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IPU Global Conference of Women Parliamentarians

Advancing parity: Breaking the barriers of gender stereotypes and negative social norms

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Rapporteur

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We parliamentarians – 193 (155 women MPs and 38 men MPs) from 61 countries of more than 410 participants, gathered in Belgrade, Republic of Serbia from 2 to 4 June 2026, reaffirm our commitment to advancing gender parity by breaking the barriers of gender stereotypes and negative social norms. We were joined by the Deputy Prime Minister of the Republic of Serbia, the President of the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia, the President of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), and the Secretary General of the IPU. We were also joined by ministers and representatives of the Government of the Republic of Serbia, Vice-Presidents and members of the Serbian National Assembly, representatives of international and civil society organizations, as well as women and men leaders from different sectors.

The 2026 Global Conference of Women Parliamentarians (GCWP) held in Belgrade built on the momentum generated from the 2025 GCWP held in Mexico City. The 2026 Conference offered a platform to follow up on the [Plan of action for gender parity in parliaments](#) adopted at the 2025 GCWP and endorsed by the IPU Governing Council in 2025. The premise of this plan of action was that achieving 50:50 representation was a starting point, but that simply electing more women did not suffice. Women and men must also be able to exercise equal levels of power, including in leadership and committee assignments, and equal influence in policymaking in all areas. Furthermore, a parity culture must be fostered if parliaments are to be inclusive and equitable institutions, free from discrimination and violence against women.

In Belgrade, we pursued the push towards parity by addressing the historic and persistent barriers to women's political participation: the stereotypes and negative social norms that shape unequal power relations, create different expectations from men and women, fuel exclusion of women from decision-making, restrict opportunities for diverse groups of women, and reinforce stigma, sexism, harassment, and violence against women in politics. We highlighted the important role of parliaments as democratic institutions in promoting equal opportunities, inclusive decision-making and greater participation of women in political and public life.

Our contribution to the forthcoming General recommendation No. 41 on gender stereotypes of the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW Committee) was guided by the *Plan of action for gender parity* which, in turn, was grounded on the CEDAW committee's General recommendation No. 40 on equality in decision-making. In so doing, we focused our deliberations on the stereotypes and social norms that hinder women's political participation and leadership and challenge gender parity in parliament.

We focused our deliberations head-on on unpacking gender stereotypes. We noted that these stereotypes consisted of attitudes and beliefs that prevailed in all societies, and were based on generalized ideas, opinions, representations, images, or classifications of women and men that projected a simplified, selective, or false picture of their lives and realities. Such stereotypes were rooted in gender inequality,

discrimination and exclusion. They were embedded in social norms, unwritten rules, and standards in society, but also in state institutions, schools, community, the family, as well as in our parliaments. They led to different behaviour and role expectations for women and men. They permeated social norms that defined what was considered right and wrong, acceptable, or “normal” in society or in institutions.

We acknowledged that the CEDAW Committee considered all gender stereotypes as contributing to discrimination and therefore constituting a violation of women’s human rights under the CEDAW Convention. We also welcomed that several international and regional human rights mechanisms and conventions had developed states’ obligations to address gender stereotypes in law and practice, including the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, and conventions such as the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (the Maputo Protocol), the Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence against Women (Convention of Belém do Pará), and the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention).

We noted that stereotypes and negative social norms evolved and that building new narratives that set positive social norms based on non-stereotypical ideas about men and women and their expected behaviour and roles was crucial at all times. This was even more critical, especially in times of polarization, anti-democratic movements, and gender backlash such as those we were currently experiencing.

Stereotypes and negative social norms about women’s limited ability, interest, aptitude, or time for public office flourished. We condemned such norms as well as the double-standards women in politics faced by being judged by their physical appearance, private life, attire, emotions, assertiveness and mistakes, as opposed to their ability to lead. Men did not face such scrutiny. We alerted against those stereotypes and norms as they fueled discrimination and violence against women and hindered women’s participation and leadership in political and public life.

We agreed in considering intersectionality as a key dimension of gender stereotypes and negative social norms that women and girls from different groups in society faced. We deplored that such norms at the intersection of sex, age, disabilities, ethnicity, colour, origin, socioeconomic background, among others, were keeping too many groups of women away from political participation and leadership. We were particularly alarmed by the data shared by the IPU showing that young women’s participation in parliament had recently decreased. It was unacceptable that because of stereotypes and lack of sufficient support, young women and women from other underrepresented groups, were left out.

