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United Nations Entity for Gender Equality  
and the Empowerment of Women

## Beijing +25: Parliaments accelerating action to achieve gender equality for all women and girls

Parliamentary event organized by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) and UN Women  
at the 64<sup>th</sup> session of the Commission on the Status of Women

11 March 2020, Trusteeship Council Room, UN Headquarters, New York

### CONCEPT NOTE AND AGENDA

#### 1. INTRODUCTION

The United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women: Action for Equality, Development and Peace, held in Beijing, China, in 1995, established a comprehensive global policy framework for women's empowerment and gender equality. The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action remain a central road map for UN Member States' implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. The 12 critical areas of concern identified in this landmark document remain as relevant today as they were 25 years ago: women and poverty; education and training of women; women and health; violence against women; women and armed conflict; women and the economy; women in power and decision-making; institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women; human rights of women; women and the media; women and the environment; and the girl-child. While progress has been made in all 12 areas to differing degrees, no country can claim to have achieved full gender equality. In addition, new challenges have emerged, such as the backlash to gender equality, violence against women in politics, and the adverse effects of climate change, violent extremism and conservatism, and digital technologies on women and girls, either exacerbating existing gender inequalities or posing new threats to hard-won women's human rights.

In 2020, as we mark a quarter of a century since the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the time has come to build on progress and scale up good initiatives, while reaffirming the commitments made and devising effective responses to ongoing challenges globally, nationally and locally. Additionally, this 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary coincides with the first five-year milestone of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which includes a goal on gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls (SDG 5) and stresses that gender equality is key to achieving progress across all development goals. Likewise, 2020 marks the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of United Nations Security Council resolution 1325 on women, peace and security, which highlights the importance of women's agency and empowerment to building and sustaining peace.

These milestones provide momentum to accelerate progress towards achieving gender equality and fulfilling the rights and empowerment of women and girls. Parliaments have a crucial role to play in translating international standards into national legal and policy frameworks and accelerating concrete outcomes in the lives of women and girls. Parliaments can make laws that deliver on equality between men and women. They can also influence policy decisions and budgetary allocations by applying a gender lens, demanding accountability from government, being gender-sensitive institutions, and partnering with stakeholders from government, civil society, academia, the media and the private sector. Parliaments must lead the way in scaling up the political will to fulfil the promise of achieving gender equality through accelerated action.

Participants are invited to share good practices developed in their respective parliaments to pass laws on, allocate budgets to and oversee implementation of gender-responsive policies and legislation, as well as building their own internal capacities to drive such practices. The event will focus on three specific priorities for accelerated action by parliaments in the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action: achieving equality in political decision-making; promoting gender-responsive legislation; and eliminating violence against women and girls, including in the context of armed conflict.

## 2. AGENDA

11 March 2020

Chaired by Ms. Susan Kihika, President of the IPU Bureau of Women Parliamentarians

10–10.30 a.m. Welcome remarks

10.30 a.m.–1 p.m. Session 1: Accelerating achievement of gender balance in politics

Women's political participation has steadily increased since 1995, but gender balance is still far from being achieved. Today 24.5 per cent of parliamentarians are women, compared to 11.3 per cent in 1995. At the current pace of progress, it would take another half-century to reach gender balance as set out in the Beijing Platform for Action.<sup>1</sup> According to the World Economic Forum, political empowerment is the gender gap that remains the widest.<sup>2</sup>

Ensuring equal participation of women and men in decision-making processes is vital for achieving not only gender equality (SDG 5) but also the goals across the development spectrum, such as ending poverty (SDG 1), ensuring healthy lives (SDG 3) and quality education (SDG 4), as well as fostering good governance and effective institutions (SDG 16).<sup>3</sup>

For this, political leaders need to support women's equal political participation inter alia by: adopting legislation that includes temporary special measures, such as ambitious gender quotas with enforcement mechanisms; providing financial incentives or sanctions for political parties; raising awareness of and educating for gender equality in schools, communities and the media; supporting initiatives led by civil society and other actors that enhance accountability on gender equality; fostering a political culture that is gender-sensitive, starting with exemplary behaviour by parliament and building a culture of zero tolerance towards sexism, harassment and violence against women.<sup>4</sup>

This session will examine existing good practices and action required to secure political and institutional commitment to gender equality. The discussion will explore how to address the specific challenges that impact women's opportunities and willingness to enter into and pursue politics, and their influence while in office.

<sup>1</sup> See also the Joint Statement by the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women and the IPU, *Women's political leadership: Striving for balance: 50/50 by 2030*, Geneva, 8 March 2019:

[www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=24279&LangID=E](http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=24279&LangID=E)

<sup>2</sup> World Economic Forum (2018), *The Global Gender Gap Report*, p. 8.

<sup>3</sup> UN Women, UNDP (2018), *Gender Equality as an Accelerator for Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals*.

