



Inter-Parliamentary Union



Permanent Mission of Albania to  
the United Nations



## From Critical Mass to Gender Parity—Women in Decision-Making Do Make a Difference!

Thursday, 14 March 2019, from 10 to 11.15 a.m.

Ex-Press Bar<sup>1</sup>, General Assembly Building, United Nations Headquarters, New York

**Subject:** We have all heard the calls regarding the need for women in leadership roles in both politics and business. The Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) tracks the number of women in national parliaments and the executive and documents the contribution of women to effective governance and decision-making. UN Women supports Member States implement global norms and programmes to achieve gender balance in political decision-making and collects data on women's representation in local governments. Influential global leaders, including UN Secretary General António Guterres, have made parity a keystone of their administrations. This session will address why moving beyond a critical mass to achieving parity is so important and what happens when it is achieved.

**Background:** The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), national laws to prevent discrimination against women, etc. Many promises have been made when it comes to gender equality and its impact on society. Yet, many challenges remain. Violence is rampant: the World Health Organization (2013) found that 1 of every 3 women has experienced physical or sexual violence at some time in her life. According to IPU (2016), 44.4% of surveyed women in national parliaments have been threatened with violence against them or their families. According to UNODC's Global Report on Trafficking in Persons (2016), 71% of the 24.9 million human trafficking victims are women or girls. Impunity for such acts is pervasive in every corner of the world. When do we say enough is enough?

Research from IPU (2008) shows that where there are greater numbers of women in parliament health, education, ending violence against women, social welfare, child welfare and gender equality get paid greater attention. In Norway, there is a direct link between having more women in municipal councils and higher childcare coverage (Bratton and Ray 2002). In India, having more women in leadership raised girls' and young women's educational achievements and career aspirations (Lori, Duflo et. Al. 2012). The idea of a critical mass of 30% emerged decades ago as the necessary leverage for women to exercise influence in decision-making. But transformative and institutional change requires going even further. Equal representation of women and men in decision-making is critical for achieving gender equality and all Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). A recent IPU resolution goes in the same direction (<http://archive.ipu.org/conf-e/135/item4.pdf>). At present, the global average of women in national parliaments is 24%, only three out of 193 countries have at least 50% women in parliament (single/lower house): Rwanda, Bolivia and Cuba. Notably, Bolivia is the only country to have enacted a specific law to combat violence against women in politics.

**Proposal:** Provide a forum to discuss how women leaders have brought about positive change, especially in the area of social protection programmes and in efforts to eliminate gender-based violence against women.

Further, participants will also discuss:

- **How have the dynamics of critical mass and parity impacted these achievements?**
- **What best practices exist in the route towards achieving gender parity in governance?**
- **What are the enablers of women's influence in decision-making processes?**

<sup>1</sup> The room does not have interpretation facilities and the side event will be held in English only.

**Moderator:** Ms. Rosalee Keech, Chief Observer to the United Nations, League of Women Voters

**Speakers:**

- H.E. Penelope Beckles, Ambassador of the Republic of Trinidad-and-Tobago
- H.E. Besiana Kadare, Ambassador of the Republic of Albania
- Hon. Gabriela Cuevas Barron, President of the Inter-Parliamentary Union
- Hon. Mereseini Vuniwaqa, Minister of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation, Fiji
- Hon. Margaret Mensah-Williams, Chairperson of the National Council, Namibia
- Ms. Hanna Kristjánsdóttir, UN Women, Senior Adviser on Women's Leadership

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**Venue:** Ex-Press Bar, General Assembly Building, United Nations Headquarters, New York

**Main sponsors:** Permanent Missions of Trinidad-and-Tobago, Fiji, Albania and Canada; IPU and UN Women

**Co-sponsors:** League of Women Voters - United States (LWVUS), Pan Pacific South East Asia Women's Association (PPSEAWA), International Council of Jewish Women (ICJW), NGO Committee on the Status of Women/New York (NGO CSW/NY), Federation of American Women's Clubs Overseas (FAWCO).