From the outset, we identified priorities to address through our parliamentary functions of legislation, oversight and representation, to advance women’s participation and leadership in political and public life. These priorities include addressing:

- The risks posed by gender-biased artificial intelligence (AI) and technological developments.
- Inequalities in law and practice, including in family relations, property, inheritance, land ownership, economic and financial independence, nationality.
- The underrepresentation of young women and women from marginalized and historically excluded groups.
- The need to shift care responsibilities from women mostly, to both men and women equally.
- The elimination of violence against women and girls, and of violence against women in politics in particular.
- The need for more investment in equality in education and employment, including through the elimination of stereotypes in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) and the need for equal pay.

Our other priorities include the need to continue advancing gender-sensitive parliaments as model institutions that embody gender equality and that deliver gender equality to society; that are free from discrimination, violence, stereotypes and negative social norms against women; and that promote gender equality as a shared responsibility.

In addressing these priorities, we agreed to work in partnership with men and women in parliament and beyond, across the parliamentary ecosystem, including with governmental institutions and civil society organizations, as well as with other sectors such as the media, the private sector, international organizations, but also the world of sports and the actors of the digital space.

We therefore call upon parliaments and their men and women members to take the following actions aimed at:

Advancing gender-sensitive parliaments, free from stereotypes and negative social norms:

- Address stereotypes and negative social norms and the underlying ideas, attitudes, beliefs and systems that persist in parliament and that give rise to them, including by identifying such stereotypes and norms and their prevalence, naming and calling them out publicly, dismantling them through establishing prevention policies, reviewing and reforming existing policies, providing awareness raising and training programmes to MPs and parliamentary staff, and monitoring trends and changes.
- Support a parity culture in parliament, including by conducting a gender-sensitivity self-assessment of the parliament's work environment, culture and infrastructure, implementing reforms to facilitate balance of work and family obligations, establishing parental leave for both women and men in parliament, ensuring full equality in resources provided to women and men in parliament in terms of office space, expenses and other facilities, and promoting communications that are gender-responsive, promote diversity and inclusion, and convey positive narratives on the roles of both men and women in parliament.
- Adopt zero tolerance for sexism, harassment and violence against women in parliament, including by providing gender-awareness training for all members of parliament and parliamentary staff, implementing policies to ensure respectful non-sexist and inclusive behaviour and language, survivor-centered anti-discrimination and anti-harassment policies applicable to all MPs and parliamentary staff.
- Promote equal leadership and participation across policy areas, including by ensuring that women and men in all their diversity can equally lead in all sectors, moving away from stereotypical divisions of policy portfolios and the overrepresentation of men in senior roles in parliament.

Legislating for parity, and against discrimination, violence and stereotypes:

- Ensure alignment of national law with the CEDAW Convention, in particular by eliminating discriminatory provisions against women and girls in marriage, divorce, alimony, custody, property, housing and land, inheritance, guardianship, nationality, and in entering contracts, among others.
- Pass and enforce laws to combat violence against women and girls, and violence against women in politics, including measures to challenge prevailing gender stereotypes.
- Adopt gender parity provisions and quotas to address stereotypes and their impacts on women's participation in politics, including nested quotas to support the participation of women from diverse groups and backgrounds.
- Provide for parental or paternity leave and not only maternity leave.

Overseeing government action:

- Develop data collection and conduct research and assessments to identify, name and better understand gender stereotypes and to identify their enablers, purposes and harms.
- Implement well-funded measures to challenge, dismantle and prevent gender stereotypes, including laws, policies and plans; implement also temporary special measures to promote access for women to fields in which they are underrepresented, awareness-raising programmes and educational campaigns, and training and capacity-building programmes.
- Ensure that legislation to combat gender-based violence includes measures to challenge prevailing gender stereotypes, including appropriate budgets, implementation and monitoring mechanisms.

- Ensure that educational institutions – public and private – eliminate gender stereotypes, and that investment is made in STEMs for girls and women.
- Integrate care and support as a central priority in laws, policies, plans, programmes, services, and budgets, free from all gender stereotypes.
- Establish adequate and effective mechanisms to report violence against women in politics and guarantee investigation and prosecution in due diligence.
- Establish collaboration mechanisms with media and social media actors to condemn, monitor and ensure accountability for gender stereotypes and violence against women.
- Adopt and enforce a gender-responsive, human-rights based, and intersectional regulatory framework for AI, digitalization and cybersecurity, requiring the prevention, identification, mitigation and redress of gender bias and stereotypes.

We commit to advancing and promoting the implementation of these actions in our respective parliaments.

We further commit to strengthening parliamentary cooperation, exchanging good practices and supporting one another in advancing gender equality and gender parity in decision-making processes worldwide.

We welcome the leadership and commitment demonstrated by the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia in hosting this Conference and fostering dialogue on advancing women's participation and leadership in public life.

We thank our gracious hosts, the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia, for their warm welcome and we commend them and the IPU for the excellent organization of the 2026 Global Conference of Women Parliamentarians.