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**At the Meeting of Women Speakers of Parliament  
organized by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU)  
on the occasion of the Second World Conference of Speakers of Parliaments**

**on  
"Parliaments and the United Nations:  
Cooperation for the promotion of gender equality"  
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I am very pleased to have the opportunity to take part in this meeting of Women Speakers of Parliament organized by the Inter-Parliamentary Union on the occasion of the Second World Conference of Speakers of Parliaments. The holding of this event prior to the 2005 World Summit is an indication of the importance the IPU gives to gender equality and empowerment of women. I wish to commend the distinguished Speakers of Parliament for their commitment to this important topic.

Next week, world leaders will gather here in New York at the 2005 World Summit to reach agreement on critical issues of development, security and human rights. Women are disproportionately affected by many of the problems demanding world attention, including poverty and conflict, and make major contributions to solving these problems. A strong focus on women's needs, contributions and priorities is critical to ensuring effective and enduring solutions to the huge challenges facing the world today.

In the context of the focus of this meeting: "Parliaments and the United Nations: Cooperation for the promotion of gender equality", I wish to take this opportunity to express my appreciation for the excellent, long-standing collaboration the Division for the Advancement of Women has had with the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU). This has included the development of the Handbook for Parliamentarians on the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, as well as training for parliamentarians on reporting and implementation of the Convention. Very recently, our collaboration involved the development of a "*Map of Women in Politics*", which highlights the current status of women in parliaments and in the executive around the world. I am certain that IPU and the Division will continue to collaborate in new innovative ways.

The **ten-year review and appraisal** of implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action was carried out recently in the context of the 49<sup>th</sup> session of the Commission on the Status of Women. The focus of the review was on implementation at national level and sharing of experiences and good practice, to assess achievements, highlight gaps and challenges and identify effective and sustainable ways forward.





Parliaments could monitor the implementation of MDG3 on gender equality and empowerment of women and ensure that gender perspectives are incorporated into implementation plans and monitoring and reporting for all other other MDGs. Gender Equality advocates in many different fora – within Governments, in NGOs and within the United Nations, have been able to mobilize effectively around the 7 priority areas identified by the Millennium Taskforce 3. Parliaments could undertake to also monitor and ensure effective reporting on these critical areas, as well as the target and indicators under MDG3.

The increased focus on human rights in the 2005 World Summit provides an important opportunity to enhance attention to women's human rights, through both enhancing the focus and specificity of the **Convention**

**Gender mainstreaming** remains an essential strategy for ensuring full implementation of the Platform for Action as it is the means by which critical policies, strategies, plans, and resource allocations in all areas of development – political, economic, social, cultural and environmental - can be influenced from a gender equality perspective. Like any other strategy, gender mainstreaming can, however, only be as good as the efforts made to implement it. There is clearly a need to invest greater resources to ensure enhanced understanding of the strategy and the ways in which it should be implemented.

A major problem has been the continued “separateness” or marginalization of work to promote gender equality and women’s empowerment. Too often, the otherwise excellent specific gender equality policies, strategies, action plans, guidelines, training programmes and monitoring and reporting strategies have not been well integrated into, or had sufficient impact on, existing mainstream policies, processes and mechanisms.

Gender mainstreaming has mainly been utilized as a strategy at the level of programmes. There is a need to enhance the focus on gender mainstreaming in policy formulation, particularly because gender perspectives are still not seen as essential for achieving the goals of all policy areas. Many Governments and organizations continue to maintain the assumption that certain policy areas, for example macro-economics and technical areas, are “gender-neutral”. Gender analysis should be the basis for policy development and decision-making in all policy areas, and capacity to effectively utilize this analysis must be developed as a required competence at all levels in organizations. Accountability for implementation and outcomes must be strengthened.

I would like to highlight in particular the potential of one area of good practice established over the past decade, that is, the increased awareness of the importance of resource allocations and budgets at different levels for promotion of gender equality. In a growing number of countries gender perspectives have been incorporated into national, regional and local budget processes. At the basis of all these initiatives is the objective to make national budget processes more accountable – to ensure that policy, programme and budget decisions take gender perspectives into account, and that policies on gender equality are matched with adequate resource allocations. A related objective is to increase women’s participation in economic processes. In some countries, Parliaments have played a role in these processes and I believe this is an area where Parliaments could make an expanded contribution of great significance.

