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## Speaking notes

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Parliament  
Opening speech

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- Good morning, good afternoon or good evening to everyone. It is a pleasure to welcome you all. We are delighted that you could join us.
- Knowing you are all here today, I cannot help but be proud of this platform of women leaders of parliament. Indeed, in order to respond to the immense challenges that we are facing today, leadership must have a woman's face now more than ever, especially in our parliamentary institutions.
- Most recently, we have seen women leaders respond in bold and successful ways to the COVID-19 crisis. Not only have they succeeded with a people-centred approach; they have also shown resolve, determination, bravery, and have prepared responses with a scientific basis. I must point out that this is not only a matter of story-telling: data shows that women's leadership is good for development, climate action and peace. Studies have repeatedly shown correlations between women's leadership and less corruption.
- This is the virtuous women's lead that blazes the right trail! I see this Summit of Women Speakers of Parliament as the platform to rally women leaders, to showcase the women-led response to COVID-19 and its repercussions, and to make this women-led response our world's response to the huge challenge it is facing.
- Our joint efforts in this direction are crucial in a world characterized by persistent inequality for women and girls. **While recognizing how far we have come, we cannot underestimate how far we still have to go.**
- Taking stock of the many inequalities that women and girls continue to face and to battle against, one key area that concerns us here today, in particular, is the incredibly unequal participation that women have in decision-making.
- The percentage of women parliamentarians around the world has only grown from 11 per cent to just about 25 per cent in 25 years. Women Speakers make up less than 20 per cent of all Speakers of parliament in the Women heads of State and heads of government make up only 5 to 6 per cent of leaders globally. Incremental progress is good, but not sufficient. Considering that there are issues that disproportionately affect women, this huge inequality in political decision-making cannot persist!
- For instance, another area where inequality hits women hard is the economy. Globally, women earn 23 per cent less than men, and the economic downturn brought about by the pandemic is further disproportionately affecting the socioeconomic status of women. Women continue to take on the majority of unpaid domestic work and parental tasks. They are more likely than men to

have low-paid and unprotected jobs in the informal sector. They are thus excluded from social protection, health insurance, and unemployment pay. This makes them more likely to be the first to lose their income which is not just crucial for them, but for their families, communities, and society at large.

- Violence against women was already at unacceptable proportions before the pandemic, with 137 women killed every day globally by a member of their own family. Due to the confined living conditions, economic stress and fear surrounding the pandemic, we are seeing increasing levels of domestic violence, sexual abuse and sexual exploitation. Previous health outbreaks have taught us that health-related resources risk being diverted during the pandemic away from the specific needs of women and girls, including survivors of violence and those in need of sexual and reproductive health care and services.
- Women make up 70 per cent of the health workforce caring for those affected. This means that women are on the front lines at high risk of infection while also keeping households as well as the whole of society afloat.
- COVID-19 exposed the full impact of gender-based inequalities and further exacerbated them. The costs of a crisis are never gender-blind. On the contrary, the impact hits women and girls harder.
- We need to remain very vigilant of the threat of reneging on the commitment of achieving gender equality goals.. The pandemic is jeopardizing collective successes obtained during recent years, which enabled progress towards making the promises of the Sustainable Development Goals and the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action a reality for all women and girls.
- While the COVID-19 crisis has altered priorities and exacerbated inequalities, it also gives us unparalleled opportunities to build back better.
- Now more than ever, gender equality must be placed at the core of parliamentary responses in a post-COVID-19 world. Gender-responsive policies built through gender-sensitive approaches, processes and institutions are not a luxury, but an absolute necessity.
- I would like to take a moment to go beyond the facts. After all, this is not just about numbers, but about women's lives. Addressing the issues that disproportionately affect women is not only a matter of empathy; it is also a matter of justice. Women make up half of the world's population, but our voices and demands often fall on deaf ears; our safety is never guaranteed; and our work is not adequately compensated. Such a state of affairs has gone on for far too long. But make no mistake. We, who are gathered here today on the occasion of this Summit, can take action now.
- In that spirit, allow us to agree and commit to take powerful action in at least five concrete areas:
- **One: Eliminate all forms of discrimination in the law** by identifying and repealing or amending discriminatory laws, by introducing new legislation if necessary and overseeing the implementation of gender-responsive legislation. I invite all women Speakers to commit to leading gender-responsive legislative reform in their respective countries.
- **Two: Support other women entering politics and pursuing political careers** by promoting quotas and parity in politics, by mentoring and

empowering women aspirants and candidates, and by safeguarding all political processes from violence against women. I urge women Speakers to be the leaders of an unprecedented boost in women's safe and respected participation: 50/50 in your country, 50/50 in the world.

- We must also **empower women in the economy and at work** by addressing unequal pay, unpaid care work and gaps in social protection. I urge women Speakers to be the leaders of equality at work and of women's social protection, and to drive a new paradigm that recognizes and values unpaid care work.
- Let me be clear: if our institutions, culture, societies, and politics remain unchanged and male-dominated environments, only rules and procedures created by men will prevail. We need to be decisive and push for affirmative action. This is not just about opening windows; we must be brave and open doors for women and girls. Today, our demand is nothing less than full gender equality.
- **Three: End all violence against women in all aspects of society, including at the government level in the Executive, Legislative and Judicial powers. Regrettably, violence remains common and it undermines women's most basic rights around the world. Therefore, decisive, zero-tolerance policies against female genital mutilation, against limitations of women's rights, against child marriages, against domestic abuse and feminicides must be enforced.**
- **Four: Transform your parliaments into gender-sensitive institutions** where there are no barriers to women's full participation, where equality between men and women is respected and where gender-responsive outcomes are promoted. I urge women Speakers to lead parliaments towards more gender-sensitive processes and functioning, and more gender-responsive outcomes.
- **Five: Improve financial investment in gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls.** The immense work towards gender equality needs to be matched with the necessary funding. I urge women Speakers to invest and make their parliaments invest in gender equality in society, and to have budgets that respond more effectively to the specific needs of women and girls in all sectors.
- These five steps, if taken collectively and around the world, can lead to a better future not just for us but for generations to come.
- The task before us is immense. We must act now, and we must act together. Hand in hand, side by side, we can drive the change we wish to see in our societies.
- This is an occasion to uplift women's leadership, to show resolute willpower, and to embrace bravery while we embark upon an ambitious, yet necessary, undertaking: write a new history for women all over the world. This is the only way to honor those who have sacrificed their lives only so that we could vote and run for political office. In their memory, let us afford every single and each one of all women and girls with opportunity to take ownership of their lives. No one will be left behind. Allow us then to proceed with this Summit under the spirit of inspiring, resolute, empathic and people-centred deliberations. Thank

you all for being here!