

Annual Parliamentary Meeting on the occasion of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) on the theme “What will it take to reach parity in political participation in a post-Covid-19 world?”

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Remarks of by United Nations Under-Secretary-General and Executive Director of UN Women, Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka

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IPU Secretary-General Martin Chungong,
Hon. Susan Kihika, President of the IPU Bureau of Women Parliamentarians and Senator of Kenya,
Honourable Members of Parliament,
Distinguished guests and participants,

I am honoured to open this year’s Parliamentary Day on the occasion of the 65th session of the Commission on the Status of Women. CSW 65 focuses on women’s participation and decision-making in public life for achieving gender equality – dear honorable MPs, that means that this is your CSW.

It is a challenging time for the world, and for achieving gender quality. Women’s leadership is far from equal and under threat by the pandemic. COVID-19 is hitting women hard: more women are experiencing violence, live without employment or social protection, and face growing care burdens as unpaid carers in families and communities. While women battle on the frontlines against COVID-19, they are rarely in equal positions in decision-making around pandemic response and recovery.

We will soon be publishing new data collected by the University of Pittsburgh on the COVID-19 Global Gender Response Tracker which UN Women runs with UNDP. It shows that out of a total 225 task forces across 137 countries, women make up only 27% of task force members. Less than a quarter of task forces are led by women.

We are also tracking social-economic measures. More governments are now passing and implementing measures to address growing violence against women. But few countries are taking steps to address women’s income security and labour force participation, including growing unpaid care burdens.

Each CSW, we make the case that women’s full and effective participation in all areas of life drives progress for everyone. Yet, here we are, with women still vastly underrepresented in public life and decision-making, as revealed in the UN Secretary-General’s recent report:

Women are Heads of State or Government in 23 countries. We actually saw this number tick up this week after Samia Suluhu was sworn in as President of Tanzania. Only 25 per cent of national parliamentarians are women.

At the current rate of progress, gender equality among Heads of Government will take another 130 years.

Familiar obstacles to women's full participation are unrelenting: higher poverty levels, a lack of financing, unequal care duties, exclusionary institutions historically designed by men, discriminatory social norms about gender roles negatively shape perceptions about women's role in public life, and widespread violence against women in public life, including online abuse and cyberbullying, threatens women's right to participation.

In 2021, we are at a crossroads. Failure to accelerate women's participation will make it impossible to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030.

When women lead, we see positive results: some of the most exemplary responses to the COVID-19 pandemic were led by women. On the other hand, when women are excluded from making or informing decisions about issues that directly impact their lives, policy outcomes are likely to be harmful and ineffective.

We will only achieve transformative change by acting swiftly and boldly to ensure more women and girls are represented in public life and decision-making at all levels. I am pleased to see that this is a message that is being voiced loudly at this CSW.

My hope is that the Member States that are working on Agreed Conclusions, as we speak, will agree to ambitious and actionable language to support women's participation and decision making in public life, and support the transformative change that we all need. Once CSW concludes, we will turn to the Generation Equality Forum, which kicks off in Mexico City from March 29th to 31st and culminates in Paris, France from June 30th to July 2nd.

The Generation Equality Forum will showcase the work of the 6 Action Coalitions, including one specifically on Feminist Movements and Leadership. This Action Coalition aims to amass concrete commitments to:

Advance gender parity in all aspects of public life including the private sector, civil society, international organizations, political and government institutions, including executive and legislative positions; And promote and expand feminist, gender transformative and inclusive laws and policies as well as support feminist and youth-led organizations and movements through the creation of enabling environments and better financing.

The Forum will also launch Leaders for Generation Equality, an intergenerational network of over 200 women leaders from across the world who are lending their voices, impact and power to advocating for the empowerment of all women and girls. Generation Equality, and the

partnerships it will inspire, will help boost our common goals. But when it comes to equal power sharing, we need your support and action on many fronts:

We need more ambitious and targeted measures and reforms, including gender quotas, to propel women into decision-making in equal numbers and at all levels, We must end violence against women in public life, We must eradicate outdated ideas about women's capacity to lead, We must transform institutions to respond to needs and realities of women and girls, and We must increase access to financing for women's participation in public life.

We have before us a once in a lifetime opportunity to achieve equality and a better world for this generation and the next.

We are counting on you.