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PANEL II

**Equal Participation of Women and Men in Decision-Making Processes, with
Particular Emphasis on Political Participation and Leadership**

Written statement * submitted by

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* The paper has been reproduced as submitted.

Introduction

1. This paper has been prepared for the United Nations panel discussion entitled *Equal participation of women and men in decision making bodies at all levels.*¹ It focuses on the quantitative aspect of women's participation in parliaments, primarily in the past ten years. It provides an overview of the gains relating to women's access to parliaments and executive bodies, and highlights some of the factors that influence women's access to decision-making positions.

2. As the world organization of parliaments, the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) has more than 140 member parliaments, and it works for the enhancement of democracy through the institution of parliament. The IPU believes that the achievement of democracy requires a balanced participation of men and women in politics, and for several decades it has been at the forefront of efforts to support women's political participation. The IPU Programme for Partnership between Men and Women works to promote women's participation and input into parliaments through the following activities: (1) The IPU has been tracking the numbers of women in national parliaments since the 1970s, and has collected data on women's election results dating back to 1945. It produces surveys and reports on women in politics and in parliament, and publishes a monthly update on the status of women in parliament on its website. (2) In addition to this knowledge compilation, the Programme also facilitates contact between women parliamentarians and encourages them to exchange experiences through the organization of regular meetings. (3) It also develops technical assistance projects, and has recently worked in several countries to support women parliamentarians and women candidates. (4) The Programme promotes the participation of women parliamentarians in the IPU's internal structures, such as in the delegations sent to the biannual IPU Assemblies.

Table 1: Ten years at a glance

In 1995:

- 11.3 per cent of all legislators across both houses of parliament were women
- The parliament of Sweden had the highest proportion of women (40.4%)
- The proportion of parliaments whose female membership was less than 10 per cent was 63 per cent
- Women were not at all present in a total of 12 parliaments

In 2005:

- 16.3 per cent of all legislators across both houses of parliament were women
- The national assembly of Rwanda had the highest proportion of women (48.8%)
- The proportion of parliaments whose female membership was less than 10 per cent was 32 per cent (60 of 187 parliaments). Women were not at all present in a total of nine parliaments (Bahrain has no women members of its Lower House but six women Senators)

Women in Parliament: Averages in global perspective

¹ This paper builds on a previous IPU Background paper prepared for the United Nations Expert Group Meeting on "Equal participation of women and men in decision-making processes, with particular emphasis on political participation and leadership." (Addis Ababa, 24 - 27 October 2005)

3. The trend in terms of women's representation over the past decade has been one of gradual but steady progress. In 1975, at the time of the First World Conference on Women in Mexico City, women accounted for 10.9 per cent of MPs worldwide. Ten years later, in 1985, women's representation had increased by only 1 percentage point, to an average 12 per cent. In 1995, the number of women had actually decreased to 11.6 per cent. With the collapse of communism in 1989, the proportion of women represented in the parliaments of the former communist countries fell drastically. Not surprisingly, the world average followed suit: the percentage of women in lower or unicameral houses fell from 14.8% in 1988 to 10.3% in 1993. Whereas many communist governments and one-party States had effectively ensured the selection of large percentages of unopposed women (and men) candidates, the move towards multiparty democracies in the 1990s made the electoral process far more competitive for women.

4. A new impetus for women's participation in decision-making found expression at the Fourth World Conference on Women, held in Beijing in 1995, and the adoption of the Beijing Platform for Action (BPFA). By 2000, the number of women in parliaments had increased to 13.4 per cent of parliamentarians in lower houses.

5. In December 2005, a new global high was reached, as 16.5 per cent of the members of lower or single houses of parliament were women, and 15 per cent in upper houses, bringing an overall total average of **16.3 per cent** in all houses of parliaments.

6. It is also worth noting that in 2005, one out of every five member of parliament elected to Lower Houses of Parliament were women. In 2000, only 11 per cent of those elected were women. The figure rose to 18 per cent for elections in 2003, and fell to 16 per cent in 2004.

7. While steady, the progress has been slow. If current incremental rates continue, an average of 30 per cent women will not be reached until 2025 and parity will not be achieved until 2040.

