



Inter-Parliamentary Union  
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T +41 22 919 41 50  
F +41 22 919 41 60  
E [postbox@ipu.org](mailto:postbox@ipu.org)  
[www.ipu.org](http://www.ipu.org)

Chemin du Pommier 5  
Case postale 330  
1218 Le Grand-Saconnex  
Geneva – Switzerland

# Speech by Dr. Tulia Ackson, IPU President

IPU – UN Women Parliamentary Meeting (CSW68)  
“Gender-sensitive parliaments: Advancing gender equality to end poverty”

UN Headquarters, ECOSOC Chamber, New York, 12 March 2023

Madam Deputy Executive,  
Madam Chair,  
Distinguished colleagues and guests,  
Ladies and gentlemen,

It is my great pleasure to open this Parliamentary Meeting on the occasion of the Commission on the Status of Women, for the first time as President of the IPU. I am honored to be here among you alongside UN Women, a key partner of the IPU with whom we share the common objective of advancing women's empowerment and gender equality.

Welcome to all! It is encouraging to witness such a level of engagement from our global community of parliamentarians, gathered here to raise the voice of parliaments in the deliberations of this CSW.

It is only by working together that we can effectively tackle our shared challenges. Inequality, violence, and discrimination against women and girls continue to threaten democracy, sustainable development, and peace. Progress achieved across various fronts is being reversed. It is a moral imperative for us to reaffirm our resolve to advance women's rights and ensure equality for all.

As parliamentarians, we have the power and duty to incorporate the needs and interests of women and girls in our deliberations and translate them into concrete policy outputs that leave no one behind. Our current debate serves not only as a platform to address common concerns but also to inspire and strengthen our commitment.

As we convene on this auspicious occasion, we are compelled to confront a persistent and cross-generational injustice that continues to challenge our societies: the vicious cycle of poverty, particularly its disproportionate impact on women and girls.

To understand and address women's poverty, we must first stop considering it a disease to be cured but rather the symptom of systemic and structural discrimination, gender inequality and injustice.

We know well now that women are more likely to live in poverty. They are often deprived of accessing quality education, healthcare, social protection and economic opportunities. Other intersecting forms of discrimination on the basis of race, ethnicity, socio-economic status, geographic location, and disability add disadvantages that lead to an even harder escape from the cycle of poverty.

Dear colleagues, in a woman's world, time runs faster, responsibilities grow larger, and work is paid less, if at all. Women often find themselves mentally and physically depleted if not abused. They are often trapped in unpaid caregiving responsibilities, largely normalized by patriarchal norms that deny the financial means to make their own choices. It is therefore no surprise that women are found to perform on average 2.8 more hours of unpaid care and domestic work per day.

This disparity is not only unjust; it is also economically unsustainable and morally indefensible. Moving forward and if our goal is to reach our 2030 targets on time, we must ensure that poverty is addressed as

a human rights issue and that its gendered dimensions are addressed through rights-affirming laws and policies, and gender-responsive budgets.

But to bring about the change we want to see, we must first begin by transforming our parliaments.

We must transform our institutions into gender-sensitive parliaments so that they are more representative, better adapted and more efficient.

Dear friends, first, we must ensure parity between men and women in parliament, making it the norm rather than the exception. IPU's latest data on women in parliament shows that progress remains much too slow. Only 26.9% of parliamentarians today are women. This is a mere 0.4 percentage point increase in one year. And as a year ago, only 6 countries have parity or a higher percentage of women in their lower or single chamber. Beyond setting a 50/50 target, we need to apply measures that work in this direction sooner rather than later. Quotas and family-friendly policies are key measures to ensure true equality in parliament.

Second, we need parliaments that are safe and accessible. IPU studies reveal that across the globe more than 80% of women MPs are facing gender-based psychological violence including intimidation, threats of death, rape, beating or abduction during their parliamentary term.

This must end now, and our personal and collective commitments are essential in this cause. Incorporating zero tolerance policies towards sexism, harassment, and violence is an essential component of gender-sensitive parliaments and we need all, men and women colleagues, united in this cause.

Third, we need to develop dedicated structures and mechanisms in parliament so we can advance gender equality legislation, monitor its implementation, and prioritize gender-responsive budgeting and financing. It is the only way to ensure that resources are allocated equitably, and that women can thrive and uplift their communities.

Dear colleagues,

The IPU and fora such as this serve as multipliers of our individual capacities as parliamentarians. We have a lot to learn, a lot to share and an opportunity to draw inspiration from each other.

I look forward to the deliberations of today's meeting and to continuing to work together to empower the people we serve.