, the CEDAW Committee and avenues for parliamentary engagement

Report

A webinar organized by the Inter-Parliamentary Union to support members of parliament in their efforts to implement the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)

Virtual event, 19 May 2022, 2 p.m.–5 p.m. (CEST)

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Introduction

In order to support members of parliament (MPs) in their efforts to implement the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW, the CEDAW Convention or the Convention),¹ the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) is holding a series of webinars for a select group of parliaments. They target first and foremost parliaments whose countries are reporting on their compliance with the Convention. The webinars are aimed at accompanying parliaments through the reporting process and supporting them in taking action for enhanced implementation of CEDAW. They provide information on the Convention, on the work of the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (the CEDAW Committee) and on the reporting process. They facilitate the exchange of good practices between MPs going through this process, and they support discussions between MPs and CEDAW Committee members on enhanced parliamentary involvement.

The first webinar in this series was held on 19 May 2022. It provided MPs with an opportunity to interact with members from other parliaments, and with CEDAW Committee experts, on ways to engage with the Committee, on provisions of the Convention that are relevant to their work, and on ways that the Convention can be used to advance gender equality.

Invitees to this first webinar included MPs from States that are tentatively scheduled for review at upcoming CEDAW sessions in 2022,² as well as from parliaments that currently benefit from technical cooperation with the IPU.

The general objective of this webinar series is for MPs to build their knowledge of CEDAW and enhance their commitment and action for its implementation.

The expected results are as follows:

- Male and female MPs have an overview of the rights entrenched in the CEDAW Convention, of the Optional Protocol to the Convention, and of the mandate and procedures of the CEDAW Committee.
- Male and female MPs understand how to take part in a CEDAW Committee session and are aware of the expected outcomes of a country review.
- Male and female MPs have a concrete understanding of the types of concluding observations the CEDAW Committee has recently issued in areas of current policymaking.
- Male and female MPs are equipped to contribute to the implementation of the Convention through their work.
- Male and female MPs follow up and present insights on the realization of activities ensuring CEDAW implementation through parliamentary work.

The first webinar was attended by 18 MPs (16 women and 2 men) from 12 countries. Parliamentary staff from 4 other countries also attended as observers. Overall, there were 52 participants. It was divided into three sessions. As well as being briefed on the Convention and the Committee, participants also heard concrete examples of how CEDAW can be used as a tool

¹ United Nations, *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women*, (New York, 18 December 1979): www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/Convention-elimination-all-forms-discrimination-against-women.

² States scheduled for review by the CEDAW Committee in June and October 2022 included as of 26 April 2022: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Belgium, Bolivia (Plurinational State of), China, Finland, Gambia, Honduras, Jamaica, Mongolia, Morocco, Namibia, Portugal, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Switzerland, Türkiye, United Arab Emirates and Ukraine.

for parliaments and MPs to advance gender equality, and how to best prepare for parliamentary engagement in CEDAW review and follow-up.

Parliamentary engagement in CEDAW implementation, reporting and follow-up

Webinar 1: CEDAW, the CEDAW Committee and avenues for parliamentary engagement

Meeting Chair: Ms. Hala Ramzi Fayez, Member of the Shura Council of Bahrain and First Vice-President of the IPU Bureau of Women Parliamentarians.

Opening remarks: Mr. Martin Chungong, IPU Secretary General, and Ms. Nahla Haidar, Vice-Chair of the CEDAW Committee.

Session I: Briefing on CEDAW and the CEDAW Committee

Panellists: Ms. Nicole Ameline, member of the CEDAW Committee and former member of the National Assembly of France, and Ms. Nahla Haidar, Vice-Chair of the CEDAW Committee.

Session II: CEDAW as a tool for parliaments and their members to advance gender equality and women's rights and empowerment

Panellists: Ms. Nahla Haidar, Vice-Chair of the CEDAW Committee, and Ms. Nicole Ameline, member of the CEDAW Committee and former member of the National Assembly of France.

Session III: Preparing for parliamentary engagement in CEDAW implementation, reporting and follow-up

Panellists: Mr. Akmal Saidov, First Deputy Speaker of the Legislative Chamber of Uzbekistan and IPU Vice-President, Ms. Jeehan Mahmood, Chair of the Parliamentary Committee on Human Rights and Gender of the People's Majilis of Maldives, and member of the Bureau of the IPU Standing Committee on Democracy and Human Rights, and Ms. Martha Lucía Micher, Chair of the Committee on Gender Equality of the Senate of Mexico.

Background

Ensuring gender equality and full respect for women's human rights is a key commitment of the international community. It is recognized as essential to making democracies strong, as well as to achieving sustainable development and peace.

The CEDAW Convention is at the core of the human rights architecture for the promotion of women's rights and provides valuable guidance on the achievement of gender equality in all areas, ranging from within the family and education, to economic and political life.

189 States³ are party to the Convention, making it one of the most widely ratified treaties in the world. However, CEDAW remains one of the conventions most subject to reservations and facing major challenges in terms of implementation, in particular in a post-COVID-19 context.

