



Inter-Parliamentary Union
For democracy. For everyone.

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Speech by Mr. Martin Chungong, IPU Secretary General

84th Session of the CEDAW Committee
*Half-day of general discussion on the equal and inclusive representation of women
in decision-making systems*

Geneva, 22 February 2023

Madam Chair of the CEDAW Committee (Ana Pelaez Narvaez),
Mister Director (Mahamane Cisse-Gouro, OHCHR),
Madam Director (Sarah Hendricks, UN Women),
Honourable members of the Committee (Nicole Ameline, Natasha Stott-Despoja),
Distinguished participants,
Ladies and gentlemen,

I am pleased to be speaking at this half-day general discussion on the occasion of the 84th Session of the CEDAW Committee.

This meeting presents a unique opportunity to contribute to the discussion on the future General Recommendation on the equal and inclusive representation of women in decision-making systems. I want to thank the Committee for its decision to revitalize the debate on this important topic.

Reaching our 2030 targets on time requires a meaningful strategy to prioritize more transformative actions towards more concrete results. Transformative actions for gender equality in particular, are vital for a sustainable development that leaves no one behind. Women's representation, full participation and leadership in decision-making systems is not only a question of equality and fairness, but also a path towards a more sustainable future for everyone.

In representation lies the foundation of democracy and parliaments, as representative institutions, should mirror society in its diversity and live up to the expectations and needs of the people, men and women, young and old, rich and poor, urban and rural, people without and with disabilities, people from minority groups or majority groups—to name a few.

I am here today to fully support the noble endeavor of this Committee to issue a general recommendation on the equal and inclusive representation of women in decision-making systems. Allow me to share with you five key ingredients that I see essential to include in the general recommendation:

First, having institutions that are open to the representation and to the participation of the entire social fabric is essential but then, ensuring that such institutions are able to operate inclusively, to embrace and promote diversity, and to use the full potential of different perspectives in policymaking and legislation is an important objective.

The Inter-Parliamentary Union came up with the concept of gender-sensitive parliaments more than a decade ago, calling for institutions to transform their modus operandi to be more representative, better adapted and more efficient in embodying gender equality and in delivering on it for society.

However, inclusivity cannot be reached overnight. To wait for it to happen—as was wrongly called for 20 years ago—is not an option either. This leads me to the second key ingredient to take into consideration. I am sure that the evidence-based and innovative research that we lead has shown the way forward by proving that gender electoral quotas are a must.

In 2021, countries that applied gender electoral quotas, elected on average 31.9% women to parliament (lower and single houses) whereas countries that applied no quotas, elected only 19.5%. However, we also know that not just any quota strategy brings results. It requires maintaining ambitious targets, measuring its fit within the electoral system in place, and most importantly, securing its strict enforcement. Talking about ambitious quotas, we at the IPU are calling unequivocally for a target of 50/50 representation. Parity between men and women in parliament is our motto.

Third, we cannot simply hope to reach parity if it is for women to end up trapped in a hostile, disrespectful, discriminating, and dangerous environment. Gender-based violence against women in politics is rampant. Our studies have revealed that more than 80% of women parliamentarians that we surveyed from all around the globe are facing gender-based psychological violence including intimidation, threats of death, rape, beating or abduction during their parliamentary term. Physical violence, sexual harassment and abuse and economic violence against women parliamentarians are all also widespread. We must put an end to violence against women in politics and apply zero tolerance whenever and wherever such violence occurs. If we don't, we risk placing democracy would be at grave risk.

Fourth, a strategy that I wish to draw your attention to today is to support the leadership of both men and women for gender equality. We need to encourage and serve stakeholders and decision-makers so that they can engage within their own spheres of influence.

I chair the global board of International Gender Champions, a leadership network that aims to break down barriers and make gender equality the working reality. It brings together decision-makers and transform their spheres of influence. I believe that within our functions in leading organizations, we have an instrumental role to play in driving transformational change.

My fifth and last call is to ensure that the voices of new generations are not only heard, but substantially reflected in policymaking. Rejuvenating democracies and institutions of democracy is a strategy that serves the promotion and fulfillment of gender equality.

Co-leading the Generation Equality Forum's Action Coalition on Feminist Movements and Leadership, the IPU understands and strongly supports the inherent capacity of intergenerational multilateral dialogue in driving change and the central role of civil society organizations in democracy.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The five key ingredients that I have just introduced make business as usual a no-go choice. The General Recommendation in the making is a way to challenge the status quo and help us all in reaching new heights.

I look forward to today's deliberations of today's debate and thank you for inviting me and the Inter-Parliamentary Union to open this discussion amongst esteemed colleagues and friends.