



Inter-Parliamentary Union
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T +41 22 919 41 50
F +41 22 919 41 60
E postbox@ipu.org
www.ipu.org

Chemin du Pommier 5
Case postale 330
1218 Le Grand-Saconnex
Geneva – Switzerland

Speech by Dr. Tulia Ackson, IPU President

*Webinar for African Parliaments on
“Preventing and Responding to Violence against Women in Parliaments”*

22 November 2023

Madam President of the African Parliamentary Union,
Mr. Secretary General of the IPU,
Dear colleagues,
Distinguished guests,
Ladies and gentlemen,

I am very pleased to welcome you all to this important webinar. I feel happy that the first IPU event that I am opening as IPU President is for African parliaments and that it will cover a vital issue requiring urgent attention for women, gender equality, and democracy at large.

I also feel glad that this event is being hosted jointly with the African Parliamentary Union, underlining the excellent and long-standing collaboration between our two institutions, working together to support Member Parliaments in tackling violence against women in politics, not only in Africa but all around the world. I am proud that the IPU has led studies on this crucial matter globally as well as in Europe, Africa, and now also in the Asia-Pacific region. I am also proud that the IPU has explored and uncovered evidence-based information on the prevalence and various forms of sexism, harassment and violence against women in parliament.

Dear colleagues,

Let's be very clear from the outset. It is not normal to hear comments suggesting that a woman's place is not in politics but in the kitchen! It is not acceptable for women politicians to receive misogynistic comments and death threats online every day! It is not part of the job to be targeted by attacks because you are a woman in politics, and furthermore when you are young, unmarried, living with a disability, or belong to a minority group in your country!

It is also totally inappropriate for sexual harassment to be widespread in political life and in our parliaments, in particular advances, comments and jokes of a sexual nature. On this subject, I remind you that the IPU and APU study in Africa showed that 40% of the women parliamentarians surveyed had been sexually harassed!

The good news is that, since the IPU's initial work on these issues in 2016, awareness has been raised significantly. I am relieved to see that parliaments have begun to take action against this violence, including by using the IPU *Guidelines on eliminating sexism, harassment and violence against women in parliament*. I am delighted that, at the very start of my tenure as President of the IPU, our Organization has adopted its own policy on preventing and addressing harassment, including sexual harassment, at IPU Assemblies and other IPU events.

The parliamentary movement of institutional reform and accountability must continue and intensify. One of the main goals of the IPU is to help parliaments to be effective, inclusive, representative and gender-sensitive institutions. And let me emphasize this: a gender-sensitive parliament is not just a place where women can be, but also a safe and respectful place where women want to be!

This means parliaments ought to be places where sexist language or behaviour is not tolerated, and where gender-based violence cannot exist or prevail in any form.

On this I would encourage you all to draw inspiration from the IPU's Kigali Declaration on gender equality and gender-sensitive parliaments, adopted last year, in which our parliaments committed themselves to implementing strict policies with the objective of zero tolerance of violence against women, sexual harassment and intimidation in parliament. Our parliaments also committed to establishing independent and effective complaints procedures with strong sanctions.

Let's hurry up and put our words into action!

Dialogue and exchange are essential to bring about the necessary changes, and this webinar is the ideal place to make it happen!