The United Nations CEDAW Committee, which monitors the implementation of the Convention and investigates alleged breaches, has recently expressed its concern at major setbacks in women's rights and called for renewed political commitment to strengthening these rights.

All States Parties are required to present a report on the implementation of CEDAW every four years to the CEDAW Committee. This is a key opportunity to take stock of advances made and priorities that need to be addressed in implementing the Convention.

For more than 20 years, the IPU has been supporting parliaments towards stronger involvement in CEDAW implementation, and in the reporting process in particular. This engagement is a key success factor in leading the required legal reforms, providing resources, and changing mentalities and culture – all of which are necessary for the realization of women's rights.

The IPU and the CEDAW Committee have built a long-standing cooperative relationship designed to promote the implementation of the Convention through the action of parliaments around the world. In 2010, the Committee adopted a statement encouraging parliaments to participate actively in their State's reporting to the Committee and in the implementation of the Convention. During Committee sessions, States Parties are systematically asked about the level of parliamentary involvement in the reporting process. The Committee also requests that its concluding observations be presented to the parliaments of the States in question, and calls on those parliaments to follow up concretely on implementation of the Convention. At its most recent session, held in February 2022, the Committee decided to work with the IPU to jointly draft updated guidance on women's equal participation in political and public decision-making.

Meeting report

Opening remarks

Ms. Hala Ramzi Fayez (Member of the Shura Council of Bahrain and First Vice-President of the IPU Bureau of Women Parliamentarians) opened the meeting by welcoming participants and introducing herself. CEDAW is at the core of the human rights architecture for the promotion of women's rights and provides valuable guidance on the achievement of gender equality in all areas, ranging from within the family and education, to economic and political life. It is also a powerful tool for parliaments to use in advancing gender equality through their legislative, oversight and representational functions. She outlined the content of the webinar sessions and emphasized that the IPU stands ready to support parliaments in their engagement for CEDAW implementation, reporting and follow-up.

Mr. Martin Chungong (IPU Secretary General) highlighted that gender equality is at the core of the IPU's mission, since it is essential to democracy, sustainable peace and social justice. It is

³ United Nations, "United Nations Treaty Collection – Status of Treaties: 8. Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women": https://treaties.un.org/Pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=TREATY&mtdsg_no=IV-8&chapter=4&clang=en.

also vital to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), towards which the Organization is working. CEDAW provides a solid basis for the work of the IPU and its Member Parliaments to deliver on gender equality. Mr. Chungong indicated that he was himself a gender champion and had personally pledged to ensure that the IPU was gender-responsive in its work, noting that 2022 marked 10 years since the adoption of the IPU's *Plan of Action for Gender-sensitive Parliaments*, which was just one of the Organization's initiatives to help parliaments become drivers for gender equality. The IPU also carries out awareness-raising on the Convention and supports parliaments with legislative and other initiatives that strive towards the implementation of the Convention. The IPU is there to serve its members and stands ready to provide support where needed in order to make CEDAW a reality everywhere.

Ms. Nahla Haidar (Vice-Chair of the CEDAW Committee) reiterated that the Convention provided a basis for gender equality in all countries. Although the Convention is almost universally ratified following 40 years of work by the Committee, it remains the treaty with the most reservations. Lifting reservations is essential to the full implementation of the Convention and the realization of women's rights, and parliaments have a key role to play in this regard. In relation to the current global context, crises exacerbate gender inequality because they immediately and disproportionately affect women. The Committee is currently witnessing significant setbacks. Collaboration between the Committee and parliaments is crucial for the implementation of the Convention and allows the Committee to keep abreast of successful practices. The Committee is currently developing guidance on women's participation in the political sphere, including in parliament.

Session 1: Briefing on CEDAW and the CEDAW Committee

Overview

The first session focused on CEDAW and the CEDAW Committee, including State reporting obligations and the State review process. Expected processes at the upcoming 82nd and 83rd sessions of the CEDAW Committee, which will take place in June and October 2022, were also discussed. The session began with a brief online poll on participants' familiarity with the CEDAW Convention. Participants confirmed that they had good knowledge of the Convention. The two CEDAW experts, Ms. Nahla Haidar and Ms. Nicole Ameline, then gave a presentation on the topic. This was followed by an open discussion with the participants.

Ms. Nicole Ameline (member of the CEDAW Committee and former member of the National Assembly of France) emphasized that MPs must be familiar with the engagements their States have made by ratifying international conventions. CEDAW has 189 States Parties, making it one of the most prominent instruments globally. The Convention is both a binding instrument for States Parties and an operational road map. All concluding observations the CEDAW Committee issues to States Parties contain a specific paragraph on parliaments. Ms. Ameline delved deeper into what the Convention entailed de facto, calling on participants to see equality not just as an obligation but also as an investment for a better and more inclusive future. Equality must be viewed as a response to the challenges we face today. It is essential that parliaments are aware of their role in implementing the Convention, and of its significance to their country's development.

