



Inter-Parliamentary Union  
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## Parliaments and women's rights: Implementing the CEDAW Convention, realizing the Universal Declaration of Human Rights for all

A parliamentary roundtable organized by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)

22 June 2023, 9.00 – 16.00 CEST (hybrid event)

### CONCEPT NOTE

#### Introduction

The advancement of human rights in general, and women's rights in particular, is at the core of the mandate of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) and of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). In this vein, the two organizations will join forces to mark the 75th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights by bringing together parliamentarians from around the globe for a roundtable to be held in June 2023 in Geneva, focusing on *Parliaments and women's rights: Implementing the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, realizing the Universal Declaration of Human Rights for all*.

#### A. Human Rights 75 initiative

On 10 December 2023, the 75th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights will be celebrated. Despite the progress that has been achieved since the adoption of the Declaration in 1948, its promise of the enjoyment of all human rights by all is still far from reality. It is critical that we rekindle the spirit, the impulse and the vitality that led to its adoption 75 years ago. We need to forge a new worldwide consensus on human rights and broaden its base of support.

In December 2022, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights launched a year-long initiative, Human Rights 75, with the aim of rejuvenating the centrality of human rights globally and advancing the promise of freedom, equality and justice for all. The year's activities will include dialogues and consultations between all actors at the national, regional and international levels to generate concrete pledges, takeaways on the future of human rights, and stories reflecting achievements made over the past 75 years. Monthly thematic spotlights will focus on critical themes for the implementation of the Declaration. The June 2023 theme will be women's rights. More information is available at <https://www.ohchr.org/en/human-rights-75>.

The initiative will culminate in a Human Rights High-Level Event from 11 to 12 December 2023 in Geneva, Switzerland, connecting with hubs in Panama, Nairobi and Bangkok. The event will bring together Member States, civil society and other stakeholders for dialogue and to present transformative, innovative and catalytic pledges for action.

#### B. The role of parliaments in the realization of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights

Parliaments are key actors in making the **rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights** a reality at the national level.

Parliaments are **cornerstones** of national human rights protection systems and are instrumental in ensuring their proper functioning. Parliaments play a crucial role in the **ratification** of international

human rights treaties, in ensuring governments' compliance with international human rights obligations, including from a gender perspective, and **in translating these into national legislation and policies**. As such, they significantly contribute to laying the foundation for the rule of law and its institutions, including the judiciary.

Parliaments exercise an **oversight** function over the executive, hold it to account for the **human rights impact** of measures, policies and practices, and ensure progress on behalf of rights holders. The setting up of **standing parliamentary committees** on human rights and on gender equality is a particularly effective way to conduct those tasks. **Caucuses of women parliamentarians** also play a leading role in enhancing equality of rights in the work of parliament.

Parliaments have direct links with **grassroots civil society organizations** and individuals, including women human rights defenders, and interact with **national human rights institutions**. This allows human rights developments and concerns to be fed into their legislative and oversight functions.

Parliaments also play a critical role in **institutionalizing women's rights and gender equality, and ensuring their realization** in society. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) is a particularly effective tool in this regard. It has proven invaluable in combatting discrimination against women and its effects, including gender-based violence against women, poverty, exclusion from decision-making processes, lack of legal protections and access to justice, discrimination relating to marriage and family relations, and unequal access to education and employment, as well as denial of inheritance, property rights and access to credit. This role of parliament will also be emphasized in the upcoming CEDAW general recommendation on the equal and inclusive representation of women in decision-making systems, currently being developed by the CEDAW Committee, in partnership with the IPU and UN Women.

Because of these central roles, parliaments – in particular parliamentary human rights and gender equality committees – are crucial in State reporting to **international human rights mechanisms** and in implementing those mechanisms' recommendations that require legislative reforms and commensurate budget allocations. Involvement of those committees in national mechanisms for implementation, reporting and follow-up (NMIRF) is critical in this regard.

### **C. Parliamentary roundtable on parliaments and women's rights**

It is essential that the activities envisaged under the Human Rights 75 initiative include a parliamentary dimension. Within the context of the monthly thematic focus on women's rights (June 2023) of the Human Rights 75 initiative, a **roundtable** will be held on ***Parliaments and Women's Rights: Implementing the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, realizing the Universal Declaration of Human Rights for all***, jointly organized by OHCHR and the IPU.

Participants will include parliamentarians from different regions, in particular chairpersons and members of parliamentary human rights and/or gender equality committees and/or women's caucuses, as well as international experts. In-person participation will be open to parliaments that have a track record of cooperation with the IPU to advance gender equality and women's empowerment at the national level. Invited parliaments are welcome to **nominate two parliamentarians** – one woman and one man – to attend in person, via a registration form by 1 June 2023. Additional parliaments may join remotely.

The roundtable will focus on the role of parliament in advancing women's rights to political participation, decent work and education on an equal basis with men, as laid down in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and codified within the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of

Discrimination against Women. It will look into how these rights are interconnected, as well as how existing gender-based discrimination and inequalities in these three areas intersect with other forms of inequality and grounds of discrimination.

The roundtable will provide an opportunity to exchange on good practices of parliamentary action, and challenges and opportunities at the national level.

Roundtable results may include the adoption of concrete transformative pledges and recommendations by participants. These pledges and recommendations will be submitted to the December 2023 High-Level Event (and subsequently inform the UN Summit of the Future in September 2024).

In addition, the 2023 Handbook for Parliamentarians on the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, jointly developed by the IPU and OHCHR, will be launched at the closing session of the roundtable.

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