



Inter-Parliamentary Union
For democracy. For everyone.

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 Dr. Tulia Ackson, IPU President

International Meeting of Women Speakers of Lower Houses of Parliaments

Paris, 6-7 March 2024

Dear Madam President, (Yaël Braun-Pivet – President of the National Assembly)
Esteemed colleagues,
Distinguished guests,

It is a great honor to participate to this meeting on this momentous occasion, marking the 80th anniversary of the Ordinance of 9 August 1944, and International Women's Day.

As we reflect on these historic milestones, we are reminded not only of the resilience of nations in the face of adversity but also of the enduring struggle for equality and justice. Today, we meet not only to celebrate the progress we have made but also to recommit ourselves to the cause of Human Rights and Gender Equality.

The theme of our discussion is a clarion call to action—a call to dismantle the barriers that hinder the full and equal participation of women in decision-making processes at all levels in society. In addressing the current and future challenges societies face globally, we cannot afford to overlook the perspectives, talents, and contributions of half of our population.

Affirming female role models in politics is a powerful way to inspire and empower the next generation of women leaders. When young girls see women in position of political power, they are more likely to believe that they too can inspire to such roles. Female role models can break down stereotypes, challenge traditional gender norms, and demonstrate that women are just as capable and qualified as men to lead.

It is practically and morally unsustainable. Studies have shown time and again that diverse and inclusive decision-making processes lead to better outcomes, greater innovation, and more sustainable solutions. Gender equality is therefore not only a matter of social justice but also a pragmatic imperative.

Currently, the **global share of women MPs stands at 26.9%**, presenting a yearly growth rate of only **0.4** percentage point. In the meantime, only **6 countries have achieved parity** in parliament. These are rates of progress we cannot afford. If we truly aim at reaching the Sustainable Development Goals on time and address the challenges of our time before they become unmanageable, we need to solidify existing gains and be much more ambitious in our actions.

Dear colleagues; first, we need a gender-lens in our work. The IPU 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.

A gender-sensitive parliament is one in which there are no barriers – substantive, structural or cultural – to women's full participation and to equality between its men and women members and staff. It is not only a place where women can work, but also one where women want to work and contribute. Transforming our parliaments into gender-sensitive institutions is a precondition for building trust and enhancing their efficiency, effectiveness, and ultimately, legitimacy.

We also need **parity** at all levels and in leadership positions. And we must consider parity not as a luxury; for it is a necessity—a necessity for democracy, for justice, and for progress. But to wait for it to happen is not an option. This leads me to the need to institute **gender electoral quotas**, a strategy that delivers on parity.

In 2023, countries that applied gender electoral quotas, elected on average 28.8% women to parliament whereas countries that applied no quotas, elected only 23.2%. However, we 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.

But we cannot simply hope to reach parity if it is for women to end up trapped in a hostile, disrespectful, discriminating, and dangerous environment. The IPU landmarking studies on **sexism and violence against women in parliament** gave evidence of widespread prevalence of gender-based violence against women MPs and women parliamentary staff. For example, our study on Europe found out that more than 85% of the women MPs surveyed had faced psychological violence and our study on Africa showed that close to 40% of the women MPs surveyed were sexually harassed during their mandate.

This is unacceptable and holds parliaments and other political institutions to account if they are to be truly inclusive. Strict policies and **zero tolerance** of violence against women, sexual harassment and bullying in parliaments must be implemented, with independent and effective complaints procedures, backed up by tough sanctions and support for complainants.

Dear colleagues, parliaments not only must set an example and eliminate gender-based violence in their own institutions but they must do so without ever losing sight of the fact that around 736 million of women and girls from all walks of life around the world are victims of gender-based violence in the home and in the public sphere. If we truly want to deliver on gender equality, we must put an end to all forms of violence against women and girls by ensuring that laws and policies are effectively implemented, and providing survivors with safe spaces to report violence, a range of services tailored to their needs and tools to combat further intimidation. We should also work to ensure that the criminal justice system bears the burden of holding abusers accountable.

In our pursuit of equality and women's empowerment, we must also recognize the critical role of **education as a catalyst for change**. Education is a fundamental human right and a powerful tool for breaking the cycle of poverty and discrimination. Yet, gender disparities persist, particularly in accessing education, with millions of girls still being denied their right to learn. Addressing these disparities requires an approach that tackles not only structural barriers but also deeply entrenched social norms and attitudes.

Moreover, we cannot ignore the gendered aspects of women's enrollment in education, especially in rural communities where traditional gender roles and cultural norms often prevail. In many parts of the world, girls face significant obstacles, including early marriage, household responsibilities, and lack of access to safe and quality transportation and schooling infrastructure. By legislating in addressing these barriers we can ensure that all girls have an opportunity to receive a quality education.

Finally, we need a more equitable approach to women's health. Despite advancements in **healthcare**, women and girls continue to face unique challenges to their well-being, including limited access to social security, reproductive healthcare services and maternal mortality. Ensuring universal access to comprehensive healthcare services, is essential for promoting women's rights and empowering women to lead healthy and fulfilling lives. As parliamentarians, we have a duty to prioritize policies and programs that address the root causes of gender disparities in healthcare and promote gender-sensitive approaches to health service delivery.

Dear colleagues, as speakers, we occupy a unique position of trust and responsibility—a position that demands our unwavering commitment and result-oriented actions to advancing the cause of gender equality and women's empowerment. Women and girls around the world are looking at us as drivers of progress – their progress.

To find solutions to the multifaceted challenges of our time we must understand that no single parliament can tackle these challenges alone. Inter-parliamentary cooperation and parliamentary diplomacy are indispensable tools in best utilizing our resources, sharing our experiences, and amplifying our voices on the global stage.

In conclusion, I call to all of us redouble our efforts to build a world where every woman and girl can fulfill her full potential and contribute her talents to society.

Madam President, thank you very much for the invitation, and I look forward to the deliberations of our discussions. Thank you!