She went on to present different areas covered by the Convention, including the following subjects:

- 1. Constitutional and legislative architecture:** There is no progress without a sound legal framework that clearly defines discrimination and discriminatory practices. This definition must include intersecting discrimination, which requires an understanding of how different identities build on each other and of the impact this has on segments of the population. This legal architecture must therefore highlight the concept of inclusiveness, ensuring that no one is left behind. Another concept that should be reflected in the legal framework is accountability, especially towards civil society. National human rights institutions (NHRIs) and civil society organizations (CSOs) should be aware of the Convention and be able to monitor its implementation. There must be a national gender machinery that monitors implementation based on disaggregated data. This can only be possible with strong coordination between entities in charge of implementing initiatives related to the CEDAW Convention. On a related note, the monitoring of CEDAW implementation within parliament must also be strengthened.
- 2. Women's representation in politics:** The CEDAW Committee is currently developing updated guidance on women's political leadership. In fact, the full representation of women in politics is a condition for the realization of all rights entrenched in the Convention and cannot be separated from the elimination of discrimination against women. One way to increase women's representation in politics is to use special measures (also known as affirmative action measures). These require strong political will to enact, but have proved to be effective.
- 3. Economic inclusion:** Related to the previous point, the economic life of women is a part of the Convention that parliaments can integrate into their rule agenda. This includes ensuring that women have equal employment and livelihood opportunities, as well as equal pay, and are able and empowered to participate in the economy without discrimination.
- 4. Family and status law:** Family law and status law are two aspects that parliaments should prioritize when implementing the Convention nationally. This includes ensuring that the age of marriage is set at 18 years and that laws in these areas do not discriminate against women and girls.

All rights entrenched in the Convention are intrinsically linked: progress cannot be made in one area without progress in all others.

In terms of parliaments' involvement in monitoring and implementing the Convention, it is important for MPs to be included in country delegations that meet with the CEDAW Committee for periodic dialogues. After such meetings, the Committee publishes concluding observations, which provide a road map for implementation of the Convention. Parliaments are responsible for implementing the guidance contained in these concluding observations, together with the executive.

Ms. Ameline concluded her presentation by reiterating that members of the CEDAW Committee were available to support parliaments in drafting and reviewing legislation to ensure that it is efficient and effective for women.

Ms. Nahla Haidar (Vice-Chair of the CEDAW Committee) pointed out that there are still 40 countries with no laws on violence against women and girls (VAWG). While such legal frameworks do not guarantee the absence of this kind of violence, they enable action to prevent and punish such acts. It is therefore important that MPs work to adopt legislation on VAWG and, once they

have done so, to follow up on its implementation. It is also important to assess the impact of laws. Peer-to-peer exchanges with other parliaments provide opportunities for comparison and serve as a source of inspiration. Most of the reservations States have made to the Convention concern the area of family law and are based on religious and traditional considerations. There is religious guidance that supports the rights entrenched in the Convention, including the definition of a child. Marriage under 18 years of age therefore runs contrary to the aforementioned rights entrenched in the Convention, making child and forced marriage an issue that should no longer be questioned.

Discussion

Ms. Dalal Jasim Al-Zayed (member of the Shura Council of Bahrain) stressed that much work remains to be done to ensure that the Convention is fully implemented. Both the legal framework and its implementation are essential. Progress can only be achieved by revising existing legal frameworks, which requires parliamentary action. She asked what more could be done to engage MPs – especially male MPs – in CEDAW. The Supreme Council for Women in Bahrain has been very active in the CEDAW process.

Ms. Nicole Ameline responded by saying that MPs should discuss the national report that will be presented to the Committee, and that they should review the outcome document to determine an implementation strategy. Consultations with human rights institutions and CSOs are essential in this process.

Ms. Meera Al Suwaidi (member of the Federal National Council of the United Arab Emirates) explained that great progress had been made in the country in terms of gender equality. In fact, the United Arab Emirates has nine women ministers, . The presidency of the United Nations Security Council is currently held by the United Arab Emirates whose Ambassador in New York is a woman, and women are able to contribute proactively at all levels. The country is also a very active member of the IPU. Closing her intervention, Ms. Al Suwaidi asked whether the IPU could guide MPs in drafting and implementing laws for CEDAW implementation.

Ms. Martha Lucía Mícher (Chair of the Committee on Gender Equality of the Senate of Mexico) shared that, since 2011, international human rights treaties signed by Mexico – including CEDAW – had automatically become part of domestic law. The Congress of the Union of Mexico also comprises an equal number of women and men. However, many MPs in the country have limited knowledge of CEDAW. She suggested introducing a requirement for all MPs to undergo an assessment of their familiarity with CEDAW upon entering office. Political parties should also take part in this process and parliamentarians, in their own capacity, should ensure that their actions and proposals are aligned with the Convention.

“Political parties should make sure that no parliamentarian starts his or her work without [knowledge of] CEDAW. As legislators, we should quote CEDAW in our initiatives. We should make sure that our proposals are aligned with the Convention.”

