



Inter-Parliamentary Union
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2023 Webinar on Parliamentary Engagement on CEDAW

IPU webinar for parliaments of States scheduled for review by the CEDAW Committee in May and October 2023 and a group of other parliaments being supported by the IPU on gender equality

**Thursday 27 April 2023
Virtual event**

Report

Geneva, August 2023

Table of contents

Introduction	3
Background	5
Meeting report	6
ANNEX: Overview of presentations and discussions	8
Why are parliaments integral parts of the CEDAW review process?	8
Gender quotas – the first step towards parity	8
Gender-sensitive leadership is a key enabler for women’s political participation	9
Addressing gender-based violence is a democratic imperative and social necessity	9
Floor interventions.....	10
Conclusions.....	12

Introduction

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) regularly holds webinars for MPs from States reviewed and scheduled for review by the CEDAW Committee.

The webinars aim to accompany parliaments through the reporting process, and support them to take action designed to enhance the implementation of CEDAW. They provide information on the Convention, on the work of the CEDAW Committee, and on the reporting process. They aim to: facilitate the sharing of good practices by MPs going through this process; enable peer-to-peer exchanges among MPs; foster interaction between MPs and CEDAW Committee members; and identify any targeted support that might be required from the IPU.

This was the third webinar of a series launched in May 2022.

Those invited to the April 2023 webinar included MPs from States scheduled for review at the 85th and 86th CEDAW Committee sessions as well as those that currently benefit from IPU support on gender equality. The event provided MPs with an opportunity to interact with members of other parliaments and CEDAW Committee experts so as to discuss how to engage with the Committee, consider which provisions of the Convention are relevant to their work, and explore how the Convention can be used to advance gender equality.

The desired outcomes of the webinar were:

- To ensure MPs from the relevant countries understand the CEDAW reporting procedure, and are aware of both their State's report and the expected outcomes of their country review;
- To ensure MPs engage in CEDAW reporting, and promote CEDAW implementation through their parliamentary work, with IPU support as necessary.

The April 2023 webinar was attended by 16 MPs (12 women and 4 men) from 11 countries. Parliamentary staff from three other countries also attended as observers. Overall, there were 36 participants from 14 countries. To accommodate the participation of parliamentarians in different time zones, the webinar was divided into two parts (Part I in the morning, and Part II in the afternoon). Each part followed the same agenda made up of two sessions, and included two different groups of participants.

Those attending were asked to evaluate the webinar through an online anonymous survey. Contributions to the survey revealed an interest in pursuing similar seminars and training sessions on CEDAW implementation as part of the IPU's yearly activities. Survey respondents also expressed interest in the development of a comprehensive guiding toolkit for parliaments on CEDAW implementation, based on the observations of the IPU and the CEDAW Committee.

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.

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Opening: Welcome and presentation of session objectives

Session 1: Briefing on CEDAW and the CEDAW Committee

Participants were appraised of the CEDAW Convention's overall focus and the functions of the CEDAW Committee, particularly the State reporting and review processes.

Session 2: Parliamentary engagement in CEDAW implementation, reporting and follow-up

Participants were invited to share their experiences about the role of parliaments in the process of reporting to the CEDAW Committee, as well as national implementation of both the Convention, and the Committee's observations and recommendations.

The ensuing debate sought input from participants on the following questions:

- How is CEDAW integrated into the work of your parliament?
- More precisely, to what extent does your parliament participate in CEDAW reporting? What are the challenges in this regard, and how can your parliament's engagement be enhanced?
- How is your parliament implementing CEDAW? What priorities are being addressed to eliminate discrimination against women?
- How can the IPU support your parliament's CEDAW engagement and implementation work?

Expert: Ms. Nicole Ameline (member of the CEDAW Committee and former member of the National Assembly of France).

MP panellists: For Part I: Ms. Puteri Komarudin (Indonesia) and Ms. Deborah Bergamini (Italy). For Part II: Ms. Cynthia López Castro (Mexico; President of the IPU Bureau of Women Parliamentarians) and Ms. Michelle Rempel Garner (Canada).

Moderation: For Part I: Ms. Mariana Duarte (Programme Officer, IPU). For Part II: Ms. Cynthia López Castro (President of the IPU Bureau of Women Parliamentarians).

Background

Ensuring gender equality and full respect for women's human rights is a key commitment of the international community. This commitment 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. It provides valuable guidance on achieving gender equality in all areas, from within the family and education, to across economic and political life.

In all, 189 States² are party to the Convention, making it one of the most widely ratified treaties in the world. However, CEDAW remains one of the conventions that is most subject to reservations, and that faces major challenges in terms of implementation, particularly 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 to the CEDAW Committee at regular intervals about the implementation of the Convention. This is a key opportunity to take stock of advances and set priorities that need to be addressed in implementing CEDAW.

