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Speech by Mr. Martin Chungong, IPU Secretary General

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

65th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW)
IPU-UN Women Parliamentary Event

23 March 2021

I am very pleased to be with you today. Welcome to all of you.

I thank you all for joining us today. I also take the opportunity to thank our partner UN Women that is co-hosting this event with the Inter-Parliamentary Union.

This parliamentary meeting is one of the most important annual events that contribute a parliamentary perspective to critical UN processes such as the one led by the Commission on the Status of Women.

Madam Executive Director, it gives me great pleasure to join forces with you. In just over a week, this is the third forum where you and I are participating and wherein gender equity is the focus. I see this as a compelling symbol of the partnership that should be encouraged between men and women in the effort to bring greater justice by promoting equity between men and women.

I am thrilled to continue and further enhance our cooperation with UN Women in advancing gender equality, upholding women's rights and prioritizing women's empowerment in all fields and at all levels.

Madam Executive Director, dear Members of parliament, colleagues and friends, it would be understatement to say that we are meeting today under extraordinary circumstances. The COVID-19 pandemic has deeply impacted all facets of life.

A little over a year ago, the World Health Organization declared a pandemic. Since then, the world has gone into a viral spin with a global crisis that has exposed the strengths but also the weaknesses of our societies.

Women are a strength in our collective effort to confront the pandemic as they account for 70% of care workers. But women are also being strongly affected as a result of gender-based discrimination: from the surge of domestic violence, to the burden of unpaid care work, to higher risks of income loss in the informal sector, and lower access to technology and information.

These gendered impacts of the pandemic require gender-responsive measures. They also require strong and inclusive leadership.

Yet our research on women in parliament and the Map on Women in Politics that we produced together with UN Women provide evidence of mixed results in terms of women's participation and leadership in politics.

The global proportion of women in parliament has reached a record 25.5 per cent. We are also witnessing an all-time high for the number of countries with women Heads of State and/or Heads of Government, which now stands at 23 since a woman acceded to the position of President in Tanzania for the first time last week.

These are gains to celebrate but these are only small gains that show that there is still a long way to go. Progress is way too slow, excruciatingly slow.

In some cases, progress has even reversed. For instance, the number of countries with no women ministers increased from 9 in 2020 to 12 in 2021, when, we had ardently wished, it would be decreasing.

We have also seen that COVID-19 has further complicated electoral politics for women and created more obstacles for women running for office. Reports from all regions indicate that online violence and harassment against women in politics is on the rise.

In sum, we are experiencing an unprecedented crisis that will take months and years to overcome. But we already know that no recovery agenda can succeed without tackling robustly the gender equality agenda.

Ensuring gender parity in political participation and leadership must be a key pillar of any recovery agenda.

The rationale for gender parity in political representation is not just equity and rights, but also because it drives stronger governance and better outcomes.

There is ample evidence that gender-balanced parliaments translate to gender-responsive policies that are long-term drivers for growth, environmental sustainability, economic empowerment, health, and education.

With more women in leadership positions, we can ensure that women in society are empowered and protected through strong, gender-responsive laws and policies.

Now, what can we do to have more women in parliament and politics?

We know that special temporary measures such as legislated gender electoral quotas are the strongest means to level the playing field. When they are ambitious and strictly implemented, I would say enforced, they are the choicest means for achieving gender parity.

We also know that having gender-sensitive parliaments and an enabling environment more broadly are keys to success.

We know that addressing the barriers that deter or limit women's participation, including gender-based discrimination, sexism, harassment and violence, is a *sine qua non*.

Turning our attention from what we know to what we should do, let's identify together: what it will take to reach gender parity in political participation in a post-COVID-19 world.

We count on your deliberations today to show the way.

I am sure you will be keen to identify priority actions to achieve gender parity in politics by building on good practices and using all necessary and lawful means to make it happen.

In this meeting, we will be tuned to the voices of the women and men who are triggering change in their own parliaments and we want to draw inspiration from their commitment and their actions.

Let us take the opportunity of this meeting to draw up a roadmap for us to take up nationally. If we share our know-how, if we mobilize our strong political will, if we put our power at the service of gender parity, if we commit to taking the necessary legal, policy and other supportive actions, we can make a change that will resonate across countries and regions of the world.

I argue that this is within the powers of parliaments the world over. What is required is strong political commitment by parliaments to exercise effectively these powers.

Strong concerted effort among national legislators can take us far. We are far more effective when we are learning from each other, pushing each other, and working together.

I look forward to your deliberations and thank you for your attention.