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Speaking Notes

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Opening of the General Debate
*Strengthening international law:
Parliamentary roles and mechanisms,
and the contribution of regional
cooperation*

14 October 2019

Madam President,
Mr. Secretary General,
Mr. President of the Forum of Young MPs,
Distinguished guests,
Dear colleagues,

International law is the main driver of peace among nations.

But let us not forget it is also about protecting individuals – especially the most vulnerable among them – from tyranny, insecurity and suffering.

Whenever international norms are under attack, they tend to be particularly acute when it comes to women's human rights, be it in the name of culture, religion or tradition.

Nothing can justify restricting the basic human rights of women and girls.

Time has come for us to reaffirm and collectively reclaim these rights!

Colleagues,

2019 and 2020 are important milestones.

This year we are celebrating the 40th anniversary of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). Yet, discrimination against women and girls persists everywhere, from gender stereotyping to unequal pay and widespread gender-based violence. Such discrimination is often condoned in the law. Today, 2.5 billion women and girls are affected by discriminatory laws.

In 2020, we shall be celebrating the 20th anniversary of Security Council resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security, and the 25th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.

This is an opportunity not to be missed. Let us get serious about advancing gender equality and women's empowerment in our respective countries and continents, and in international forums.

Dear colleagues,

CEDAW, Beijing and UN Security Council resolution 1325 help advocates and law-makers across the globe to make progress. They constitute the Bill of Rights of half of humankind.

And this is no time for moving backwards or eroding these safeguards!

As MPs we must uphold these core principles and show how relevant they are today.

First, we must call for the inclusion of women in the formulation and negotiation of international and regional treaties, including peace agreements. This would lead to more inclusive and legitimate processes and lasting outcomes.

Second, it is important that parliaments take a leading role in monitoring these treaties. This means ensuring decisions at the international level affect positively women's human rights at the national level. We need to show that international law works for all, and is not against anyone.

Third, parliaments should have no fear of legal reforms to advance gender equality. This requires explaining to our constituents that these changes are for the common good. In the end, this will reinforce trust in our institutions, in their relevance and robustness.

Colleagues,

To achieve progress we should not hide from our challenges. We need to acknowledge them and ensure our decisions are fair and well understood. This requires transparency, accountability, openness but also – very importantly – institutions that are truly inclusive and representative of all sectors of society.

The role of our parliaments is key in these troubling times. We should take this as an opportunity to create a decisive path to protect women's human rights from our parliamentary seats and through genuine cooperation among us.

Thank you.