For more than 20 years, the IPU has been supporting parliaments towards stronger involvement in CEDAW implementation, particularly the reporting process. 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 statement³ 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 implementing the Convention. At its February 2022 session, the CEDAW Committee decided to work with the IPU in developing a new General Recommendation that focuses on the equal and inclusive representation of women in decision-making systems.

² 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.

³ See: www.ohchr.org/documents/HRBodies/CEDAW/Statements/Parliamentarians.pdf.

Meeting report

The webinar about parliamentary engagement on implementing the CEDAW Convention emphasized the central position of parliamentarians in enabling paradigm shifts (especially pertaining to women in politics), which are essential to making the rights in the Convention a reality. It allowed parliamentarians to engage in an open and constructive dialogue, where participants shared their experiences, observations and thoughts on the engagement of their respective parliaments in the implementation of CEDAW.

Ms. Nicole Ameline (member of the CEDAW Committee and former member of the National Assembly of France) underlined the Committee's role as an ally to the States under review, stressing its openness in engaging constructively with all States Parties, and recognizing the leading role of parliaments in exploring solutions.

The debate centred on the role of parliaments in the CEDAW review process as well as in driving change and monitoring implementation. Parliamentarians identified challenges, shared good examples, and made recommendations on how to mainstream gender equality in law-making, which includes implementing the CEDAW Convention and the CEDAW Committee's recommendations.

Participants noted that gender quotas were a well-tested measure to bridge the representational gap in parliament, and underlined the importance of translating CEDAW into policies and practices. Participants also said that having more women political leaders entrusted with real powers is a crucial part of structurally addressing the considerable challenges of gender equality today.

Attendees emphasized that parliaments' ways of working should be more inclusive and aware of gender issues, so as to work towards the realization of gender-sensitive parliaments. Tackling violence against women in all its forms was discussed as a fundamental prerequisite for reaching parity in society and parliament. Participants stressed that legislators needed to strongly condemn such violence, and align national legislation more closely with CEDAW.

The key conclusions of the webinar were:

1) Instituting strong and efficient parliamentary standards

- **Parliamentary levels of understanding about gender issues**, discrimination and patterns of gender violence have room for improvement.
- Advancing efforts towards building **gender-sensitive parliaments** remains a key precondition to effectively legislating, implementing and monitoring CEDAW provisions.
- Parliaments need to realize their continued leading role at the forefront of social paradigm shifts to advance the women's rights agenda. In that respect, parliaments need to take ownership of **CEDAW Committee recommendations** so as to advocate and drive a formalized and results-oriented follow-up process.
- Parliaments need to adopt an **intersectional approach** in designing policies that aim to mainstream CEDAW into law-making, as well as into the follow-up process to Committee

recommendations upon review. It is essential to forge a broader understanding of how gender intersects with other identities vis-à-vis globally observed challenges in parliament.

- Parliaments need to invest more in **reaching parity**, recognizing that gender quotas are a first step, rather than the endpoint of any efforts needed to transform parliaments into gender-sensitive institutions. Gender quotas should be quantitative and qualitative. They should aim to facilitate and advance the cause of new social groups gaining access to politics, particularly young people.

2) Addressing stereotypes, sexism, harassment and violence against women in politics

- Parliaments have a strong potential to forge a deeper understanding of stereotyping and **discrimination patterns against women in politics**, including by introducing innovative internal communication strategies.
- Parliamentary and political party leaders retain a strong capacity to **challenge male-dominated practices and patriarchal attitudes** in parliament, and they should deploy this capacity to its fullest extent.
- Parliaments and political parties therefore need to recognize and challenge the strong resistance within their ranks that aims to hold back any real progress for women's rights, including in terms of implementing CEDAW.

3) Achieving broad-based support and a holistic approach to gender equality

- Political parties need to commit to open political debate based on reaching consensus that goes beyond party lines for the benefit of all society. Meaningfully encouraging their parliamentary members to **work across the party divide** is an essential part of driving substantial reform on gender equality within parliament and beyond.
- The **interconnectivity of global challenges and their intersection with gender issues** require new multilateral approaches in order to meet targets and achieve results in a timely and inclusive manner.
- In light of the rapid **technological advances** spearheaded by artificial intelligence, parliamentarians need to look more deeply into education as a crucial part of fostering more gender-sensitive approaches to technology.

4) Investing more in multilateral parliamentary cooperation

- Despite systemic differences among States party to the CEDAW Convention, their challenges have been identified as broadly similar. These similarities should be regarded as an opportunity for parliaments to engage in: creating **new multilateral parliamentary impetus towards challenging anachronistic norms and ways of working**; converging interests; and exchanging practices to benefit women's rights.

ANNEX: Overview of presentations and discussions

Why are parliaments integral parts of the CEDAW review process?