*Ms. Martha Lucía Mícher
Chair of the Committee on Gender Equality, Senate of Mexico*

Ms. Zeynep Yıldız (member of the Grand National Assembly of Türkiye) explained that, in recent years, various efforts had been made to eliminate discrimination, including through relevant provisions in basic laws and regulations. For instance, article 10 of the Constitution was amended to allow for affirmative action measures. In 2004, Türkiye amended article 19 of its Constitution to guarantee that international treaties, including CEDAW, take precedence over domestic legislation. When it comes to programming and implementation, the country has also opened

1,000 shelters for women and children, as well as setting up the Committee on Equal Opportunity for Women and Men. Although every country has its own cultural context, peer-to-peer exchanges among MPs encourage them to go further.

Ms. Jhajaira Urresta (member of the National Assembly of Ecuador) is the second-youngest MP in the country. She shared that, in 2019, Ecuador suffered political unrest, which resulted in a number of women affected. Since 2017, women activists – especially young girls – have suffered attacks. The absence of legislation on gender-based violence (GBV) in Ecuador is concerning, and further action is needed to implement GBV policies.

Ms. Nicole Ameline emphasized that the observations and experiences shared by participants in the first session were extremely valuable, and that national action plans for implementation of the Convention would not only confirm States' commitment to CEDAW, but also allow priorities to be identified and national guidance for its implementation to be drawn up.

Lessons learned:

- Constitutional and legislative frameworks that reflect the CEDAW Convention are an important enabling factor and a basis for national implementation.
- One way to increase women's participation in politics is through affirmative action measures, which require strong political will to enact but have proved to be effective.
- Religious guidance for the implementation of the CEDAW Convention is available. Religion should therefore no longer constitute a ground for reservations – on the engagement of women in political and economic life, on family and status laws, or on any other area covered by the Convention.
- Some 40 countries still have no law on VAWG.

Recommendations:

- ✓ MPs should lead in ensuring that the legal framework in their country reflects the Convention.
- ✓ The national report presented to the CEDAW Committee should be discussed in parliament.
- ✓ Strong collaboration with human rights institutions and CSOs is needed to actively support and monitor the implementation of the Convention.
- ✓ MPs' knowledge on, and engagement in, the CEDAW process should be promoted through the provision of training and awareness-raising efforts.
- ✓ Parliaments should adopt action plans to implement concluding observations issued by the CEDAW Committee.
- ✓ The IPU should provide support for the drafting and revision of laws, in order to ensure they are aligned with the Convention.
- ✓ The IPU should support the engagement of male MPs in the Convention.

Session 2: CEDAW as a tool for parliaments and their members to advance gender equality and women's rights and empowerment

Overview

In the second session, CEDAW experts elaborated on the CEDAW Committee's mandate to interpret the provisions of the Convention, including through country-specific concluding observations and general recommendations. These tools provide guidance on how the Convention can be applied to emerging topics such as climate change, conflict prevention, VAWG, harmful practices and family law, as well as to current country-specific contexts. The two CEDAW experts, Ms. Nahla Haidar and Ms. Nicole Ameline, gave a presentation on the topic. This was followed by an open discussion with participants.

Ms. Nahla Haidar (Vice-Chair of the CEDAW Committee) emphasized that article 21 of the Convention stated that the Committee may make suggestions and general recommendations based on the information received from States Parties. Such recommendations constitute soft law, adapting the Convention to the specific context of a country and to emerging topics. For instance, the Committee has noted a lack of clarity over how issues of war, displacement and asylum-seeking affect women's rights, and over what States' obligations are in terms of adopting legal frameworks to eliminate discrimination.

In order to clarify these points, the Committee developed general recommendation (GR) 28, which outlines States Parties' obligations in terms of revising and adapting their legal framework to the Convention. The Committee also adopted GR 30 on women in conflict prevention, conflict and post-conflict situations, as well as GR 31 on harmful practices, which was developed jointly with the Committee on the Rights of the Child. The Committee is currently working on a new general recommendation on indigenous women, which might be of interest to at least two parliaments represented at this webinar (Mexico and Ecuador).

"The core obligation of CEDAW is to ensure equality in constitutions, laws and legal frameworks. Women who are subject to intersecting forms of discrimination face specific vulnerabilities, and legislation helps in addressing these stereotypes."

*Ms. Nahla Haidar
Vice-Chair of the CEDAW Committee*

Ms. Haidar then elaborated on the process leading to the adoption of GR 37, which included research on the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030 and consultations with a variety of actors around the world. The Committee noted the extent to which disasters and climate change exacerbate inequalities, in part because women have less access to resources such as land and water, and to decision-making at all levels. Moreover, women who are subject to intersecting forms of discrimination face specific vulnerabilities. States Parties to the Convention have an obligation to address this situation through their legal framework. They must also ensure that women are at the table when issues related to climate change and natural disasters are discussed. In fact, disaster risk reduction in the context of climate change and climate resilience requires empowerment, inclusivity and non-discriminatory participation.

Ms. Haidar underlined the role of gender equality in promoting climate justice and expanded on the need to build on informal and indigenous knowledge of women in the context of climate

change. In October 2022, the CEDAW Committee will adopt GR 39 on indigenous women and will then officially start working on the new and upcoming GR on women's participation in political and public life.