Table 2: Women in Parliament 1945-2005

	1945	1955	1965	1975	1985	1995	2000	2005*
Number of parliaments	26	61	94	115	136	176	177	187
% women representatives (lower house or unicameral)	3.0	7.5	8.1	10.9	12.0	11.6	13.4	16.5
% women representatives (upper house)	2.2	7.7	9.3	10.5	12.7	9.4	10.7	15.0

*Data from 31 December 2005

Source: IPU, 2006. *Women in Politics: 60 years in retrospect* Information kit.
<http://www.ipu.org/english/surveys.htm#45-05>

Regional trends

8. Since 1995, the **Nordic countries** have maintained their exemplary position with averages consistently over 38 per cent. In 2005, the regional average rose to an all time record of 40 per cent. Although not often noted, today's percentages reflect enormous progress over a fifty-year time frame. In the post-war era, women counted for between 1.3 and 14.5 per cent of lower chambers in the parliaments of the Scandinavian countries. Dramatic change occurred during the 1970s, attributed to profound social changes in tandem with marked economic growth. That the regional average has continued to increase over the past ten years may indicate that these parliaments have yet more progress to make. Sweden has always been the top performer; it now has 45.3 per cent of parliamentarians who are women, followed by Norway, Finland, Denmark and Iceland.

9. Over the last ten years, women have continued to be least represented in the parliaments of the **Arab States**. While regional averages have oscillated in this period, the Arab States have seen an encouraging increase in the percentage of women in parliament, reaching a high of 8.2 per cent in both houses of parliament in November 2005. While this is half the global average, it is in fact double the rate of eight years ago, when the average was less than 4 per cent. Much of this progress is attributable to an expression of political will in favour of women's participation in politics, a growing public debate on women's role in society and the implementation of different types of quotas in some countries in the region, including in Djibouti, Jordan, Iraq, Morocco and Tunisia.

10. Outside these two regions, averages have tended to stabilise between 10 and 20 per cent. The most significant progress is evident across the Americas (+7 percentage points); in sub-Saharan Africa (+6.7 percentage points) and in Europe (excluding the Nordic countries) with a 6.1 percentage point increase.

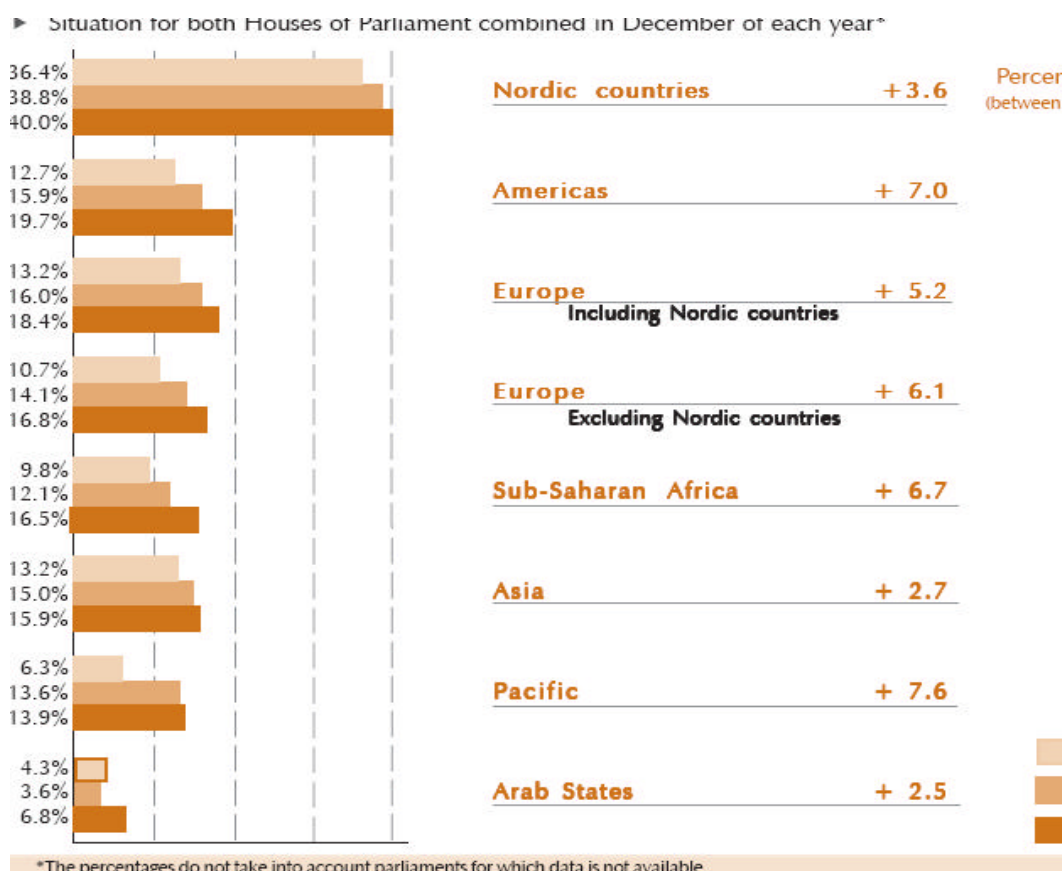
11. The impressive 7 percentage point increase in women's parliamentary representation in **the Americas** over the past 10 years is in large part attributable to the enthusiasm with which many countries in Latin and Central America have implemented affirmative action measures. Different types of quotas now exist in 17 countries of the Americas. More specifically, great progress was made after the 2005 election in Honduras (with an 18 percentage point increase to 23.4% women), the 2003 elections in Paraguay (+7.5 point increase to 10% women) and Mexico (+6.6 points to 22.6% women), the 2002 elections in Costa Rica, where women increased their representation by 15.8 percentage points to 31.6 per cent, and the 2001 elections in Nicaragua (+11 points) and Peru (+10 points). Elections in 2005 however, saw slight declines in the number of women in Dominica (to 12.9%) and Bolivia (to 16.9%).

