





Inter-Parliamentary Union

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Statement by Ms. Muna Pelham-Youngblood, MP House of Representatives of Liberia

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Chairperson,

It is a great honour for me to take the floor on behalf of the Inter-Parliamentary Union.

Last week, the IPU and UN Women organized a parliamentary meeting on the occasion of the 60th session of the Commission on the Status of Women. The focus of our meeting was *The Power of Legislation for Women's Empowerment and Sustainable Development*. Before sharing with you the outcome of that event, allow me to reiterate our thanks to UN Women for its ongoing cooperation.

For us parliamentarians, it is so useful to participate in the work of the Commission, follow its debates and learn from the wealth of information, exchanges and meetings that the CSW generates. It allows us to go back home with a much better understanding of the overall UN process. And it strengthens our commitment to help to follow up in each of our countries on the decisions that have been taken here.

Now, let me turn to the outcome of the annual parliamentary meeting held last week. It was a very interactive and constructive event, with more than 116 MPs from 37 countries, which followed three main themes. The first focused on the status of discriminatory laws worldwide. We took stock of progress, and identified the gaps that remain in eliminating these laws that formalize inequalities and discrimination on the basis of sex. The second topic focused on the power of parliaments to end discriminatory laws and showcased parliamentary initiatives to implement reforms and adopt strategies for repealing such laws. The third theme explored the opportunities provided by our oversight role to ensure that laws on gender equality and on ending violence against women are effectively enforced.

Chairperson, allow me to highlight some of the main outcomes of the meeting:

1. We shared the view that gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls lies in the full realization of their fundamental rights. However, multiple forms of legal discrimination against women and girls persist around the world today. These constitute a major impediment to the development of our societies.
2. We took stock of progress: today, more than half of discriminatory laws identified in 1979 have changed. But while change is underway, progress is slow. Major gaps remain, particularly regarding laws relating to the economic and personal status of

women. In addition, more should be done to address violence against women and harmful practices. Family laws continue to be the hardest to reform.

3. Ensuring that women's rights are respected in practice is one of our most important challenges. We highlighted that, as Members of Parliament, our power to legislate comes with the responsibility to secure enforcement. We are responsible for ensuring that women and girls' rights are promoted and protected by law, and that no law formalizes inequality or discrimination. This means building legal frameworks that are in line with CEDAW requirements, the Beijing Platform for Action and the Sustainable Development Goals.
4. We considered that real change can only come from within the countries, and we need local movements to see it through. As parliamentarians, we must work hand in hand with civil society organizations to prioritize how we will seek to end discrimination. We discussed the many tools we have at our disposal: women's parliamentary caucuses, standing committees and other parliamentary mechanisms that help us collaborate with our governments, as well as grassroots movements. In order to legislate adequately we also need access to information and data.
5. We recalled that the task of ending discriminatory laws is not only the responsibility of women's parliamentary caucuses, or gender equality committees. Rather, the challenge of mainstreaming gender perspectives into all legislation should be tackled by all parliamentary bodies, and all MPs – both female and male. We need more women represented in decision-making processes. But ending discrimination, achieving equality, and ensuring a sustainable future – these are not women's issues alone. They are matters of credibility and relevance for all of society.
6. We agreed that putting laws and policies into practice remains our greatest challenge. Our aim must be to ensure that all laws and policies adopted have adequate financial resources and are fully monitored, so that they can be truly implemented in reality. Success depends a great deal on the capacity of State institutions, and also on political will. We considered the use of tools like gender-responsive budgeting to strengthen accountability.
7. We also need to make it clear to everyone that gender equality benefits women *and* men. On that note, education is a huge factor for achieving gender equality and ending discrimination. We can make a difference by raising awareness among women of their rights and by sending a clear message to everyone that discrimination and violence on the basis of sex will not be tolerated. In each of our countries, we must call for early education on equal gender roles and on good relations between boys and girls. We also need to communicate more clearly the benefits for men of achieving gender equality, and to reduce the fear over what might happen if power relations between women and men change. Gender equality benefits everyone.
8. We must remember that, even when we achieve change, progress can be reversed, and the road to implementation can be long and difficult. Parliamentary monitoring and oversight of the implementation of laws on gender equality and the protection of women's rights is greatly needed.

9. We looked at building partnerships and alliances. We highlighted the importance of a full range of partnerships: between men and women MPs; among women MPs from across the political spectrum; with civil society, and with the media. The IPU and UN Women have been cooperating for many years now, and are currently aiming to launch a joint multi-year project to support parliaments as they amend and repeal existing discriminatory laws.

Chairperson,

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

Thank you.