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Chemin du Pommier 5  
Case postale 330  
1218 Le Grand-Saconnex  
Geneva – Switzerland  
[www.ipu.org](http://www.ipu.org)

## Address to UN High-Level Panel on Women's Economic Empowerment, UN Women and Global Citizens

### *Levelling the Law for Women and Girls by 2030*

Mr. Martin Chungong  
Secretary General of the Inter-  
Parliamentary Union

New York, 25 September 2018

Madam Vice President,  
Madam Minister of State,  
Madam Deputy Executive Director,  
Distinguished guests,  
Ladies and gentlemen,

It is heartening to see such high-level support for making our laws gender responsive, so we can reach our common goal of empowering all women and girls by 2030.

Women's economic empowerment is essential to many aspects of our Sustainable Development Agenda. Women who have sufficient resources and can manage them autonomously favour girls' and boys' nutrition, health and education. Enhancing women's financial autonomy also levels the playing field for women and men to take part in all areas of life, including in political decision-making.

In too many parts of the globe, men are still considered as the head of the family. Boys are still inheriting most of family property. Widows are left without resources. Girls are forced into marriage and left out of school.

Even when national Constitutions affirm equality between women and men, a wide range of national laws still condone such inequalities. This can no longer be so.

We need to reaffirm the urgency to ensure equal rights for women and men in laws governing family and marriage relations, personal status and economic life, and to develop robust laws to combat violence against women and girls.

Any efforts to open up the economy to women will remain in vain if women are still not allowed to make their own choices on matters such as family planning, management of property or even when they sign a contract or open a bank account. And as long as women still face pervasive forms of gender-based violence and harmful practices, such as female genital mutilation and child marriage, they will be left behind.

In order to ensure the full realization of women's fundamental rights and their economic empowerment, structural inequalities need to be addressed. This entails laws enabling women to take ownership of their lives and of their destinies. These rights have to be enshrined in properly enforced laws.

**This is where parliaments and members of parliament have a key role to play.**

Gender equality requires effective, comprehensive legislation and public policies that are non-discriminatory, support women's empowerment and address all forms of discrimination.

Putting these laws into practice remains the main challenge. At the IPU, we know that the role of MPs is crucial in scrutinizing budgets to ensure that adequate financial and human resources are allocated to the effective implementation of legislation.

For parliaments to meet these challenges and actively play their part, they need to be more inclusive and representative; they need to embody and advance gender equality. So levelling the law for women and girls also means ensuring our electoral laws promote equal participation of men and women. We know that more women in parliament brings about more gender-responsive laws.

But levelling the numbers will not be enough. Repealing discriminatory laws cannot be the sole responsibility of women MPs. When it comes to leveraging support from society for the legal reforms that are needed, the role of male MPs is crucial in changing mentalities, garnering support and creating this transformation that societies need.

We also need proper parliamentary processes to be in place. At the IPU we believe that parliaments need to engage in institutional reform so they can become real gender champions. In order to help our Members achieve this objective, we have designed a toolkit for parliamentarians to assess the gender-sensitivity of their parliaments. The toolkit challenges parliaments and parliamentarians to take a fresh look at their working methods, processes and structures, and to develop their own roadmap to achieve better outcomes for society.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Last year, the global parliamentary community made a strong commitment as our Members unanimously adopted a resolution on women's financial inclusion. The resolution calls on parliaments to lift the "legal, cultural and logistical barriers that discriminate against women and prevent their full inclusion in the financial systems" and in particular "to remove legal provisions that discriminate against women in areas such as work, family, property and inheritance".

We know what we have to do. The time to act is now.

If each of us plays our part, our 2030 gender equality goals will be achieved. I look forward to working with you in this endeavour. I am pleased, therefore that IPU is partnering with UNWomen on the project to eliminate discrimination in law.

Thank you.