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United Nations Entity for Gender Equality
and the Empowerment of Women

What will it take to reach gender parity in political participation in a post-COVID-19 world?

A parliamentary event organized by the Inter-Parliamentary Union and UN Women at the 65th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women in line with the priority theme *Women's full and effective participation and decision-making in public life, as well as the elimination of violence, for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls*

Tuesday 23 March 2021, virtual event

CONCEPT NOTE AND PROVISIONAL AGENDA

Background

The impacts of crises are often hardest felt by women, and COVID-19 is no exception. Beyond the public health crisis, COVID-19 has become a full-fledged economic and social crisis, and persistent obstacles have exacerbated the participation of women in political decision-making and leadership. Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) – the shadow pandemic – has worsened with lockdown measures and economic pressure.

An effective response to the pandemic and its social and economic consequences requires strong and sustained leadership, action and the participation of everyone affected. Unfortunately, achieving balanced power between women and men in decision-making is more crucial than ever. Yet women remain substantially underrepresented among decision-makers worldwide. Women make up only a quarter (24.9 per cent) of members of national parliaments worldwide¹ and 36.3 per cent of elected officials in local deliberative bodies. Globally, as of 1 January 2020, only 21.3 per cent of ministers are women. In only 30 cabinets worldwide do women make up at least 40 per cent of ministers.² Women's under-representation as health ministers is especially concerning in the midst of an ongoing pandemic: while women make up 70 per cent of health sector workers, in 2020, only 24.7 per cent of the world's health ministers were women,³ and they held just 25 per cent of senior roles in health institutions.⁴

During the pandemic, many women are shouldering additional domestic and care work at home, which negatively impacts on their ability to fully participate in public life. For politicians, both women and men, online platforms have become effective tools for interaction with their constituents. This has, to some degree, helped facilitate work-life balance for some, but has also revealed gender inequalities between legislators. For example, in Kenya, women politicians have reported that they are increasingly exposed to online and technology-facilitated gender-based violence, including physical threats, sexual harassment, stalking, "Zoom bombing" and sex trolling.⁵

COVID-19 responses benefit from women's participation. Gender-responsive policies and women's leadership are vital for mitigating the gendered impacts of COVID-19 and ensuring a more equitable recovery. Without women's participation in decision-making now, there is a risk that the fragile gender equality gains achieved over the past 25 years will be lost.

Parliaments are challenged to demonstrate much-needed political will, produce gender-responsive legislation, and conduct gender-sensitive oversight of government action and resource allocations during the crisis. They are also key players in driving gender parity in political decision-making and leadership and mobilizing popular support in that direction. MPs should contribute robustly to build support within their own political parties and blocs for women's equal participation in political decision-making and leadership.

The time to act is now, as renewed commitments and accelerated actions are needed more than ever before. Globally, the leaders of parliaments set the tone at the Fifth World Conference of Speakers of



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Parliament and the 13th Summit of Women Speakers of Parliament, both held in 2020. The Declaration adopted by the Speakers of Parliament underlined a commitment to “work towards achieving full, effective and equal participation of women in parliaments and all State institutions, including in positions of leadership”, and to continue embodying gender equality in their structures, operations and working methods to ensure “all barriers to women’s participation in politics are removed”. The Women Speakers of Parliament emphasized the call for gender parity (50/50) in parliament and political decision-making positions.

Objective

Recognizing the urgency for concrete and bold government and legislative actions to reach gender parity in decision-making, the IPU and UN Women are organizing the annual Parliamentary Meeting on the occasion of the sixty-fifth session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW 65) on 23 March 2021, on the theme “**What will it take to reach gender parity in political participation in a post-COVID-19 world**”.

Members of Parliament from around the world will share good practices on achieving and overcoming challenges to reaching gender parity in their respective parliaments, especially in light of the gendered impacts of the pandemic. The event aims to stimulate dialogue that can help scale up political will and transformative actions towards gender parity in political participation. The Meeting will furthermore provide an opportunity to contribute to the CSW’s debates from a parliamentary perspective.

Date and time

The Parliamentary Meeting will take place on Interprefy (a digital platform for simultaneous interpretation) on **23 March 2021**.

Given the online format of this year’s CSW, the meeting will be held at two different times on the same day. Members of Parliament are only expected to attend one of the two sessions.

Meeting option 1: 23 March 2021 from 8:00 to 10:00 a.m. ET (or 13:00 to 15:00 p.m. CET)

Meeting option 2: 23 March 2021 from 11:00 a.m. to 13:00 p.m. ET (or 16:00 to 18:00 p.m. CET)

Agenda

Chair: Ms. Susan Kihika, Member of the Kenyan Senate and President of the IPU Bureau of Women Parliamentarians

Moderator : Ms. Patricia Ann Torsney, Head of the Office of the Permanent Observer of the IPU to the United Nations, New York

Opening

- IPU and UN Women: Introductory remarks (5 minutes)

Session 1: Women’s participation in parliament in 2021 and the impact of COVID-19

Moderated discussion (55 minutes)



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This session will focus on the presentation of recent developments in women's participation in parliament. Good practices will be shared, including from parliaments that took legal measures to support women's equal political participation by, for example, adopting legislation that includes temporary special measures, including gender quotas with enforcement mechanisms; enhancing existing gender electoral quotas by introducing a parity provision; legislating financial incentives for political parties for complying with legislated quotas and funding women's campaigns or sanctions for their failure to do so.

Short presentations will be followed by a moderated debate among participants.

Session 2: Priority actions for gender parity in parliaments

Moderated discussion (50 minutes)

Participants will discuss priorities for parliamentary action for the next five years. During the discussion, MPs will have the opportunity to define transformative actions they can lead or promote to:

- Introduce or enhance legislated gender quotas with effective enforcement mechanisms;
- Enhance the participation of underrepresented groups of women, including young women, women with disabilities and women belonging to national minorities.

Wrap-up and the way forward (10 minutes)

- Wrap-up by the moderator

Panelists:

MEETING OPTION 1

- Ms. Meera Sultan Al-Suwaidi, Member of Federal National Council (United Arab Emirates)
- Ms. Binda Pandey, Member of the House of Representatives (Nepal)
- Ms. Arlette Contrera, Member of the Congress of the Republic (Peru)
- Ms. Beline Uwineza, Member of the Chamber of Deputies (Rwanda)
- Ms. Laura Farris, Member of the House of Commons, co-Chair of the Women and Work All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG), Vice Chair for the APPG on UN Women (United Kingdom)

MEETING OPTION 2

- Ms. Martha Lucia Micher, Member of the Senate, Chair of the Gender Equality Committee (Mexico)
- Ms. Mergane Kanouté, Member of the National Assembly, Member of the IPU Executive Committee and Bureau of Women Parliamentarians (Senegal)
- Ms. Heather McPherson, Member of the House of Commons (Canada)
- Ms. Irma Luz Herrera Rodríguez, Vice-Chair of the Women's Equality Committee (Colombia)

¹ Women in Parliament, 2020, IPU

² Map on Women in Politics: 2020, IPU and UN Women.

³ COVID-19 and Women's Leadership, From an effective response to building back better, UN Women 2020

⁴ Data as of 1 January 2020 (IPU and UN Women 2020).

⁵ KICTANet, Trends of online violence against Women in Politics During the COVID-19 pandemic in Kenya, June, 2020.