Ms. Nicole Ameline (member of the CEDAW Committee and former member of the National Assembly of France) explained that now that the CEDAW Committee decided to develop a new general recommendation on parity and the full representation of women in decision-making at all levels, the Committee will initiate a participatory process, seeking contributions from States and MPs interested in engaging on the issue. She invited the participants to take part in this process, explaining that MPs would be asked to think about how women can move from being considered victims to being recognized as leaders. The process will also provide an opportunity to reflect on the mandate of parliaments themselves, as well as on the leadership role of international organizations. The general recommendation will also elaborate on new tools and practices to promote women's political participation, including special measures and training programmes.

"We have to think about how women can move from being considered victims to being looked at as leaders ... We don't just want to improve the status of women; we want to re-evaluate the status of women. Integrating this into our legal and policy frameworks will require political will."

*Ms. Nicole Ameline
Member of the CEDAW Committee
Former member of the National Assembly of France*

Discussion

Ms. Dyah Roro Esti (member of the House of Representatives of Indonesia) explained that Indonesia had ratified the CEDAW Convention in 1984. Indonesia passed law number 16 on marriage in 2019, and law number 12 on sexual violence in April 2022. Indonesian law on general elections requires a minimum of 30% women in parliament. Although this target has not been reached in the current legislative term (2019–2024), the share of seats in parliament held by women now stands at about 22% (an increase of 2 percentage points). Indonesia also has national and provincial women's caucuses. However, MPs are not actively involved in the CEDAW reporting process. Ms. Roro Esti concluded by underscoring the importance of peer-to-peer exchanges among MPs, of MPs' engagement in monitoring the implementation of CEDAW, and of gender-related legislation.

Ms. Sabrina Khasayeva (member of the National Assembly of Azerbaijan) stated that Azerbaijan had taken significant steps to promote the equal distribution of resources and women's involvement in all fields, to raise awareness on gender equality and to eliminate GBV, in accordance with the CEDAW Convention. The principle of equality between women and men is enshrined in Article 25 of the country's Constitution, and national action programmes reflect this commitment. Soft law is used as a way to encourage women to engage in business opportunities. The first female Vice-President of Azerbaijan was appointed in 2017, and the National Assembly appointed its first female Speaker in 2020.

Ms. Zeynep Yıldız (member of the Grand National Assembly of Türkiye) noted that women currently held 17.3 per cent of seats in parliament in Türkiye, which is the highest representation since women were granted the right to stand for election in 1935. Women are also the majority in academia and in the judicial branch.

Ms. Dalal Jasim Al-Zayed (member of the Shura Council of Bahrain) highlighted the need for MPs to receive guidance on developing domestic legislation on VAWG, and for judges to receive training on the CEDAW Convention. In Bahrain, law enforcement officials are specifically trained to earn women's trust and to encourage them to seek the protection they need. Although there are many young women in parliament in Bahrain, more incentives are needed for girls to enter the political sphere. The CEDAW Committee should track whether women MPs have leadership roles in parliament, as Speakers or heads of committees.

"In Bahrain, we have focused on training in rule of law enforcement mechanisms to ensure that women can trust law enforcement and get the protection they need."

*Ms. Dalal Jasim Al-Zayed
Member of the Shura Council of Bahrain*

Ms. Wilma Andrade (member of the National Assembly of Ecuador and Second Vice-President of the IPU Bureau of Women Parliamentarians) indicated that the 2008 Constitution of Ecuador

provides for parity in all State functions and the elimination of all forms of violence and discrimination. The principle of parity has been translated into law, including through quotas that will be applied gradually. At the upcoming elections in 2023, the quota will reach 30%. A fund has been established to implement and monitor these constitutional provisions, and work is ongoing in parliament to develop a law on violence against women in politics.

"I am convinced that only if we have women in decision-making positions, we will see real progress. However, we still have challenges to address, especially in the participation of indigenous women ... Women representatives of minorities need space to participate in decision-making. The IPU should develop a guide that will enable us to facilitate the participation of women from marginalized groups in decision-making."

*Ms. Wilma Andrade
Member of the National Assembly of Ecuador*

Significant progress can only be made if women are in decision-making positions. But challenges remain, especially in terms of the participation of indigenous women. The IPU should develop a guide on the participation

of marginalized women in decision-making.

Ms. Martha Lucía Mícher (Chair of the Committee on Gender Equality of the Senate of Mexico) explained that Mexico was the second country in the world, after Rwanda, to enshrine the principle of gender equality in its constitution. She elaborated on how this constitutional provision came to pass and on the resistances that arose in the process, including doubts around women's interest in entering and participating in politics – especially in decision-making positions – and around their ability to serve as senators. In order to promote women's participation in decision-making, it is essential to address violence against women in politics.

"Had we not addressed violence against women in politics, we would not have been able to promote women's participation in decision-making."

