



Inter-Parliamentary Union

For democracy. For everyone.

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## Speech by Mr. Martin Chungong, IPU Secretary General

State of Gender Equality in Serbia: Courage has a female gender  
Women Parliamentary Network Conference

25 January 2021

Dear Mr. Speaker,  
Dear Madam Prime Minister,  
Dear Madam Coordinator of the Women's Parliamentary Network,  
Distinguished Members of Parliament and Ministers,  
Dear Colleague, UNDP Resident Representative,  
Ladies and gentlemen,

I am pleased to address you today at this important conference. And I hope that you and your families are doing well during these times.

The Inter-Parliamentary Union and the Serbian National Assembly have a very long common history. In 2021 the National Assembly will be celebrating 130 years of IPU membership.

You will remember that, in October 2019, Serbia hosted the 141<sup>st</sup> IPU Assembly, which brought together parliamentarians from all over the world to discuss how to strengthen the international legal order, including gender equality commitments. In Belgrade, the interparliamentary community also adopted the first international parliamentary commitment to achieve universal health coverage by 2030. Never before have these objectives been more important. And we count on the National Assembly to continue to champion this agenda.

Around the world, we are reminded that democracy requires constant vigilance, evaluation and improvement. One of the greatest contributions to democracy is striving for gender parity. For genuine democracy requires equal participation in decision-making by men and women. Today, 25 per cent of parliamentarians in the world are women. This is more than double the 11 per cent it was in 1995, at the time of the Beijing Conference.

This represents people's demand for greater gender equality. Modern parliaments are those in which citizens can identify themselves and can look up to for answers to their problems and aspirations. So, parliaments need to lead the way on gender equality.

The National Assembly of Serbia has already gone a long way in fulfilling that aspiration. The introduction and then increase of the electoral gender quota have been crucial in enhancing the number of women in parliament. This led to women accounting for nearly 40 per cent of women MPs in Serbia today. With strong and continued efforts such as these, achieving gender parity is just around the corner.

Beyond getting women into parliament, it is crucial to ensure that they have free and safe spaces to fulfil their mandate and participate in public debate. This includes combatting sexism and violence against women in parliament. At the IPU, we know no country is immune from this problem. Our research shows that over 80% of women MPs have faced some type of intimidation, harassment or violence during their term.

But there are ways to prevent and address this scourge. One of them is to build institutional measures and a sound political culture.

The gender-sensitive parliament self-assessment that was carried out by the National Assembly with the support of the IPU and UNDP in 2019 was a crucial step towards identifying progress made so far and areas for further improvement to make sure the institution can embody and advance gender equality in all aspects of its work. I encourage the National Assembly to pursue this endeavour and follow-up on the self-assessment recommendations, with the support of the Women's Parliamentary Network and the SDG Focus Group.

The fight for gender equality is an uphill battle. We are trying to reverse long-standing practices. We are challenging longstanding beliefs and mindsets. But forging partnerships at all levels is our best chance at making sustainable and lasting change. Let me assure you that the IPU is always here and ready to accompany you in such efforts.

Thank you and I wish you a fruitful and productive conference.