



141st IPU Assembly

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13-17 October 2019



Workshop on *Leaving no one behind in political representation: Gender and youth quotas*

Tuesday 15 October 2019, 11 a.m.–12.30 p.m.
Hall 3/0 (ground floor), Building A, Sava Centre

Concept note

One of the most significant challenges of development and democracy is the effective political representation of each and every one of the groups that make up society. Despite commitments made since 1995 to implement the Beijing Platform for Action and achieve gender equality in public affairs, IPU data shows that only 24.3 per cent of the parliamentarians of the world today are women.¹ In 2018, young parliamentarians under the age of 30 represented a mere 2.2 per cent of parliamentarians.² IPU research shows also that young women are clearly facing twofold discrimination based on sex and age and are among the least represented in parliament.

The 1990s saw the birth of a global phenomenon that sought to give an affirmative answer to the demands of feminist groups and international commitments: quota laws. These laws have since expanded and today can be found in all regions of the globe and a wide range of political systems.

The quota system gained currency within the affirmative action movement, which boosted women's political representation especially in countries in political transition. The primary objectives of implementing quotas are twofold: on the one hand to influence policy towards women's interests, and on the other hand to achieve a greater level of women's participation in other spheres of society. This has been a much faster way of achieving more equal representation (though we are not there yet) than the incremental approach.

Legislation providing for gender electoral quotas or reserved seats for women in parliament exists in 62 countries.³ Four countries have 50 per cent or more women parliamentarians [Andorra, Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Cuba and Rwanda]; 50 countries have more than 30 per cent women parliamentarians. The majority of these countries have gender electoral quotas in place (legislated quotas, reserved seats or voluntary party quotas).

Whatever the type of quota (legislated or voluntary party quotas), the desired outcome - equal representation across the board – can only be achieved if quotas are institutionalized within political parties. This is because political parties are the main entry point into political leadership (at both national and sub-national levels) and are viewed as representative of the public's view and society's ideology.

¹ IPU data on women in national parliaments: archive.ipu.org/wmn-e/world.htm

¹ IPU report *Youth participation in national parliaments*, 2018: www.ipu.org/resources/publications/reports/2018-12/youth-participation-in-national-parliaments-2018

¹ Gender Quotas Database, a joint project of International IDEA, the IPU and Stockholm University: www.idea.int/data-tools/data/gender-quotas/database

Although quotas for youth are used only rarely, IPU research found correlations between women and youth representation in parliament. The countries with the greatest share of parliamentarians under 30 are also among those with the highest proportion of women members of parliament. At the other end of the spectrum, countries with few or no women parliamentarians also have no or only very few young parliamentarians. It is safe to say that gender quotas paved the way for more diversity in parliament and continue to do so.

To address youth under-representation, the IPU Forum of Young Parliamentarians adopted a set of youth-target proposals for parliaments to achieve by 2035: a minimum of 15 per cent of MPs under 30 years of age; a minimum of 35 per cent of MPs under 40; and a minimum of 45 per cent of MPs under 45. Each target should include a gender parity provision of 50 per cent women and 50 per cent men. Youth quotas can be a strong means to achieve these targets.

However, in many instances a gap still persists between the targets set or quota provisions and the ultimate results reached or the actual proportions of women and youth in parliament. While quotas do make a difference, their scope and implementation vary greatly, thus achieving different results. Taking gender electoral quotas as an example, countries that apply legislated quotas elect more women to parliament overall: in 2018, countries with quotas elected 25.6 per cent women to lower houses of parliament and unicameral parliaments, whereas those without quotas elected only 18.6 per cent women. When gender electoral quotas set a target of 30 per cent or more women, the share of women elected was 27.7 per cent in lower houses of parliament and unicameral parliaments. When the target set was 50/50, the overall share of women winning seats in these chambers reached 29.3 per cent.

Hence, it is essential that quotas be not only ambitious, but also well designed and strongly enforced.

All this raises some questions that the workshop will explore, including:

- What conditions must be met to have effective quota laws?
- What are the main challenges to introducing gender electoral quotas? How can they be overcome?
- How can arguments put forward by those opposing quotas be addressed, so that women appointed or elected through quotas are perceived as legitimate representatives of the people?
- What are some interesting developments in the design and implementation of gender electoral quotas?
- What lessons can be drawn from the implementation of gender and youth quotas in tandem?
- What is needed through quotas and other measures to enhance young women's participation in parliament and in politics?
- To what extent do gender electoral quotas positively influence political parties in promoting gender parity in their ranks and leadership?

Welcome remarks:

- Ms. Gabriela Cuevas Barron, IPU President

Proposed panellists:

- Ms. Susan Kihika, President of the IPU Bureau of Women Parliamentarians
- Mr. Melvin Bouva, President of the IPU Forum of Young Parliamentarians – To be confirmed
- Ms. Julie Ballington, Global Policy Advisor on political participation, UN Women
- Dr. Amal Abdulla Al Qubaisi, Speaker of the Federal National Council, United Arab Emirates
- Ms. Cynthia López Castro, MP, Mexico