*Ms. Martha Lucía Mícher
Chair of the Committee on Gender Equality of the
Senate of Mexico*

Ms. Nicole Ameline stressed that the long-standing collaborative relationship between the IPU, the CEDAW Committee and parliaments provided a foundation for implementing the priorities identified during the webinar, including laws on VAWG, a new culture of governance that requires women's participation at all levels of responsibility within parliament and on committees, and strengthened cooperation between the executive and parliament.

Ms. Nahla Haidar emphasized the importance of ensuring decision makers understand that women are able and equipped to participate in politics. We need to build on male gender champions, who are ready and willing to be involved and included in this process. It is also vital to raise awareness among young women about the importance of them being engaged in politics from a very young age.

"We have to change the narrative. Women are able and equipped to participate. Until recently, we didn't have mechanisms for accountability. But now we do. It is an obligation for the older generation to prepare the youth better."

*Ms. Nahla Haidar
Vice-Chair of the CEDAW Committee*

Lessons learned:

- The core obligation of CEDAW is to ensure equality in constitutions, laws and legal frameworks. Women who are subject to intersecting forms of discrimination face specific vulnerabilities, and legislation helps in addressing these stereotypes.
- General recommendations adapt the Convention to emerging topics such as conflict and climate change.
- Women representatives of minorities need space to engage in decision-making. The inclusion of indigenous women in leadership is essential in addressing issues such as climate change and disaster risk reduction.
- The CEDAW Committee will embark on a process to develop a general recommendation on women's participation in public and political life, at all decision-making levels. Parliaments will be invited to engage in this process.

Recommendations:

- ✓ More should be done to promote peer-to-peer exchanges among parliaments, as a way to ensure parliamentary engagement in the CEDAW process.
- ✓ Law enforcement officials should receive training on the CEDAW Convention.
- ✓ While examining trends in the number of women in politics is important, it is also essential to look at their function, including tracking whether women MPs have leadership roles in parliament, as Speakers or heads of committees.
- ✓ The IPU should develop a guide for MPs on facilitating the participation of women from marginalized groups in decision-making.
- ✓ Laws and mechanisms – such as legislated quotas and related electoral laws – should be used to ensure women's participation in politics.
- ✓ To promote women's participation in decision-making, it is also key to address violence against women in politics.
- ✓ It is essential to promote young women's participation in politics, building on male gender champions in order to reach this goal.

Session 3: Preparing for parliamentary engagement in CEDAW implementation, reporting and follow-up

Overview

The third session focused on the role of parliaments in ratifying CEDAW and its Optional Protocol which allows for the filing of individual complaints and the conduct of inquiries by the CEDAW Committee, as well as in withdrawing reservations and in implementing the Convention, including reporting to the CEDAW Committee and taking action nationally to turn the Committee's recommendations into reality. Participants heard from three MPs, who presented the experiences of their parliaments in this field.

Ms. Jeehan Mahmood (Chair of the Parliamentary Committee on Human Rights and Gender of the People's Majilis of Maldives, and member of the Bureau of the IPU Standing Committee on Democracy and Human Rights) stated that parliaments of States that had ratified CEDAW played an instrumental role in implementing the Convention through their legislative, oversight and representational functions. Gender equality committees, comprising male and female MPs, can have a vital role in following up on CEDAW implementation. The People's Majilis of Maldives has established a special Parliamentary Committee on Human Rights and Gender for precisely this purpose.

The Parliamentary Committee's standing orders specify its role in following up on the Convention. Each year, it meets the country's NHRI to discuss the implementation of CEDAW recommendations. The Parliamentary Committee also examines all legislation pertaining to women's rights prior to its submission to the plenary. In 2021, for example, the Parliamentary Committee endorsed the amendment to the sexual offences law, making sure that it was in line with the Convention and the recommendations issued by the CEDAW Committee. As a result, all forms of marital rape are now included in the legislative framework of Maldives. The Parliamentary Committee also reviewed an amendment to a law on decentralization, which introduced a quota for female councillors. By examining the yearly budget, the Parliamentary Committee ensures that the gender machinery is sufficiently funded. Finally, the Parliamentary Committee recently submitted guidance calling for a gender-responsive budget to parliament. This initiative is expected to be implemented in the course of 2022.

"I am an advocate of gender equality committees, which can follow up on implementation of the Convention. All legislation pertaining to the principles of CEDAW is examined by our Parliamentary Committee on Human Rights and Gender before it is submitted to the plenary."

*Ms. Jeehan Mahmood
Chair of the Parliamentary Committee on Human Rights and
Gender of the People's Majilis of Maldives*

At the most recent CEDAW session, members of the Parliamentary Committee were part of the delegation of Maldives and responded to all questions related to legislation. This experience fuelled their intention to implement the legislative amendments recommended by the CEDAW Committee, including on evidence in cases of violence. Appearing before the CEDAW Committee gave the Parliamentary Committee a sense of ownership of their responsibilities with regard to implementing the Convention.

It is also the role of parliaments to support government in withdrawing reservations to the Convention. Recently, Maldives partially withdrew its own reservations.

