



Inter-Parliamentary Union

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IPU Statement

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Parliamentary Union

Regional Conference for Central and
Eastern Europe on Making Laws
Work to End Violence Against
Women and Girls

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Mr. Speaker of the Chamber of Deputies,
Mr. Speaker of the Senate,
Madam Executive Director of Global Rights for Women,
Madam Vice-President of Vital Voices,
Honorable Members of Parliament,
Distinguished guests,
Ladies and gentlemen,

I welcome this opportunity to address you at the beginning of this regional conference. I stand here as representative of an organisation that is convinced that enabling women to live free from violence and participate in the management of public affairs is at the core of democracy. The Inter-Parliamentary Union actively pursues this objective.

Let me start by thanking the Romanian Parliament for the wonderful work done in organizing this unique conference and for receiving us with such generous and warm hospitality. This conference is a seamless continuation of the positive collaboration between the Parliament of Romania and IPU to deepen parliamentary response to both the sustainable development goals and human rights commitments in the region.

I also would like to acknowledge here the great partnership we have developed with Global Rights for Women and Vital Voices. Together we stood convinced it was time to organize a conference founded on the acknowledgement that multi-sectoral cooperation is a prerequisite to making laws work on ending violence against women and girls.

This is why our conference brings together for the first-time country delegations consisting of parliamentarians, NGO advocates and legal government officials. We have with us representatives from more than 20 Central and Eastern European countries.

You are coming from different countries, different backgrounds, working in different sectors but you all share the common objective of enabling women to live free from violence. You cherish the goals of ensuring survivor safety, improving offender accountability and kindling in the minds of all members of the community and intolerance of violence against women and girls.

It is my hope that this conference will provide you with an opportunity to share a diversity of experiences and know-how, and to engage in a dialogue in order to learn from each other. We are here to collaborate and join forces. This is the beauty of our meeting. I am very pleased to welcome you all on behalf of the IPU.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Every year millions of women and girls worldwide suffer violence. This continues to be a major issue on the international human rights agenda. You probably already know the alarming figures, but it is always useful to recall them:

- 35 per cent of women worldwide have experienced physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence or non-partner sexual violence.¹
- Annually, 1 in 2 women killed worldwide are killed by their partners or family members. This represents more than 43, 000 women.²

Over the last 20 years, international and regional human rights instruments have been adopted recognizing governments' obligation to protect the human rights and fundamental freedoms of all women and girls to ensure that they are free from violence. Two thirds of the world's countries have enacted laws aimed at ending violence against women. This is the case for most Central and Eastern European countries, but I think we are all struck by the poor record of implementing and enforcing these laws.

The positive aspect of things, if I may say so, is the growing mobilization in response to the challenge of implementation. Best practices have been developed through the experiences in countries where laws have been in place for many years. Furthermore, the Istanbul Convention sets forth clear and comprehensive standards for legislation and its implementation. The Convention is also remarkable in that it recognizes and formally invites parliaments to participate in monitoring measures taken to implement its provisions. This is a first in a regional or international treaty.

Ladies and gentlemen,

There is no one-size-fits-all solution to implementing laws on ending violence against women.

- First, we need to focus on the protection and dignity of the survivors.

We need to understand and meet their needs by providing easy and gender-sensitive accessible services so to ensure that more women feel that it is safe to report violence and seek justice. This means that we need to listen to the survivors and include their voices, as well as those of the specialized organizations that support them, in our efforts in the areas of law, policy development, implementation and monitoring.

I am pleased to find this concern at the heart of this conference.

- Second, we need to develop multi-sectoral collaboration and partnership

It might be asked why the IPU and the Romanian Parliament are associated with this initiative, together with Global Rights for Women and Vital Voices? The reason is that we firmly believe that partnership and close collaboration between parliamentarians,

¹ WHO, Global and Regional Estimates of Violence against Women, ("Only women aged 15 years and older were included, to differentiate violence against women from child sexual abuse." p.12) http://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/10665/85239/1/9789241564625_eng.pdf.

² UNODC, Global Study on Homicide 2013.
https://www.unodc.org/documents/gsh/pdfs/Chapter_2-2.pdf.

state agencies and civil society associations is the key to finding and testing innovative approaches and enhancing implementation. Each of these actors is one essential component to addressing violence against women. However, real progress can only result from the combined efforts of all those at the forefront of the drive to eliminate this scourge.

We also think that the role of MPs in ending violence against women is an untapped potential. Of course parliamentarians have a responsibility to review and adopt laws, and to do so critically in a spirit of continuing evaluation and improvement.

They are also there to scrutinize budgets to ensure that adequate financial and human resources are allocated to the effective implementation of legislation. At the IPU, we believe that monitoring and evaluation mechanisms should be based, at least in part, on parliamentary oversight. In accomplishing that task, parliamentarians must work hand in hand with civil society organizations and governments to access information and data, and prioritize measures and policies rooted in the reality of their countries.

- Third, men should be part of the solution

Ensuring effective implementation is closely related to changing mentalities and cultures. It will be possible only when we will mobilize and engage men in this movement of change. Here, sustained, effective awareness-raising campaigns are crucial. All citizens must understand that there is nothing private and tolerable about violence against women.

The silent majority of non-violent men must speak out now and assume their responsibilities alongside women. We have to count on men and boys to embody a new social construct of non-violent men and relationships built on respect.

- Fourth, parliamentarians need to address violence against women in politics

IPU recently published a study that revealed widespread sexism, violence and harassment of women MPs worldwide. Of the 55 women MPs surveyed, over 80 per cent reported experiencing some form of psychological violence. In all, 44 per cent of those surveyed said they had received threats of rape, beatings, kidnapping or death. Some 20 per cent of respondents said they had been slapped, pushed or struck, including by other members of parliament. It is time to break persisting taboos and exchange best practices in addressing this major challenge to gender equality in politics. Parliaments need to tackle the problem of gender violence and harassment in their own house if they want to lead by example and reinforce their contribution to eliminating violence against women in all walks of life.

Ladies and gentlemen,

In the course of the next three days you will address a wide array of topics that will help you strengthen your response to domestic violence and sexual violence. You will also plan within national delegations how you will work together to apply the lessons learned at the conference when you return home.

The IPU is counting on this innovative meeting to come up with recommendations and conclusions that will provide the needed momentum for parliaments in the region to play a robust role in this endeavour. We also hope it will send a strong signal for parliamentarians in other parts of the world.

I look forward to open and constructive debates and wish you a very successful conference.