Ms. Nicole Ameline (member of the CEDAW Committee and former member of the National Assembly of France) highlighted the unique cooperation between the IPU and the CEDAW Committee, and its centrality in developing a strong role for parliaments in the Committee's periodic review process. Ms. Ameline emphasized that parliaments and parliamentarians are central actors throughout the reporting and review processes. The review process should be understood as an enabling mechanism to achieve progress for women's rights, rather than merely a system for criticism. She set out the link between the challenges that States currently face in implementing CEDAW and the great potential that the review process provides in cementing cooperation between governments and parliaments.

Ms. Ameline underlined the central position of parliamentarians in enabling paradigm shifts, especially pertaining to women in politics, where patriarchal norms remain largely in place. She emphasized the role of education in addressing all types of stereotyping and discrimination. Education is key to shaping a deeper understanding of CEDAW and women's rights more broadly, especially in light of the new challenges and opportunities arising as a result of today's considerable technological advances. CEDAW entails not only equal opportunities, but also an obligation on States to deliver results. Substantive equality can only be achieved if there is equality of outcomes. Parliaments must therefore ensure that laws not only comply with CEDAW, but also lead to desired results.

Gender quotas – the first step towards parity

Ms. Cynthia López Castro (Mexico) shared news of the considerable progress made in Mexico's legislature (the Congress of the Union), which currently has equal numbers of men and women in both houses of parliament. This was the result of a long process of political reform and decision-making. Reaching parity in parliament was described as a daily struggle for women parliamentarians. They had to overcome long-entrenched patriarchal attitudes and processes, which discourage women from pursuing a career in politics, and sometimes openly threaten them. Ms. López Castro also underlined the importance of strong and courageous leadership in shaping new policies, emphasizing that male advocates for parity were needed in parliament and beyond.

Ms. Puteri Komarudin (Indonesia; member of the IPU Bureau of Women Parliamentarians) underlined the significance of the 30% quota applied to women candidates in Indonesia, describing it as a key tool for creating an enabling environment for women in politics. She shared the news that the Parliament of Indonesia had passed the Sexual Violence Act (Law No. 12/2022) after a decade of efforts to strengthen the legislative framework on gender-based and sexual violence. Ms. Komarudin further emphasized the role of the Parliament in initiating the legislation, and underlined the central role of the parliamentary women's caucus in fostering dialogue and supporting the process. She highlighted the close cooperation between the Parliament of Indonesia and the IPU in advancing gender equality in parliament.

Gender-sensitive leadership is a key enabler for women's political participation

Ms. Deborah Bergamini (Italy; member of the IPU Bureau of Women Parliamentarians) underlined the substantial progress being made towards advancing women's rights in her parliament. She commended the efforts of women parliamentarians across political parties in pushing for legislation that strengthens women's rights. She emphasized the significance of having women political leaders, such as the current Italian prime minister. A woman holding that office had resulted in a significant cultural shift in favour of women in Italian politics.

"The CEDAW reporting and State review processes are key in enabling a platform for substantial dialogue between State and non-State actors, being central in cementing a culture of permanent and result-oriented dialogue on women's rights." – Ms. Deborah Bergamini

Ms. Michelle Rempel Garner (Canada) underlined that the equal participation of women in high-level decision-making is a prerequisite to ensuring gender-sensitive policymaking. But real parity can only be achieved if women leaders have real powers. Parliaments must move away from tokenism and political declarations, as these add to a general disillusionment in terms of society's expectations of parliaments being able to deliver meaningfully on gender equality. Ms. Rempel Garner called on women parliamentarians across parties to commit to open political debate based on reaching consensus that goes beyond party lines and benefits all of society. She identified the marginalization of women's rights as an important challenge. She advocated for cementing a broader understanding of how gender intersects with other identities, as well as for parliaments to be more strongly involved in international bodies.

"The equal participation of women in high-level decision-making is a prerequisite to ensure gender-sensitive policymaking. But real parity can only be achieved if women leaders have real powers."
Ms. Michelle Rempel Garner

Ms. Nicole Ameline (member of the CEDAW Committee and former member of the National Assembly of France) stressed that women parliamentarians are considered as leading and inspiring examples of women's empowerment globally. She underlined the urgency with which the implementation of CEDAW must accelerate to enable more women to take part in policymaking. Parity governance was a strong guarantee for peace, solidarity and democracy in light of the multifaceted and interlinked nature of challenges observed globally.

Ms. Ameline emphasized that increasing the involvement of parliaments – especially women parliamentarians – in the CEDAW review process helps to shape gender-sensitive policies as well as to empower and inspire women.

Addressing gender-based violence is a democratic imperative and social necessity

Many participants said that the need to meaningfully address violence and discrimination against women in politics was central to enabling women in parliament to take a stronger stance over demanding more parliamentary engagement in a State's international obligations.