Ms. Mahmood concluded her presentation by pointing out the importance of having men support and champion women's rights in a team or committee on gender equality.

Mr. Akmal Saidov (IPU Vice-President and First Deputy Speaker of the Legislative Chamber of Uzbekistan) presented three areas in which his country had advanced, in line with the recommendations of the CEDAW Committee:

- 1. Strengthening the institutional base:** The Senate of Uzbekistan recently established a Committee on Women and Gender Equality, while the Legislative Chamber created a Commission on Family and Women's Affairs. A parliamentary commission that monitors the implementation of national goals and objectives as part of work towards attaining the SDGs has also been set up, with gender equality being a strong component under SDG 5. Another parliamentary commission works to ensure that Uzbekistan complies with international human rights obligations. Finally, a National Commission on Gender Equality was recently established under the leadership of the Chair of the Senate, comprising MPs alongside representatives of government and CSOs.
- 2. Making the legal framework gender-sensitive:** The Supreme Assembly of Uzbekistan recently adopted laws to guarantee equal rights and opportunities for women and men, to protect women from harassment and violence, to guarantee the reproductive health of citizens, to establish an equal age of marriage for men and women, and to lift provisions in the Labour Code that restricted women's access to gainful activity. The Senate also approved a National Gender Strategy.
- 3. Involving parliament in reporting to the CEDAW Committee:** At its meeting in February 2022, the CEDAW Committee examined the sixth periodic report of Uzbekistan. The country's delegation to the meeting included representatives of both chambers of parliament. It also included two women chairs of parliamentary committees, as well as other women representatives of government. During the dialogue, MPs answered questions. Members of civil society were also able to observe the review for the first time. The recommendations issued by the CEDAW Committee were then discussed in parliament, and a national action plan is being crafted to guide implementation.

Uzbekistan will publish a Uzbek-language version of the IPU handbook entitled *Gender-responsive law-making: Handbook for Parliamentarians No. 33*. The country will also host the IPU Summit of Women Speakers of Parliament in September 2022 and is proposing to hold a side event on human rights for women MPs during the Global Forum on Human Rights Education, which is scheduled to take place in October 2022.

Based on the country's experience with CEDAW, Mr. Saidov recommended that the United Nations General Assembly adopt a resolution on the role of parliament in implementing the SDGs.

Ms. Martha Lucía Mícher (Chair of the Committee on Gender Equality of the Senate of Mexico) emphasized that the CEDAW Convention was a guiding instrument for feminist legislators, and that the Senate of Mexico was using the Convention and its general recommendations as fundamental references in the law-making process. As such, the Senate Committee on Gender Equality recently identified legal provisions that allowed for marriage before 18 years of age, worked to extend protection orders in cases of violence against women in politics from three days to one month, and classified the sharing of intimate pictures online as a crime. The Foreign Affairs Committee promoted Mexico's ratification of International Labour Organization Convention No. 189 (Decent Work for Domestic Workers) and Convention No. 190 (Eliminating Violence and

Harassment in the World of Work). However, there remains work to do, including a constitutional revision on sexual and reproductive rights and legislative revisions on national safety net systems. The Mexican National Institute of Women has set up a commission to follow up on the implementation of CEDAW Committee recommendations.

Concluding her intervention, Ms. Mícher stressed that harmonizing legislative instruments was essential, especially in decentralized States.

Discussion

Mr. Laurent Wehrli (member of the National Council of Switzerland) underscored the importance of information and training on CEDAW for MPs of all ages, including men and women, and of building on a strong partnership with men to act on gender equality.

Lessons learned:

- Parliamentary committees can play a central role in implementing the CEDAW Convention and following up on CEDAW Committee recommendations, including by adopting gender-sensitive laws and monitoring their implementation, in partnership with a diverse group of stakeholders.
- A mechanism that reviews CEDAW recommendations in parliament facilitates implementation.
- Having MPs participate in the periodic review by the CEDAW Committee and in reporting to the Committee gives them ownership of the Convention implementation process.
- Capacity-building on CEDAW is crucial, and may be a successful avenue to engage more male MPs.
- The use of the CEDAW Convention and its general recommendations as fundamental references in law-making facilitates the harmonization of legislative frameworks.

Recommendations:

- ✓ Ensure parliament has a structure such as a parliamentary committee clearly mandated to ensure CEDAW implementation, monitoring and follow-up.
- ✓ Make parliamentary review of the Convention a systematic exercise.
- ✓ Ensure that MPs participate in the periodic review by the CEDAW Committee and in reporting to the Committee.
- ✓ Invest in capacity-building and knowledge-sharing on CEDAW within parliament.
- ✓ Make use of the CEDAW Convention and its general recommendations as references in law-making.

Conclusion

Ms. Hala Ramzi Fayez (member of the Shura Council of Bahrain and First Vice-President of the IPU Bureau of Women Parliamentarians) reiterated that the IPU stood ready to support Members in their efforts to promote equality between men and women in law and in practice, including through awareness-raising among MPs on CEDAW and its link to the SDGs. The IPU can assist with reviewing existing laws from a gender perspective and with examining draft laws on the subject, in order to strengthen gender mechanisms within parliaments so that they can better monitor the effective implementation of existing laws with respect to CEDAW.

