



Inter-Parliamentary Union
For democracy. For everyone.

Chemin du Pommier 5
Case postale 330
1218 Le Grand-Saconnex
Geneva – Switzerland
www.ipu.org

Speaking notes

Mr. Duarte Pacheco
President of the IPU

Opening session of the
13th Summit of Women Speakers of
Parliament

Vienna (Austria), 6 September 2021

Madam Chair of the Summit of Women Speakers of Parliament,
Mr. President of the Austrian National Council,
Madam Director-General of the United Nations Office at Vienna,
Mr. Secretary General of the IPU,
Dear Speakers of Parliament,
Distinguished guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my great pleasure to open the 13th Summit of Women Speakers of Parliament.

Like many of you, I have long waited for the day when we can finally be together face-to-face. It is great to see so many Women Speakers of Parliament here in Vienna, showing how committed you are to the role of parliaments in gender equality.

Today's theme, *"Women at the centre: From confronting the pandemic to preserving the achievements of gender-responsive recovery"*, is an urgent one and is at the very top of the IPU's agenda.

We have now been struggling with the COVID-19 pandemic for almost two years. COVID-19 has affected people's health and wellbeing, and disrupted societies and economies. The crisis has revealed and worsened already high levels of inequalities within and between countries.

One of the growing inequalities is the global gender gap. The impacts of crises are never gender neutral, and the COVID-19 crisis is no exception. The effects of lockdowns and economic downturns are more gravely felt by women and girls. Decades of gains in gender equality are at risk of being reversed.

So, we must urgently approach recovery efforts from a gender-responsive perspective.

How can decision-makers like us adequately respond to this? We are hopeful that this Summit will show us the way.

I am therefore pleased that today, your first session will tackle *"Women in the pandemic: A tribute to everyday heroes"*. It is fundamental that we recognize and pay tribute to the women in all sectors who have been instrumental in confronting the pandemic.

This debate is particularly important. To craft policies that reflect real-world situations, we must first understand and commend the crucial role of women in addressing the pandemic.

Afterwards, however, we need to pave the way forward. That is why the second session for this Summit will be focusing on *"Women in the post-pandemic recovery: Preserving achievements, furthering process"*.

As we recover from the effects of the pandemic, we need to use our leadership to take impactful action. We need to make sure that advancements in the rights of women and girls are not being scaled back, but are instead moving forward.

Earlier this year, the IPU Forum of Women Parliamentarians took stock of the gendered impacts of the pandemic and how we can collectively address them.

Women parliamentarians from around the globe highlighted four key conclusions that parliaments must take into account.

First, women only represent 25 percent of parliamentarians globally but comprise the majority of front line workers. Political parity in decision-making needs to be prioritized now more than ever.

Second, the pandemic exacerbated economic inequalities, making women more vulnerable to layoffs, more likely to be performing unpaid care work and lacking adequate worker protection. We need social protection measures and must strengthen support to the care economy to ensure women's economic empowerment.

Third, parliaments must step up their efforts in preventing and addressing the increasing violence against women during the pandemic, especially in the growing online space.

Fourth, an integral part of building back better is to start from within parliaments. We must be models of gender-sensitive institutions in our societies, through advancing gender-responsive legislation and repealing discriminatory laws.

The pandemic has made us realize that we must work together to achieve our goals. Coalition-building between the international community and civil society is crucial to our success.

As Speakers of Parliament, our influence should not just remain within our national borders, but extend to the global community, especially to countries where women's liberties are in danger of being taken away. During this transitory period in Afghanistan, the country's sustainable development requires the meaningful participation of women in all fields, including in public life. We need to ensure that women's participation in the democratic process remains a priority in the country, and that the number of women in parliament does not fall from its current 27 per cent. Women's voices must be represented, especially now, when 80 per cent of refugees from Afghanistan are women and children.

Colleagues,
Friends,

The time has come for us to show we can and will make a difference. As Speakers, the responsibility is yours to mobilize parliaments towards concrete policies for lasting change.

We must enact laws that make childcare available and universally accessible so that women can go back into the labour force. We need to invest in the care economy and create laws that justly compensate domestic care work. We must provide universal social security, adequate safety nets and employment benefits to all workers; especially those in the informal sector where women are the majority.

Let us be bold and move political commitment to the next level by working towards gender equality in our parliaments and for stronger and more equitable post-pandemic societies.

I look forward to your deliberations and I wish you an excellent 13th Summit of Women Speakers of Parliament.