Ms. Deborah Bergamini (Italy) highlighted the responsibility of political parties to strengthen and adapt their own rules, so that discrimination and harassment against women politicians could be addressed. Parties should also impose strong sanctions against perpetrators. Ms. Bergamini set out the disproportional and gendered challenges that women face in balancing public and private life. She underlined the need for parliaments to support women in politics in this regard.

Ms. Michelle Rempel Garner (Canada) underlined that parliament should also be more inviting to women as a workplace. She noted that in Canada's parliament, there is an anti-harassment policy for staff, but there is no such policy for incidents between MPs.

Ms. Nicole Ameline (member of the CEDAW Committee and former member of the National Assembly of France) acknowledged the challenges that many parliaments face in ensuring that their members fully participate in CEDAW's State review process. She touched on the potential of new technologies. Digital tools could be a game changer, as they enable parliaments to build stronger and closer cooperation with the CEDAW Committee, through seeking advice and sharing progress on CEDAW implementation in parallel to the formal review process. Ms. Ameline emphasized the historically close cooperation between the CEDAW Committee and the IPU, stressing that the Committee's upcoming general recommendation on equal and inclusive representation of women in decision-making systems (GR40) would be an important milestone towards providing a new vision for women's political empowerment.

In response to questions from the audience, she stressed that the continuous parliamentary evaluation of new policies and frameworks is fundamental. She also said that the plethora of cultural differences between parliaments should not be instrumentalized in pursuit of a business-as-usual mentality. In closing, Ms. Ameline called on all participants to do more to ensure that greater numbers of women could work in their respective parliaments. She underlined that, if the goal is to reach gender parity in the foreseeable future, then global solidarity with women in politics is desperately needed.

Floor interventions

Interventions from the floor focused on sharing the challenges of building a strong understanding of and interest in monitoring and implementing the provisions enshrined in key international instruments.

Members from Italy cited time-consuming parliamentary procedural impediments as the reason for the lack of adequate parliamentary involvement in implementing international conventions.

Parliamentarians from Italy and Canada underlined the importance of adopting gender-sensitive policies that do not neglect the intersectionality of gender with global phenomena such as migration, the climate crisis and the spread of new technologies. Parliaments were called upon to reinvigorate their understanding of the challenges emerging in the periphery of the State.

Members from Nicaragua underlined that they had reached parity in parliament, including by drawing on recommendations shared by the IPU. Nicaragua was now one of six countries with a gender-balanced parliament.⁴ Members said that key enablers of the change they had achieved included: mainstreaming gender-sensitive practices in formal legislative processes; and an investment in building the capacity of all parliamentary committees on gender issues.

⁴ See IPU's *Women in Parliament in 2022* report: www.ipu.org/resources/publications/reports/2023-03/women-in-parliament-2022

Parliamentarians from Uruguay and France said that efforts towards reaching parity must be continuous. National action plans and laws that led to more women in parliament and leadership positions were described as essential drivers for change.

The member from **Uruguay** also indicated the importance of mechanisms such as a dedicated parliamentary committee on human rights and gender equality. In Uruguay, parliament played a full part in CEDAW reporting and follow-up through the recommendations monitoring system SIMORE (*Sistema de Monitoreo de Recomendaciones*).

"Having strong mechanisms such as a dedicated parliamentary committee on human rights and gender equality is crucial. In Uruguay, parliament was fully part of the CEDAW reporting and follow-up processes through the recommendations monitoring system SIMORE." – Ms. Gloria Rodríguez Santo

Conclusions

Ms. Cynthia López Castro (Mexico) said that the IPU had a valuable toolbox to support parliaments in their efforts to promote equality between women and men, both in law and in practice. Those tools included: awareness-raising; practical assistance in reviewing current and draft laws from a gender perspective; and strengthening gender mechanisms within parliaments, so that legislators can better monitor the effective implementation of existing laws with respect to CEDAW.

Ms. Nicole Ameline (member of the CEDAW Committee and former member of the National Assembly of France) recognized the value of these exchanges. She said that the CEDAW Committee was fully available to nurture further cooperation with parliaments. Gender stereotyping was described as a key challenge that perpetuates discrimination, inequality and violence. There was therefore an urgent need to invest in civic education, including by mainstreaming education about CEDAW into school curricula. Ms. Ameline also highlighted the need to capitalize on the potential of new technologies in assisting States to measure the efficiency of policies, including their gender aspects.

Ms. Mariana Duarte (Programme Officer, IPU) reiterated that the IPU remains at the disposal of all parliaments in supporting their efforts to advance gender equality. She said that the IPU Bureau of Women Parliamentarians had an important role in steering the Organization's engagement with CEDAW, and ensuring close communication and cooperation with parliaments.