Ms. Faye

z explained that MPs would have opportunities to share insights into their parliamentary activities relating to CEDAW implementation, both following this event and during subsequent webinars.

The key conclusions of this webinar were as follows:

1. Parliaments play a central role in guaranteeing gender equality by using the CEDAW Convention

MPs have a key role to play in ratifying, withdrawing reservations to, and implementing the Convention, as well as in reporting to the CEDAW Committee and following up on its recommendations, including by ensuring that the legal framework in their country reflects the rights entrenched in the Convention. MPs may use the CEDAW Convention to guarantee gender equality through constitutional and legal frameworks.

Women who are subject to intersecting forms of discrimination face specific vulnerabilities, and legislation provides a basis to address this situation. According to the CEDAW Convention, legislative frameworks should also promote the participation of women in political and economic life, provide for the eradication of VAWG, and set out family and status laws that ensure the rights of women and girls.

2. General recommendations are tools to make use of Convention

Beyond the Convention, the general recommendations issued by the CEDAW Committee provide further guidance for the law-making process and serve as a basis upon which legislative instruments may be harmonized. In fact, general recommendations adapt the Convention to the specific context of a country and to emerging topics, such as conflict and climate change. The CEDAW Committee is currently working on a general recommendation on indigenous women and will shortly start working on women's representation in politics.

3. Parliaments should participate in CEDAW reporting and review

MPs should be involved in every stage of the CEDAW process: in reporting to the CEDAW Committee, in dialogue with the Committee as members of their country's delegation, in presenting the outcomes of the review in parliament and in drafting an action plan to implement the recommendations. Including MPs in the process gives them ownership of their responsibilities in the CEDAW implementation process.

4. Promote capacity-building on CEDAW and the engagement of male MPs

Although some MPs are very knowledgeable about CEDAW, capacity-building on the

Convention remains key. Specific sessions on the Convention may be a good avenue to engage male MPs in the process, which is an important enabling factor for gender equality.

5. Women's full and effective participation is key

Women's participation in politics is crucial for the implementation of the Convention. While looking at the number of women in politics is important, examining the functions they embody is key. Having women MPs in leadership roles in parliament – as Speakers or heads of committees – can have more impact. Moreover, laws and mechanisms such as legislated quotas and related electoral laws are efficient tools to guarantee women's effective participation in politics. Addressing violence against women in politics is also key. Targeted measures should also focus on empowering young women and girls so that they engage in politics.

6. Parliamentary committees and institutional bodies are strong enablers for CEDAW follow-up and implementation

Parliamentary committees on gender equality, human rights and/or the SDGs are instrumental to implementing and following up on the CEDAW Convention: they can guarantee that related laws are in line with the Convention, convene a diverse set of stakeholders to contribute to monitoring and implementation, and institutionalize the review by parliament of implementation efforts.

7. Parliament could facilitate multi-stakeholder engagement with the CEDAW process

Actively promoting and monitoring the implementation of CEDAW requires a close working relationship between parliament, government, NHRIs and CSOs. Case studies have shown that parliaments are in a good position to convene and organize multi-stakeholder engagement, but must have the agency and political will to play this role.

8. The IPU and CEDAW Committee members stand ready to provide technical support to parliaments

The IPU and CEDAW Committee members expressed their availability to support parliaments in drafting laws in line with the CEDAW Convention, in monitoring their implementation, in engaging male MPs in following up on the Convention and in facilitating the participation of women from marginalized groups in decision-making.

Annex

Involvement in CEDAW reporting and follow-up by parliaments whose countries are scheduled for review at the 82nd and 83rd sessions of the CEDAW Committee⁴

Parliament	Parliament involvement in the drafting of the State report	Presentation or debate on the State report in parliament	Expected participation in the State delegation	Parliamentary follow-up to the review envisaged
Armenia	No response	No response	No response	No response
Azerbaijan	Yes	No	No response	Yes
Bahrain	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Belgium	No	No	No	Yes
Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	No	No	To be determined	No
China	No response	No response	No response	No response
Finland	No response	No response	No response	No response
Gambia	No response	No response	No response	No response
Honduras	No response	No response	No response	No response
Jamaica	No response	No response	No response	No response
Mongolia	No response	No response	No response	No response
Morocco	No response	No response	No response	No response
Namibia	No response	No response	No response	No response
Portugal	No response	No response	No response	No response
Saint Kitts and Nevis	No response	No response	No response	No response
Switzerland	No	No	To be determined	Yes
Türkiye	Yes	No	No	Yes
United Arab Emirates	No response	No response	No response	No response
Ukraine	No response	No response	No response	No response

⁴ List of countries valid as at 26 April 2022. The information provided on this table is based on responses received from national parliaments to the IPU questionnaire (as at 19 September 2022). An updated schedule of review of State reports by the CEDAW Committee can be found at https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/TreatyBodyExternal/SessionsList.aspx?Treaty=CEDAW.