

Part 3: Putting an end to sexism, harassment and violence against women in parliament and in all walks of life.

Ms Tone Wilhelmsen Trøen, President of the Storting – Norway

President, Colleagues,

It is a great honour for me to address this distinguished audience today. I would like to thank the IPU for putting this important subject on the agenda.

We are going through a difficult time due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This is especially the case for women. They are on the very front line as more than 70% of workers in health and social care are women. However, back in their homes, women are also victims of a sharp increase in domestic violence during the lockdown.

Women have a role to play in politics and the public discourse. This is a topic close to my heart. It is our responsibility as presidents of parliaments to facilitate for women's participation so that young women will continue to engage in and make a difference in political work.

As a woman, I see that sexual harassment, violence and hate speech - and the fear they instil - create a chilling effect. As a president of parliament, I see that women hesitate to, and refrain from, entering the political stage and taking part in the public discourse. I will do my utmost to counter this unfortunate trend, and set the stage so that more women are inspired to get involved in politics. This is not a woman's issue alone. It is a threat to democracy. A threat we must take seriously, both women and men.

The wave of #metoo has swept across the globe. Sexual harassment is a problem for all of us and we must dare to look at the situation in our own parliaments. Otherwise, we risk pushing the matter aside and viewing it as everyone else's problem.

I would like to thank IPU and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe for the surveys on Sexism, harassment and violence against women in parliaments in Europe.

The results were shocking. Eight out of ten female MPs reported that they had experienced psychological violence. One in four said they had suffered sexual violence!

In the wake of this survey and the #metoo wave, the Norwegian parliament initiated a similar survey last autumn.

In our survey 11 per cent of the MPs and party employees reported that they had experienced bullying or harassment during the past year. There was a clear predominance of women among those who say they have experienced bullying, harassment or unwanted sexual behaviour. As we have zero tolerance for such behaviour in our parliament, the results were simply disappointing.

Based on the results, we will take measures to ensure that our work environment is one where everyone can feel safe, and where everyone can work to their full potential.

Colleagues,

This year was to be a landmark year for global equality, marking the 25th anniversary of the Beijing Platform. Now, we see countries considering withdrawing from the Istanbul Convention. The COVID-19 pandemic threatens women's rights and international gender equality work. In this difficult time, we, the women speakers of parliaments, must stand together!

I look forward to working with you to exchange best practices and keep women's rights high on the global agenda.

Thank you for your attention.