



Inter-Parliamentary Union
For democracy. For everyone.

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Speech by Mr. Martin Chungong, IPU Secretary General

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'Voices of Parliaments' session

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Mr. Speaker,
Distinguished members of parliament,
Ladies and gentlemen,

I am pleased to open this debate on the Voices of Parliament.

Representation lies at the very foundation of democracy. It is inherent to the social contract.

Genuine democracy is grounded on the idea that institutions must reflect the diversity of the population. But this is still far from being a reality. At a time when democracies are being challenged, it is essential to go back to the very basic components of a representative democracy and be bold about it.

Ladies and gentlemen, if our goal is to ensure genuine democracy, sustainable development, peace and social justice, we should be serious about achieving gender equality across the board and in leadership positions. Turning a blind eye to this fundamental question can no longer be considered an option.

At the IPU we believe in the centrality of parliaments as representative institutions to drive social change. This is why we came up with the concept of Gender-sensitive parliaments more than a decade ago, calling for institutions to be more representative, better adapted and more efficient in embodying gender equality and in delivering on it for society.

Ahead of our session, I am pleased to share 3 main elements of gender-sensitive parliaments which we consider key in creating the conditions for gender-responsive laws and policies.

First, we need more women in parliament. Parity between men and women in parliament should be the norm rather than the exception. Setting a target of 50/50 representation is the only way to ensure genuine equality in representation. Also, it is important to ensure that women in all their diversity are represented.

But we cannot simply hope to reach parity if it is for women to end up trapped in a hostile, disrespectful, discriminating, and dangerous environment. Parliaments can only be truly inclusive if they are serious about ensuring everyone can contribute and lead, without discrimination, threats, violence and fear. IPU studies revealed that more than 80% of women parliamentarians from all around the globe are facing gender-based violence.

Gender-sensitive parliaments ensure zero tolerance policies towards sexism, harassment, and violence. They are the ones that apply equally important measures such as quotas on leadership positions and family-friendly policies to help ensure work-life balance.

Finally, engaging men MPs and leaders in the advancement of gender equality is extremely important. Male parliamentarians can be, and have been, strong allies in advancing equality. This is something parliaments should invest in.

But beyond national parliaments, we need to make sure that at the global level we have equality in representation, effective participation and influence. At the IPU, we have been practicing what we preach. Since the 1980s, we have built a women's movement at the IPU. For decades now, we have put in place quotas for women on delegations to our Assemblies, and we now reach close to 40% women delegates. Our governing structures also require the presence of men and women, with quotas ranging from one third to gender parity. At our last IPU Assembly in October, we had 4 women candidates for IPU Presidency, all from Africa. And as we speak, we have an African woman MP heading the Organization for the first time in our history.

Dear participants, I hope these elements serve to prompt a debate focusing on promoting the voices of women leaders, engaging male champions, and prompting institutional change.

I look forward to the deliberations of today's debate and you can count on the IPU to continue to promote genuine democracies that put gender parity at the centre.

Thank you!