



# INTER-PARLIAMENTARY UNION

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY  
New York, 26 February 2011

**STATEMENT by the Hon. M. Wiens-Vivians,  
Vice-President of the IPU Co-ordinating Committee of Women Parliamentarians  
Deputy Speaker of the National Council of Namibia**

It is a great pleasure for me to be here today. I am the Deputy Speaker of the National Council of Namibia and Vice-President of the IPU Co-ordinating Committee of Women Parliamentarians.

Last week, the Inter-Parliamentary Union and the Women's organization held a meeting on the occasion of the 53<sup>rd</sup> session of the Commission on the Status of Women. Before starting with your dialogue, allow me to say that we began our proceedings with a dialogue session and a meeting with Mrs. M. M. M. M. Executive Director of UN Women. I would like to reiterate our thanks to her for having taken the time to discuss with parliamentarians UN Women's objectives and strategies. We were pleased to hear that parliamentarians were doing the work of UN Women. Allow me to reiterate, Mr. Chairman, the IPU's and its Members' full support for the work of the new women's entity. We look forward to strengthening our cooperation with the

Now, let me turn to the outcome of the annual parliamentary meeting on the occasion of the CSW. The purpose of this meeting is to ensure that parliamentarians participate in the work of the Commission, that they contribute to its decisions and that they learn from the information, exchanges and meetings that take place. This information serves to mobilize parliamentarians with a view to monitoring and follow-up of the decisions that have been taken here.

Our meeting focused on the role of parliamentarians in promoting progress and participation of women and girls in education, in training, science and technology. It was a very interactive and constructive event, with more than 100 members participating.

The debates centered on three main issues: education, as a prerequisite for girls to access science and technology; how to facilitate women's access to the science and technology labour market; and how information and communication technology (ICT) can support the

Mr. T. Narayan, an MP, said during the meeting:

- The first point that was made was the need to address gender stereotypes as a key cross-cutting issue. It is important to ensure that women's education and access to the science and technology labour market have been in line with the national agenda very closely and to look at the data on gender equality in particular. We, members of parliament, and community have any sexist and stereotypical expressions. As opinion leaders, we need to make a concerted effort to change the mindsets. It is important for us to serve as role models for girls throughout the country and encourage them to be ambitious and pursue their dreams through education. It is important to support their dreams and ambition.

- In terms of access to education, the national report kept cropping up was "quality" education. The question is not only to facilitate access to education for girls but also to ensure that the education provided to them is of a high quality. This, for us parliamentarians, means ensuring free access to primary and possible secondary education, providing incentives for girls to go to school and sufficient funding for schools to deliver quality services for both girls and boys. This is all within our sphere of influence as MPs, in particular as concerns budgets and oversight of executive action. In discussing the education of girls, we also highlighted all of the main challenges that can limit their access. The purchase of textbooks, school uniforms, and so on are all of the costs that are beyond a family's capacities to send their children to school. We should therefore look not only at schools themselves but at the environment in which girls evolve.

- The main point was the need to facilitate the access of women to the science and technology labour market. We all know that girls who graduate with a science diploma, they are less likely to find work in that field. The gap between education and labour market remains very wide. We as parliamentarians, need to ensure that our countries respect international labour standards, in particular those related to discrimination and equality. We are required to be creative and devise incentives to facilitate women's access to science and technology work. Several countries have taken different approaches, such as affirmative action measures in that area. Although this question is often shrouded by controversy, the situation warrants the consideration of such a possible option. It is important to note that a remarkable difference to women's participation in politics. Last but not least, we should look into developing measures aimed at striking a better balance between work and family life, which are applicable to both men and women. It is important to bring about a change in culture in the labour market.

- The last point concerns the use of ICT to support women's interests and women MPs. Our discussions clearly highlighted how ICT made for better functioning parliaments and facilitated our work as MPs. With regard to women parliamentarians, ICT allows for a level playing field with men; it is a tool that facilitates communication with constituents, it enhances accountability and transparency, it also has the potential to increase women's visibility, which is crucial. We did note, however, that not all members of parliament have the same access to ICT and that some women, in particular those in rural areas, still lacked basic access. This remains a concern that we need to address.

Mr. Chairman,

Let me end by highlighting the interests expressed by the women parliamentarians present at our meeting to continue to be involved in the work of the United Nations. They undertook to follow up some of the debates and conclusions of this field during our meeting in their respective countries. We are confident that if everyone takes their part, significant progress can be achieved.

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The last point concerns the role of ICT in support of parliament and women's work. The discussion clearly highlighted how ICT made for better functioning parliaments and facilitated our work as MPs. With regard to women's parliaments, ICT allows for a level playing field with men: it is a tool that facilitates exchanges and links with our constituents. It enhances accountability and transparency. It also has the potential to increase women's visibility which is crucial. We did not, however, discuss the extent to which women's parliaments have access to ICT and that some women, in particular those in rural areas, still lacked basic access. This remains a concern that we need to address.

Mr. Chairman,

Let me end by highlighting the interest expressed by the many parliamentarians present at our meeting to continue to be involved in the work of the United Nations. They undertook to follow up some of the debates and conclusions held during our meeting in their respective countries. We are convinced that if each of us plays our part, significant progress can be achieved.

Thank you.