12. Progress evident in **Sub-Saharan Africa** is also attributable to an open commitment to improve women's participation in politics and in some cases, the implementation of special temporary measures. The most successful cases, however,

have seen various affirmative action measures enshrined in constitutions or electoral laws following processes of post-conflict reconstruction. Nations emerging from internal conflict have succeeded in increasing the percentage of women in their new or restored parliaments. The revised national constitutions of Rwanda and Burundi, for example, now include provisions to reserve seats for women; in South Africa and Mozambique, the dominant political parties have introduced quota mechanisms.

13. At a sub-regional level, the Southern African Development Community (SADC) countries have also set a target for women's representation in parliament of 30 per cent by 2005. In South Africa, Mozambique and Namibia, women's representation in parliament now ranges from 22 to 33 per cent. In the United Republic of Tanzania, the proportion of women elected to the legislature in 2005 reached an impressive 30.4 per cent. Seats have been reserved for women in the United Republic of Tanzania for several years, and a constitutional amendment passed in 2000 increased the number of reserved seats from 20 per cent to at least 30 per cent, in line with the targets set by the Beijing Platform for Action (BPFA) and the SADC Declaration on Gender and Development.

Table 3: Regional averages of women in Parliament: 1995, 2000, 2005



14. Increases in **Europe** can be partly attributed to progress made in Central and Eastern European countries, and in some established western European democracies.

When the Iron Curtain fell in Europe, so did the percentages of women in parliament in Eastern Europe. Women in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics for example, frequently accounted for at least 30 per cent of the legislature. Yet in 1990, the proportion of women elected in the Russian Federation, for example, amounted to less than 9 per cent. A return to “post-war” figures was similarly evident in the first pluralist elections held in many other Eastern European nations. In Romania, women comprised 3.6 per cent of the Chamber of Deputies and 0.8 per cent of the Senate, a drop from 34.4 per cent in 1983. In Hungary, women’s representation fell to 7.3 per cent in 1990 from 30.1 per cent in 1980, and 20.7 per cent in 1985. In the subsequent elections held between 1993 and 1995 some advances were made. Today, as multi-party democracy spreads in the region, and as European Union integration advances, the number of women in parliament has begun to further increase, albeit slowly. In 2005, the Republic of Moldova made a 7.9 percentage point jump to 21.8 per cent. In established western democracies recent progress has been notable in Belgium, Spain and Portugal. The case of Liechtenstein can also be highlighted: in 2005 it made a 12-percentage point increase to 24 per cent of women in parliament. For a country that granted women suffrage only in 1984, this is a welcome evolution.

15. While each region has seen an overall increase in the proportion of women represented in parliament, this progress has not always been consistent. In **Asia and the Pacific**, for example, progress achieved by 2000 was diminished, to some extent, in subsequent elections. In fact, the extent to which women’s representation in Asian legislatures has lagged points to a particular difficulty women have in being accepted as legitimate political actors. The case of Bangladesh is illustrative. In 2001, women’s representation fell from nine to two per cent when the quota law reserving 30 additional appointed seats for women expired. The result implies that in the absence of this special measure, parties and voters were not sufficiently sensitive to the need for women in political life. In 2004, a new law was enacted increasing the size of the parliament to include 45 extra seats reserved for women. These reserved seats were filled in September 2005, and allocated to political parties in direct proportion to their overall share of the national vote they received in the 2001 election. In effect, the number of women has now surpassed the previous high; they now account for nearly 13.0 per cent of the membership.