<sup>4</sup> UN General Assembly resolution, *Intensification of efforts to prevent and eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls: sexual harassment (A/RES/73/148)*, operative paragraph 7; and IPU resolution, *The freedom of women to participate in political processes fully, safely and without interference: Building partnerships between men and women to achieve this objective*, adopted at the 135<sup>th</sup> IPU Assembly (Geneva, 27 October 2016).

Following panellists' presentations, there will be a moderated debate which will consider the following questions:

- What national legislation has effectively promoted gender balance in parliaments?
- What good practices have emerged to promote the participation of more diverse cohorts of women in parliament, including young women and women with disabilities?
- How have parliaments created a space for women to occupy key leadership positions and effectively influence decision-making?
- How can parliaments liaise with civil society to build partnerships for gender equality in political decision-making?
- How does violence against women in politics affect women's participation and influence in the political arena, and impact the participation of future generations? What best practices exist in addressing this issue, including in parliament?

**12.30 p.m.                      Presentation on the Generation Equality Forum**

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**1–2.30 p.m.                      *Lunch break***

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**2.30–4.15 p.m.              Session 2: Eliminating discrimination in the law: A sine qua non for accelerated action towards gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls**

Over 2.5 billion women and girls around the world are affected by discriminatory laws and the lack of legal protections, often in combination.<sup>5</sup> Discrimination in law spans various domains that affect women's right to travel, seek employment, start a business, receive inheritance, transmit their nationality to their children or spouse, seek protection from violence and decide whether and when to get married. Equality in law is therefore a game changer for the human rights of women and girls. While laws alone are not enough, they are an indispensable guarantee and convey an important message to society as a whole.

Parliaments are part of the solution, especially as members of parliament can draft bills and amend laws. Parliamentarians can also reach out to constituents to solicit their feedback and garner their support, as well as to hold the government accountable for improving and implementing gender-responsive laws.

In March 2019, UN Women launched a strategy together with partners, including the IPU, to provide a framework for a concerted and multi-stakeholder approach aimed at fast-tracking the elimination of discriminatory laws across the board, while documenting experiences and lessons learned for further reform efforts.

Following panellists' presentations, there will be a moderated debate which will consider the following questions:

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<sup>5</sup> McKinsey Global Institute (2015), *The Power of Parity: How Advancing Women's Equality Can Add \$12 Trillion to Global Growth*. McKinsey & Company, p. 74.

- What are the most recent legal reforms enacted by parliament to address gender-based discrimination in laws and practice? What strategies were used for these reforms?
- What existing discriminatory laws and practices in your country are priorities for reform today?
- What are the specific cultural/social barriers to legal reform that need to be taken into consideration? How can they be overcome?
- What challenges are faced in the implementation of gender-responsive legislation and how best can they be addressed?
- What is needed for a multi-stakeholder initiative in your own country to eliminate discrimination in the law?
- Concerning the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, is your parliament involved in its reporting process and the follow-up of its recommendations? How has the Committee helped promote gender equality in laws in your country?

**4.15–5.30 p.m.**

### **Session 3: Eliminating violence against women and girls: Placing zero tolerance on the parliamentary agenda**

Violence against women and girls is prevalent across the world. It includes acts such as threats, coercion, deprivation of liberty, harassment, and psychological, sexual or physical abuse that affects women and girls or is inflicted on them because of their gender. It is a serious human rights violation that occurs in the broader context of gender-based discrimination and unequal power relations between men and women in both the public and private spheres. Violence against women and girls not only deprives them of their dignity and integrity, but also prevents them from realizing their full potential for themselves and for society.

One out of every three women worldwide has experienced physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence or non-partner sexual violence. No country is free from this violence that exists across generations, ethnicity, disability or any other background, and can be justified or tolerated in the name of culture or tradition.

Situations of armed conflict, violent extremism, insecurity and population displacements place women and girls at greater risk of gender-based violence and abuse. Women's bodies are directly targeted by the use of sexual violence as a weapon of war.

In response to this appalling reality, the right of women to be free from violence has been recognized in international and regional human rights instruments, and important achievements have been made to bring national legislation in line with the norms established by these instruments. However, passing laws and developing policies is not enough. Their implementation remains the key challenge. Without it, these laws and policies will not fulfil their intended objective of preventing violence, protecting and supporting victims, and ensuring that they have access to justice and reparation and that the perpetrators are prosecuted. Parliamentarians have a responsibility to review and adopt laws and policies on ending violence against women and girls, and to use their parliamentary oversight to ensure that such laws and policies are effectively implemented.

Following panellists' presentations, a moderated debate will begin in which panellists and parliamentarians are invited to respond to the following questions:

- What good legal frameworks and parliamentary practices exist to prevent and protect women and girls from gender-based violence? What is the key to their successful implementation?
- How can parliaments influence policies to address the differentiated impact of conflict and violent extremism on women and girls, as well as supporting survivors of violence in such contexts?
- How is gender budgeting being applied to enhance the prevention and protection of women and girls from violence?

**5.30–5.45 p.m.**

Concluding remarks