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Chemin du Pommier 5
Case postale 330
1218 Le Grand-Saconnex
Geneva – Switzerland
www.ipu.org

ELIMINATING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN POLITICS: WHAT WORKS AND WHAT DOESN'T?

Mr. Martin Chungong,
Secretary General of the IPU

Online Discussion
Co-hosted by the IPU and the Kofi
Annan Foundation
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Introduction

- The IPU is pleased to co-host this online discussion with the Kofi Annan Foundation and I am personally delighted to be on this panel with valued partners in promoting the participation of women in politics.
- Today we are commemorating the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women. This day is a reminder that violence against women is one of the most widespread human rights violations in the world. With the COVID pandemic and lockdown restrictions, domestic violence, online violence and other forms of violence against women, has multiplied. This is a shadow pandemic that is spreading across the world.
- Violence against women in politics is part of this shadow pandemic. In recent years, our joint efforts both in researching and awareness-raising about this violence have resulted in naming and gaining international and national recognition of this too long-hidden problem.
- Today we have the evidence. We know that violence against women in politics is a threat to democracy and requires greater accountability and an urgent coordinated response from key actors at international and national levels.

Compelling reasons for addressing violence against women in politics is so important?

- Whether it is hateful speech, sexist comments, sexual harassment or physical assault, violence targeting women leaders is a top deterrent to equal participation in political life.
- It is part of structural tactics to dominate women and silence them – silencing what is seen as a competing political perspective.
- Violence has a direct impact on women's participation in politics and their full contribution to political processes.
- And this is a major prejudice to democratic institutions and to democracy itself!

Main results of IPU studies

- Two IPU studies have shown that this phenomenon goes right to the heart of our parliamentary institutions and parliamentary work environments, even though parliaments are expected to set themselves up as models for other institutions and the rest of society.

- The findings of our Europe-wide study **confirm** the findings obtained in our 2016 study conducted at the global level with women parliamentarians.
- They show that **85 per cent** of respondents had experienced psychological violence, of whom **47 per cent** reported having received death threats or threats of rape or beatings.
- **68 per cent** had been the target of comments relating to their physical appearance or based on gender stereotypes and **25 per cent** reported having been sexually harassed.
- **25 per cent** of the participants in the global study had been subjected to physical violence.
- Online attacks are alarming: **58 per cent** of the women parliamentarians surveyed in Europe had been the target of online sexist attacks on social networks, notably Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc.
- This is perhaps further exacerbated in these COVID times as a result of the increased use of social media platforms.

Parliaments leading by example to eliminate violence against women in parliament and IPU guidelines

- Sadly, our studies also revealed the weaknesses of parliamentary mechanisms and of mechanisms within political parties to deal with these abuses. Because of a lack of support for those affected such violence goes unreported and unpunished.
- This must stop. To offer concrete solutions and better equip parliaments in their efforts to lead by example, last year the IPU published a set of guidelines.
- The guidelines call on parliaments to:
 - Carry out an exhaustive evaluation of the situation, including through surveys.
 - Adopt specific policies on ending sexism and gender-based violence in parliament.
 - Provide confidential access to assistance for victims.
 - Ensure remedies, including complaint and investigation mechanisms, as well as disciplinary sanctions against perpetrators.
 - Raise awareness and run training for all persons working in parliament.
- Many parliaments are now taking action to end systematic sexism, harassment and violence against women – in parliament and in all walks of life. We need to support and monitor these actions.

Cooperation within international institutions and organizations

- We also have to continue and intensify our cooperation to generate a broad political will from policy makers around the world to strengthen legal frameworks to address violence against women in politics, political violence, and online gender-based violence.

- In addition, I would like to highlight the need to use international human rights mechanisms for addressing violence against women in politics. At the IPU we have the Committee on the Human Rights of Parliamentarians which is a unique mechanism to facilitate protection, reporting, and redress for parliamentarians facing harassment and violence, including for addressing violence against women parliamentarians. In 2020, the Committee monitored and spoke out on the situation of 57 women parliamentarians who had been subjected to some form of violence and harassment.
- We must encourage women to use such mechanisms and we must do more to open human rights mechanisms to cases of violence against women in politics.
- Lastly, I firmly believe that our work should be based on the conviction that men and women are both essential parts of the solution. We need more men leaders on board to actively take part in the debate on violence against women. We need men to speak out and spread the word that enabling women to live free from violence and to participate in the management of public affairs is at the core of democracy!