



Inter-Parliamentary Union
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T +41 22 919 41 50
F +41 22 919 41 60
E postbox@ipu.org
www.ipu.org

Chemin du Pommier 5
Case postale 330
1218 Le Grand-Saconnex
Geneva – Switzerland

Speech by Mr. Martin Chungong, IPU Secretary General

Global Multistakeholder Summit on Advancing Gender Equality in Nationality Laws

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Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,
Colleagues,

It is a real pleasure for me to be here today to address this Summit on behalf of the IPU. From the outset, I would like to thank each of the organizations – the Global Campaign for Equal Nationality Rights, Equality Now, UNHCR and UN Women – which partnered with the IPU to organize this very important gathering, bringing representatives from all over the world together to discuss strategies on how to advance gender equality in nationality laws.

Most importantly, I would like to thank each and every one of you who has come to Geneva to participate in this Summit and add your voice and energy to the global efforts to achieve progress in addressing gender discrimination in nationality laws. As we all know, and as many of you may have already highlighted in your discussions yesterday and today, gender discrimination in nationality laws is still a reality today in many countries around the world. It has been highlighted that while these discriminatory provisions stem from specific national situations and considerations, all of them have a similar impact, as they lead to human rights violations; to hardships for the affected families, women and children; to impacts on development and social cohesion; and are a major cause of statelessness. And this is a concern for the IPU.

Fighting gender discrimination and putting an end to statelessness are closely aligned with the IPU's mission to empower parliaments and parliamentarians to promote peace, democracy and sustainable development around the world.

Let me begin with gender equality. This is at the core of the IPU's work. By supporting women in parliament and parliaments' transformation into gender-sensitive institutions that deliver on women's rights, the IPU contributes to national legislative processes for equal gender rights in every corner of the world. In 2025, we will be celebrating the 30th anniversary of the Beijing Platform for Action and the IPU has selected gender equality as its priority theme for the year. One of the reasons for that decision is that we are witnessing a slowing of progress – if not an outright pushback – on women's rights around the world, including on women's political participation. This pushback calls on all of us to remain vigilant and step up our efforts to defend and promote women's rights.

As the gains we have made are in jeopardy, some people enjoy no rights at all, and I refer of course to stateless women and men, girls and boys. We know that in 2024 over 4 million men and women do not yet enjoy the right to a nationality. Although there has been significant progress in ending statelessness since the launch of UNHCR's *#iBelong* campaign 10 years ago, we have not put an end to statelessness. 4 million men and women cannot yet live a life that you or I would call "normal" today. They cannot enrol their children in school, own or lease property, work, marry, travel or vote. They are invisible. They simply do not exist. They are denied their basic rights, and at the core of this denial is gender discrimination in nationality laws.

The IPU has been engaged in fighting statelessness for close to 20 years now. At the last Global Refugee Forum in 2023, we renewed our pledge to support efforts towards enhancing parliamentary engagement in the fight against statelessness. This includes the adoption of legislative reforms to address and prevent statelessness at the domestic level, and universalization of the two UN statelessness conventions. The IPU is also proud to be a member of the Global Alliance to End Statelessness, launched earlier this year – a forum that brings a multitude of stakeholders together to work on ending statelessness.

Within these frameworks, parliamentarians can and must play a pivotal role in bringing about change at the national level. They generally hold the keys to resolving and preventing statelessness domestically, where small adjustments to nationality laws can make a major difference in eliminating gender discrimination and thus impact the lives of individuals and communities significantly. They can also adopt and ensure implementation of legislation that is consistent with international law, as well as promote accession to the two UN statelessness conventions.

But of course this does not come easily. And for progress to be achieved, we need two key elements:

- First, strong political will and courage are key. We know these are complex and sensitive issues and you have all highlighted the many factors that are important to take into account in promoting change. But there are solutions, and for these to be implemented, there is a need for political will, a need for decision-makers to speak out, explain, engage and push for change.
- Second, no one can achieve progress alone. “Together” is the key word. This means the government, judiciary, civil society, academia, faith-based organizations **and, of course, parliamentarians.**

This is exactly why the IPU is honoured to be co-organizing this Multistakeholder Summit as a way to bring parliamentarians together with government representatives and civil society organizations to empower them to build partnerships, strategize and propose roadmaps for national-level action to advance gender equal nationality rights.

Colleagues,

TO CONCLUDE, the IPU would like on this occasion to renew its commitment to mobilizing and engaging the parliamentary community in fighting discrimination in nationality laws and ending statelessness. We are confident that the outcome of this Summit will result in significant change and reforms at the national level. I sincerely believe that we can all, together, lead the way for more just, safe and peaceful societies. This will not be easy but you can count on the IPU, and all the partners here today, to support your efforts towards this goal.