



Inter-Parliamentary Union
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The Power of Legislation for Women's Empowerment and Sustainable Development

A parliamentary event organized by the Inter-Parliamentary Union and UN Women on the occasion of the 60th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women
15 March 2016, ECOSOC Chamber, UN Headquarters, New York

CONCEPT NOTE AND DRAFT AGENDA

1. INTRODUCTION

In 1995, at the historic United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, 189 countries pledged to “revoke any remaining laws that discriminate on the basis of sex” by 2005.¹ In addition, 189 States have ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), committing to take action to eliminate discrimination against women. Today, in 2016, this promise is far from being fulfilled. Legal equality - which enables women and girls to access rights and seek recourse if denied – is a necessary but inadequate prerequisite for the sustainable promotion, enforcement and monitoring of gender equality and non-discrimination. Putting an end to discriminatory laws thus requires key partners, strategy and action at multiple levels.

Elected and vested with both the power to legislate and influence public opinion through the media and citizen engagement, parliaments and parliamentarians have a fundamental role to play in ending discriminatory laws, enacting gender equality legislation and overseeing their respective implementation.

In line with the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5 – to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls – and the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) Plan of Action for Gender-sensitive Parliaments (2012), the IPU and UN Women will host a parliamentary event on the occasion of the 60th session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) to highlight “The Power of Legislation for Women's Empowerment and Sustainable Development.” The event will focus on key forms of discrimination in laws which hamper the sustainable development agenda, drawing on evidence-based global research and policymakers' practical experiences of enacting, implementing and enforcing equality and non-discrimination laws.

2. DRAFT AGENDA

15 March 2016

10:00 - 10:30 a.m.

Welcome remarks

- Ms. M. Mensah-Williams, Chairperson of the National Council of Namibia, President of the IPU Coordinating Committee of Women Parliamentarians
- Mr. Y. Glemarec, United Nations Assistant Secretary-General, Deputy Executive Director for Policy and Programme, UN Women

10:30a.m. – 1 p.m.

Session 1. The status of discriminatory laws worldwide

Legal discrimination against women permeates all countries and all sectors of society. Discriminatory legal frameworks constitute a major impediment to the achievement of equality and the well-being of people. Such laws unambiguously

¹ United Nations, Commission on the Status of Women report on the forty-ninth session (28 February-11 and 23 March 2005), Economic and Social Council Official Records, 2005, Supplement No. 7 (E/2005/27-E/CN.6/2005/11), New York.

signal to societies that women's and girls' lives matter less. They also result in severe consequences for development.

Legal discrimination against women exists in every body of law that governs societies, and is all the more evident with respect to women's *marital status*, including marriage, divorce, polygamy etc.; *personal status*, including citizenship, legal identity, weight of court testimony and the right to travel; *economic status*, including inheritance, property and employment; and in legislation addressing *violence against women*, including rape and so-called "honour killings".²

According to the World Bank, 155 of 173 economies studied in 2015 have at least one legal difference restricting women's economic opportunities; in 100 economies, women face gender-based job restrictions; and in 18 economies, husbands can legally prevent their wives from working.³ Increased educational access and attainment for women and girls has not been matched with better labour conditions, prospects for advancement or equal pay for equal work. Early marriage, restricted mobility, inadequate or totally absent maternity leave or labour codes that explicitly restrict the type of work women can do are all barriers.

This panel will look at the multiple forms of legal discrimination that persist around the world today, taking stock of progress and gaps to date.

Panellists for the session include:

- Ms. Y. Hayashi, Chairperson of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women
- Mr. A. Lopez Claros, Director, Global Indicators Group, Development Economics, World Bank Group
- Ms. Y. Hassan, Global Executive Director, Equality Now
- Ms. B. Duncan, Justice and Constitutional Advisor, Leadership and Governance, UN Women

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

- What is the status of discriminatory laws around the world?
- Which are the discriminatory laws that have proven the most difficult to reform or repeal?
- Where has progress been achieved?
- What has stalled and impeded progress?

12:50 – 1p.m. Intervention by Ms. P. Mlambo-Ngcuka, Executive Director, UN Women

1 – 2:45p.m. ***Lunch break***

2:45 – 4:15p.m. **Session 2. The power of parliaments to end discriminatory laws**
Parliaments and parliamentarians have the prerogative to make, change and repeal laws or institutional practices in matters of gender equality and non-discrimination. Progress to date in repealing discriminatory laws has been slow, but the global push for gender equality has never been stronger. The recent adoption of the SDGs, which represent a shared and transformative development agenda, has reinforced global commitments, specifically through SDG 5, to "achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls". The Goal's specific targets include ending all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere. Such a vision – what UN Women calls a "Planet 50:50 by 2030" – is one in which all men and women enjoy equal rights, access and opportunity. This panel will focus on the

² Equality Now, *Words & Deeds: Holding Governments Accountable in the Beijing+20 Review Process*, January 2015

³ World Bank and International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, 2013, *Women, Business and the Law 2014 Removing Restrictions to Enhance Gender Equality*.

power of parliaments to make this vision a reality. It will showcase parliamentary initiatives to implement reforms and adopt strategies for repealing discriminatory laws.

Panellists for the session include:

- Ms. N. Skalli, Member of the House of Representatives (Morocco), Former Minister of Social Development, Family and Solidarity
- Ms. M.O. Emaase, Member of the National Assembly (Kenya)
- Mr. C. Chauvel, Team Leader, Inclusive Political Processes, Bureau for Policy and Programmes Support, UNDP

This session will be a moderated debate between **panellists and parliamentarians, in response to the following questions:**

- What specific actions have been taken to repeal discriminatory laws over the past 20 years in your parliament?
- What have been the benefits for women?
- What is necessary to build political will to support such reform efforts?
- Where do the major challenges lie in parliamentarians' work to end discrimination?
- What lessons can be drawn from experiences to date?

4:15 – 5:45pm

Session 3. Challenges of implementation, enforcement and oversight

Gender equality before the law does not necessarily guarantee equal opportunities for women and men in practice. Gender-based stereotypes and social norms and practices deepen these gaps.

Parliaments not only have the power to enact legislation, but they play a vital role in overseeing its implementation and enforcement. Several parliamentary mechanisms, such as committees and caucuses, can be leveraged to make a greater impact. This panel will therefore explore the opportunities provided by parliaments' key oversight role, as well as other parliamentary roles and functions to secure effective enforcement of legislation, whether in terms of budgetary allocations or awareness raising, among others. The importance of women's political leadership and representation in legislative bodies will also be discussed.

Panellists for the session include:

- Ms. S. Markham, Senior Coordinator for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment, USAID
- Ms. C. A. Thomas, Executive Director, Global Rights for Women
- Ms. P. Locatelli, Member of the Chamber of Deputies (Italy)
- Mr. C. Chauvel, Team Leader, Inclusive Political Processes, Bureau for Policy and Programmes Support, UNDP

Presentations will be made by resource persons, to be followed by a moderated debate **in which parliamentarians are invited to respond to the following questions:**

- What are the obstacles to parliamentarians' oversight and enforcement role of gender equality? What are the opportunities?
- What are the lessons learned from enforcing laws on ending violence against women or quota laws? Who are the key partners?

5:45 – 6:00pm

Concluding remarks