Moving forward on gender mainstreaming will also require galvanizing new broad-based coalitions which can strengthen women's voices, provide access to new resources, and lead to policy change. Parliamentarians can develop strategic alliances and build common strategies with key stakeholders. There is a need, for example, to initiate increased interaction with gender equality experts in academia, particularly since the constraints to effective policy formulation include lack of data and under-researched areas where anecdotal evidence is not sufficient basis for policy discussions.



participation in power structures and decision-making processes, the greater the transparency and accountability of these structures and processes.

The ten-year review and appraisal of implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action clearly shows that, despite political recognition of the fundamental right of women and men to participate in political and public life, the gap between de jure and de facto equality in the area of power and decision-making remains wide. While the proportion of seats held by women in legislative bodies is the highest world average reached to date, and continues a trend of gradual but sustained growth, the pace of change is clearly far too slow. Only 14 countries have at least 30 percent representation of women in parliament, which had been established as a target for 1995, and is still not achieved ten years later.

One encouraging development is the fact that a number of post-conflict countries have highlighted and addressed the importance of including women in reconstruction processes, and of their participation in new democratic institutions. Rwanda, for example, currently has the highest proportion of women in parliament in the world.

Two articles of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women deal with women's participation in political and public life, i.e. articles 7 and 8. Article 7 obliges States parties to take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in political and public life and to ensure that they enjoy equality with men in the political and public life of the country. Article 8 obliges States parties to ensure to women on equal terms with men opportunity to represent their Governments at the international level and to participate in the work of international organizations. In order to provide further guidance to States parties, the Committee adopted general recommendation 23 (1997) on political and public life reflecting its authoritative understanding of the content of the articles, and related States obligations.

Between 2001 and 2004 the Committee considered the reports of 58 States parties and raised the issue of women's participation in political and public life and in the international realm in all but three constructive dialogues with States parties. The concluding comments indicate that the Committee had few opportunities to highlight positive aspects of implementation of these articles, but instead had to identify areas of concern.

Legislative measures recommended by the Committee range from constitutional amendments that guarantee the balanced participation of women and men in political life; laws to promote balanced representation of men and women in electoral candidate lists; and election laws aimed increasing the representation of women in elected and appointed bodies. At the same time, the Committee has stressed that the effectiveness of legislative measures will be enhanced when these are accompanied by practical measures, such as special training programmes geared at women, and awareness raising campaigns.

Women's political participation will be the focus of attention in the 50th session of the Commission on the Status of Women in 2006. The Commission will consider the two





It is important to ensure that responsibility to promote gender equality and empowerment of women is not relegated to women parliamentarians, as individuals or in caucuses. Parliamentary caucuses - of women, or of both women and men - can play an important role to promote and monitor increased attention to women's contributions and needs and priorities, but real progress requires that all parliamentarians, both men and women, work to ensure that gender perspectives are identified and explicitly addressed in all policy areas.

In **conclusion**, the important issues for gender equality have been well known for some time – the challenge is effectively addressing them. This requires accelerated action from a diverse group of actors, including Parliaments. There are a number of critical questions which it would be important for Parliaments to consider: What underlies the pervasiveness of gender-based discrimination in all its forms? In what ways are gender inequalities reproduced within societies - through which norms, practices and institutions and how can these be addressed? Why is attention to gender inequality in public policy and programmes ad hoc and selective, and how can more systematic and effective implementation across all areas of public policy be achieved? How can accountability, leading to adequate levels of political commitment and resource allocations, be secured at all levels?

There is a need for strong and explicit leadership on gender equality in the decade to come, within Governments, in Parliaments, in the United Nations and other international and regional organizations as well as in civil society - to ensure the needed political will and allocation of resources. Speakers of Parliaments could provide critical strategic leadership to ensure that Parliaments play a key role in promoting gender equality and empowerment of women.

This parliamentary event provides an important opportunity to address some of the critical issues around the role of Parliaments. I am sure that the discussions today will be stimulating and fruitful.

Thank you