16. Nearby, the volatility of the averages in **the Pacific** is attributable to changes in two of the region’s countries: Australia and New Zealand. If it were not for these countries, the average of the Pacific would be considerably lower. Of the 12 remaining countries in the region, half have no women in parliament, while the other 6 have between 0.9 and 6.2 per cent.

Highlights and trends

Increase of countries with a "Critical Mass" of Women

17. The number of parliaments with a female representation of 30 per cent or more has increased four-fold in the past ten years. In 1995, only in five countries did women constitute over 30 per cent of the legislature. In December 2005, 20 parliaments had reached the BPF target of 30 per cent, which is considered by some to constitute a sufficient "critical mass" of women deemed necessary to bring about real changes in parliament.

Table 4: Countries with 30% Women Representatives (in lower or single houses of parliament)

Level	Country	% Women	Quota
1	Rwanda	48.8	30% Reserved seats (indirectly elected) Voluntary party quotas**
2	Sweden	45.3	Voluntary party quotas
3	Norway	37.9	Voluntary party quotas
4	Finland	37.5	N/A
5	Denmark	36.9	N/A
6	Netherlands	36.7	Voluntary party quotas
7	Argentina	36.2	Legislated quota of 33% women candidates on party lists
8*	Cuba	36.0	N/A
8*	Spain	36.0	Voluntary party quotas
9	Costa Rica	35.1	Legislated quota of 40% women candidates on party lists
10	Mozambique	34.8	Voluntary party quotas
11	Belgium	34.7	Legislated quota of 33% women candidates on party lists
12	Austria	33.9	Voluntary party quotas
13	Iceland	33.3	Voluntary party quotas
14	South Africa	32.8	Voluntary party quotas
15	New Zealand	32.2	Voluntary party quotas
16	Germany	31.8	Voluntary party quotas
17	Guyana	30.8	N/A
18	Burundi	30.5	Legislated quota of 30% women candidates on party lists
19	United Republic of Tanzania	30.4	30% Reserved seats (indirectly elected)

N/A=Not applicable.

Note: From January to December 2005 Iraq was the first Arab state to have reached more than 30% women in the transitional assembly. The number of women representatives dropped to 25.5% following the December 2005 election.

* Both Cuba and Spain have 36.0 per cent women in parliament and therefore share eighth position, bringing the total number of countries in this table to 20.

** Quotas adopted on a voluntary basis by one or more political party, ranging from 20-40 per cent women candidates. Source: IPU, 2005. *Women in National Parliaments*, <http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/world.htm>; and International IDEA and Stockholm University. 2005, *Global Database of Electoral Quotas for Women*, <http://www.quotaproject.org>

Table 4 shows the 20 countries with 30 per cent or more female representation in parliament, and reveals different observations. Four groups stand out:

18. Firstly, one quarter of the countries are **Nordic countries** which have seen

gradual profound social and political changes over the past 30 years together with marked economic growth and the adoption of party quotas. This type of slow but constant progress in the number of women elected is what Drude Dahlerup has coined the **slow track** to women's representation in parliament.

19. Secondly, one fifth of the countries are so called "**post conflict**" countries (Burundi, Mozambique, Rwanda and South Africa). These countries have been referred to as **fast track countries**, where in a relevantly short space of time, often in one election cycle, the representation of women has increased dramatically. For example, in South Africa the representation of women jumped from 2.7 per cent to 25 per cent in one election, and from less than 15.0 per cent to 48.8 per cent in Rwanda. An important part of the equation in these fast track countries is that they are countries in transition, and the process of establishing new constitutions and institutions and rewriting the rules of the political landscape provides a golden opportunity for women to influence the process and make their voices heard, especially in the drafting of electoral and political party laws.

20. Thirdly, nine of the 20 countries are developing countries, which demonstrates that **developing countries** are likely to be among the top performers in terms of numbers as are the developed ones.

21. The last point to note is that 16 out of the 20 countries use **electoral quotas**. Rwanda and the United Republic of Tanzania are the only countries to use reserved seats where 30 per cent of the seats in parliament are set aside for female legislators. In Sweden, Norway, the Netherlands, Spain, Mozambique, Austria, South Africa, New Zealand, Germany, Iceland (and formally Denmark), one or more political party, usually the ruling party, has adopted a voluntary party quota setting a target or firm percentage of the number of women candidates it fields for election. Costa Rica, Belgium and Argentina have legislated quotas, which specify that a certain percentage of candidates for election must be women. There are firm legal sanctions in place if the provisions are not met, such as rejecting electoral lists that have less than the statutory minimum number of women.

