



Inter-Parliamentary Union

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Speech

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Secretary General

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General Assembly
Political Leadership and Violence against
Women and Girls: Prevention First

What impact have parliamentarians had to
prevent violence against women and
girls/gender-based violence? And country
illustrations and successes

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Mr. President,
Distinguished guests,
Ladies and gentlemen,

I thank you Mr. President for inviting me to join this panel. It is a great honour for me to bring the expertise of the global parliamentary community to the table.

For several years now, the IPU has been working to generate broad political will and to strengthen the capacity of women and men MPs to implement strong legal frameworks and policies to address all forms of violence against women and girls.

I would like to acknowledge the wonderful partnerships we have developed in this endeavour with the United Nations, in particular with UN Women, the Special Rapporteur on VAW, the Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict, and the CEDAW Committee.

Together, we have always been convinced of the importance of deploying the untapped potential of parliaments to put an end to the violence suffered by millions of women and girls worldwide every year. And these figures have multiplied over the past year due to the COVID pandemic, lockdown restrictions and economic stress.

What impact have parliamentarians had and what efforts should they step up in times of crisis?

- First, parliamentarians are central to the review and adoption of laws and policies on ending violence against women

This means repealing discriminatory laws and replacing them with comprehensive legislation that criminalizes all forms of gender-based violence and includes provisions on prevention, protection and support for the survivors, and prosecution and punishment of the perpetrators.

As examples, in the last 10 years, with the support of the IPU, private member bills on domestic violence and sexual harassment have been adopted in the Maldives, and

MPs in Burkina Faso, Burundi and Togo have adopted specific laws to combat violence against women and girls.

Today, although two-thirds of the world's countries have enacted laws aimed at ending violence against women, implementation remains poor.

- This brings me to my second point: parliamentarians must be engaged in prevention and the effective implementation of legislation on ending violence against women

A key role of parliamentarians is to scrutinize budgets so that adequate financial and human resources are allocated to ensure the effective implementation of laws.

In their oversight role, they must 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; and as such they require gender-sensitive and accessible service providers. Only then will more women feel safe to report violence and seek justice.

After receiving IPU support in this area, in 2020, the Parliament of Djibouti adopted legislation that strengthened comprehensive care for survivors of violence against women and girls.

- Third, men should be part of the solution alongside women

Ensuring prevention and effective implementation is closely related to changing harmful attitudes and embodying a new social construct of non-violent men and healthy relationships built on mutual respect.

We must therefore engage male political leaders as transformative agents of change for gender equality. 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.

In Sierra Leone, the first ever Parliamentary Caucus on FGM, which is composed of a majority of men, was created in 2020 with IPU support. We have been strengthening men and women MPs' ability to talk about FGM abandonment in their constituencies and to generate support for national policies in this area.

- Fourth, parliamentarians need to address violence against women in politics

This is a universal obstacle to women's participation in political life and to their full contribution to political processes. Parliaments need to tackle the problem in their own house and lead by example.

The IPU published a set of guidelines for parliaments to adopt specific internal policies on ending sexism and gender-based violence in their institutions. Parliaments in Canada, Chile, Finland, Mexico and the UK have adopted such policies for MPs and parliamentary staff. They include complaint and investigation mechanisms, as well as provisions for disciplinary sanctions against perpetrators.

These are a few examples of positive developments that carry hope for all women to live free from violence and participate in the management of public affairs on an equal basis.