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Signature of a Framework of Cooperation Agreement between the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict and the Inter- Parliamentary Union

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Parliamentary Union

Virtual Event with the Office of the
Special Representative of the
Secretary-General on Sexual
Violence in Conflict

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Introduction

- I am delighted to have the opportunity to celebrate and officially seal the long partnership between the global parliamentary community and the Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict.
- Tomorrow we will mark the International Day for the Elimination of Sexual Violence in Conflict.
- The signature of this Framework of Cooperation Agreement comes at a crucial time.
- With the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, the need to prioritize this agenda and join forces in the prevention of and response to conflict-related sexual violence is as urgent as ever.
- The pandemic has revealed and aggravated gender-based violence against women and girls, including sexual violence. The risks are likely higher for women and girls in contexts of conflict, violent extremism, terrorism, displacement and migration.
- Moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic has also exacerbated shortcomings related to protection and the provision of essential services and community support to survivors and has limited access to justice.

Why is the Framework of Cooperation Agreement important and what role is envisaged for the IPU?

- I see this Agreement as a major instrument in building a better tomorrow and mobilizing for a gender responsive post-COVID recovery through the work of parliaments.
- The Agreement reaffirms the importance of deploying the untapped potential of parliaments and parliamentarians to address the scourge of sexual violence in situations of armed conflict.
- It recognizes the fact that parliamentarians are central in adopting a strong normative framework aimed at guaranteeing the safety of survivors and ensuring sexual offenders' accountability.
- It will also be a critical tool to strengthen the IPU's work with parliaments on implementing the Women, Peace and Security agenda, and in supporting parliamentary action – in situations of conflict, peace-building processes, and in the post-conflict reconstruction period – to address the root causes of sexual violence, including structural gender-based inequality and discrimination, poverty and marginalization.

How parliamentarians are important in the fight against sexual violence in conflict

- First, parliamentarians have a responsibility to review and adopt laws, and to do so critically in a spirit of continuing evaluation and improvement.
- I welcome the launch today of the Model Legislative Provisions on the Investigation and Prosecution of Conflict-Related Sexual Violence and its associated Legislative Guidance. Through our agreement we will encourage parliaments to use this cutting-edge tool in their efforts to strengthen their national normative frameworks.
- Parliamentarians are also there to scrutinize budgets to ensure that adequate financial and human resources are allocated to the effective implementation of legislation.
- We believe that monitoring and evaluation mechanisms should be based, at least in part, on parliamentary oversight. Parliaments can play a key role in monitoring and overseeing the implementation of action plans on the Women, Peace and Security Agenda as well as laws on gender equality and the elimination of sexual violence. In accomplishing that task, parliamentarians must work hand in hand with civil society organizations and governments to access information and data.
- They must also listen to survivors and include their voices, as well as those of the specialized organizations that support them. Survivors' needs must be well understood and fully met; only then will more women feel safe to report violence and seek justice.
- Parliaments need to guarantee the active participation and leadership of women in all fields, specifically in enhancing global security, peace and stability. Much of the promise of inclusive and women-led peace processes is unfulfilled. Women

continue to be excluded from peace and security processes due to discriminatory laws, social stereotypes, and institutional obstacles.

- Male political leaders should also be engaged as transformative agents of change for gender equality alongside women. Ending gender-based violence is closely related to changing harmful attitudes and embodying a new social construct of non-violent men and healthy relationships built on mutual respect.
- As the Chair of the International Gender Champions Global Board, I have made a commitment to be such an agent of change and encourage other men to do the same.

The work the IPU has done or is doing specifically in the area of conflict-related sexual violence, as well as sexual and gender-based violence more generally

- The IPU's work in this area is multifaceted. The IPU has long advocated for parliaments to take action in the area of conflict-related sexual violence, as well as on ending violence against women and girls more generally.
- Please allow me to provide you with a few examples of this work.
- Firstly, at the global level:
 - Through the work of the Forum of Women Parliamentarians, the IPU regularly draws the attention of parliaments to the UN Security Council Resolutions on Women, Peace and Security, and the widespread and systematic use of sexual violence as a weapon or tactic of war.
 - Through our internal gender mainstreaming mechanisms, this work influences and infuses the work of the Standing Committee on International Peace and Security, and of the High-Level Advisory Group on Countering Terrorism and Violent Extremism. Several resolutions have thus been adopted at IPU Assemblies in recent years, providing political guidance on how parliaments can act effectively against gender-based violence, including sexual violence in conflict.
- Secondly, at the national level:
 - The IPU has supported parliaments in crisis, conflict and post-conflict situations in empowering women and girls and advancing gender equality in order to achieve sustainable peace.
 - In Egypt, Mali and Tunisia, for example, IPU support played a key role in preparing for the adoption of laws that strengthen women's participation in all decision-making positions.
 - Also, in the last 10 years, with the support of the IPU, MPs in Burkina Faso, Burundi, Maldives and Togo have adopted specific laws to combat violence against women and girls.
 - In Djibouti, we supported a multi-pronged effort to strengthen gender equality and address violence against women and girls by training MPs in ending violence against women and girls and helping create a caucus of women parliamentarians. In February 2020, we helped the Djibouti National Assembly to review and adopt a

new law that strengthened comprehensive care for survivors of violence against women and girls.

- In Sierra Leone, the first ever Parliamentary Caucus on FGM was created in 2020 with IPU support. It will strengthen men and women MPs' ability to talk about FGM abandonment in their constituencies and to generate support for national policies in this area.
- Also, in close partnership with your Office, dear SRSG Patten, I have written to the Speakers of the Parliament of Somalia to avoid legal setback and serious breaches of international and regional standards relating to rape, other forms of sexual violence, and the harmful practice of child and forced marriage. The dialogue continues, with a view to consideration and adoption by Parliament of the Sexual Offences Bill, which had been drafted in line with the Government of Somalia's commitments to strengthen its prevention efforts and response in relation to sexual violence.
- These are just a few examples. The stakes are high, and the demands are multiple. I am convinced that the enhanced cooperation we are putting in place today will be very useful to provide specific support to parliaments on addressing conflict-related sexual violence.