



INTER-PARLIAMENTARY UNION

**Third Committee of the General Assembly
Agenda item 61: Advancement of Women**

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Permanent Observer**

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Chairperson,

There is international consensus on the imperative need for the advancement of women in all facets of society. The need for women to have a larger role in politics and decision-making finds expression in the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Beijing Platform for Action and the Millennium Development Goals. It is also one of the main areas of activity of the Inter-Parliamentary Union, and gender inequality and discrimination in society at large can only be addressed by working collectively through and with parliaments and their members.

It is unfortunate - indeed unbelievable - that a decade after the Beijing Conference, so little improvement is evident in the lives of women around the world. Discrimination, lack of access to medical care, and illiteracy are a few examples of the obstacles far too many women must still endure today. It is also regrettable that most parliaments, the key institution of democratic dialogue and decision-making, remain male-dominated bastions. Today just over 16 percent of members of parliament are women.

Acts of violence against women are among the most potent obstacles to their advancement. Violence perpetuated against women is a fundamental violation of their basic human rights. The problem occurs throughout the world in many different forms - trafficking, sexual and domestic violence, female genital mutilation - and it is particularly acute in conflict and post-conflict areas.

The IPU commends the Secretary-General's study on violence against women and is committed to working alongside the United Nations and its bodies to further the implementation of its recommendations.

Violence against women must be understood as a problem that affects not only women, but society at large, as it hinders human development and contradicts democratic principles. The causes and consequences of violence against women are linked to longstanding gender inequality and discrimination and cannot be justified by inferences to custom, tradition or religious considerations. Combating violence against women in all its manifestations is a goal for humanity and States must not renege on their pledges to do so.

As a collective effort is needed to address gender inequality that exacerbates violence against women, I would like to underscore the role of parliaments and highlight some of the work the IPU has undertaken recently in this field.

At its 114th IPU Assembly held in Kenya last May, a resolution was adopted by all Member Parliaments that focuses squarely on *How parliaments can and must promote effective ways of combating violence against women in all fields*. The resolution has been circulated in the General Assembly, and we hope that it will help complement the work carried out by the United Nations in this area.

In recognizing that violence against women constitutes a breach of their human rights and fundamental freedoms, the resolution stresses that parliaments and their members have a key role to play in terms of prevention, assistance and criminalization. Some specific measures include:

- Ratification of international and regional instruments pertaining to violence against women including CEDAW and its optional protocol and ensuring compliance;
- Reviewing legislation that hinders the attainment of equality between the sexes, in particular in education, health and access to property and land;
- Establishing observatories on violence against women and developing indicators and data, disaggregated by sex, to monitor the effectiveness of policies to combat violence against women;
- Establishment of parliamentary bodies to monitor and evaluate all international and national measures designed to prevent and eradicate violence against women;
- Cooperation with the UN Human Rights Council and the Peace Building Commission, which have a key role in protecting the rights of women;
- Allocating fiscal resources to ensure implementation of legislation and measures to combat violence against women including domestic violence, female genital mutilation, and violence in the workplace, in human trafficking and in situations of armed conflict.

This resolution serves as a basis for the IPU to work to enhance parliamentary action to put an end to violence against women. I would like to underscore the importance of collaboration to meet this goal. The IPU has a strong partnership with the United Nations and has collaborated closely with the Division for the Advancement of Women (UNDAW), particularly in ensuring a parliamentary dimension to the implementation of the CEDAW. As you may know, we hold joint annual seminars on the role of parliaments in implementing the Convention. This year there will be a specific thematic emphasis on measures to combat violence against women. The session will highlight the recommendations of the United Nations' Secretary-General's study and discuss parliamentary follow up.

This is a first step. The IPU is also working on developing regional parliamentary seminars on Violence against Women, linking legislation and gender budgeting as effective ways of making a change. We intend to begin work on these seminars early next year, in collaboration with the United Nations.

Through these activities we hope to strengthen parliamentarians' involvement and commitment. One area which the IPU will continue to focus on is female genital mutilation. Our efforts date back several years, and our website has information on the work and examples of legislation existing today to abandon the practice. Most recently, the IPU organized a regional conference on *Violence against Women: the role of Parliaments in abandoning FGM* with the African Parliamentary Union and UNICEF. The Final Declaration includes a comprehensive strategy to address FGM and offers a Plan of Action for future parliamentary initiatives. We are currently working on implementing the Declaration at the sub-regional and national levels. Our top priority will be to assist parliaments to develop legislation in this field.

The connection between violence against women and violence against children is obvious. We are particularly pleased with efforts undertaken at the United Nations on combating violence and welcome the timely release of the United Nations Secretary General's Report on Violence against Children. This is an area where the IPU is engaged with UNICEF and other partners, and we look forward to mobilizing parliamentary action. We cannot address violence in general, and violence against women and children in particular, without developing a global approach to the question. Parliaments and the IPU will endeavor to take up this challenge.