Positive results for States emerging from conflict

22. As mentioned previously, countries emerging from conflict tend to fare better in terms of women's representation in Parliament. In 2005 elections were held to restore parliaments in four countries emerging from conflict: Afghanistan, Burundi, Iraq and Liberia. In all of these countries the percentage of women parliamentarians increased. In Afghanistan, Burundi and Iraq, constitutional drafting processes led to the introduction of electoral quotas and other mechanisms aimed at ensuring a certain level of women's participation in parliament and in governmental structures. Women now comprise 25 per cent of representatives in Iraq, and 27 per cent in Afghanistan. In Burundi, the proportion of women in parliament jumped from 18.4 per cent to 30.5 per cent. In Liberia guidelines were developed for political party candidacies in elections which specified a 30 per cent quota for women on party lists. However, political parties did not implement them as there were no sanctions for non-compliance. As a result, only 12.5 per cent of the candidates elected were women.

23. All four examples highlight the importance given to including women in post-

conflict State-building. Despite the vast differences between the countries, they share certain commonalities – the intersection between domestic women’s movements and the international community in supporting the election of women to parliament. Such results can be linked to a growing recognition of women's role during conflict and post-conflict periods, their inclusion in peace processes, the existence of a constitutional drafting process, which offers avenues for change and in some cases the inclusion of electoral quotas for women.

Women’s political rights: Universality within reach

24. The long struggle for full and universal political rights for women has achieved some progress in the past five years. Women in Kuwait finally met with success when the all-male Kuwaiti parliament granted women the right to vote and stand for election on 16 May 2005. Women will be able to participate in the parliamentary elections in 2007 and the local elections in 2009. This victory is indicative of an embryonic but largely positive trend regarding women's participation in politics in the Arab region. The struggle for the granting of political rights to women continues in Saudi Arabia, where an election law published in August 2005 did not explicitly ban women from voting in the 2005 municipal elections. In the end, though, women were excluded, officially because of "time constraints" and logistical considerations (such as the fact that only a fraction of Saudi women possess photo identity cards).

Women in Top Positions of State: Another challenge

25. Turning to the number of women in the highest positions of State, including executive positions and presiding officers of parliament, the picture becomes more negative. Women have not reached the highest levels of decision-making in the same proportions as in parliaments. This demonstrates that serious obstacles persist.

26. In terms of **elected Heads of State and Government**, the number has actually decreased since 1995, when there were 12 women. In December 2005, there were only nine.

27. Secondly, in terms of women **presiding officers of parliament**, the overall number has also decreased from 10.0 per cent in 1995 to 8.0 per cent in 2005. In December 2005, women presided over 28 of the 262 parliamentary chambers (10.7%). Developing countries and countries in transition are more likely to have women speakers of parliament than developed countries. Nearly one-third of the women speakers come from Caribbean countries.

Table 5: Women in the Executive, January 2005

Position	Number of women
Women Ministers	14.3%
Ministerial portfolios held by women	858 in 183 countries

28. In January 2005, 14.3 per cent of ministers in the Executive were women. Sweden had the highest number of women ministers in the world ever, at 52.4 per cent, followed by Spain, with 50.0 per cent. Women held 858 **ministerial portfolios**, although it is extremely difficult to calculate this in terms of a percentage because of the lack of information on the total number of ministerial portfolios worldwide.

However, it is possible to examine the type of portfolios held by women:

- Of the 858 ministerial posts held by women, 83 (9.7%) were related to family, children, youth, the disabled and the elderly;
- 69 (8.0%) were related to social affairs;
- 63 (7.3%) were related to women's affairs;
- 63 (7.3%) were related to education;
- 60 (7%) were related to the environment and energy.
- Least represented were portfolios related to parliamentary affairs, population and information.
- Only 12 portfolios were related to defence, 20 to finance and the budget and 25 to foreign affairs.

Lessons Learned

29. The incremental change over the past decades clearly demonstrates that women have faced, and continue to face, persistent challenges relating to their political participation. The increase in the number of women in decision-making bodies was not an automatic result of the opening up of the political space and processes in many countries with the evolution of democracy since the 1990s. It has been the result of institutional and electoral engineering, strong political will, a growing women's movement, political party commitment and will, the adoption of electoral quotas and reserved seats, sustained mobilization and the emphasis placed on achieving gender equality by the international community. This international discourse and the work of international organizations has been instrumental in concentrating efforts to support women's full political participation in the past ten years. Women's activism and mobilization at the country, regional and international levels have also been pivotal.

30. The slow pace at which change has occurred has prompted many parliaments and political parties to implement candidate **quotas** and other special measures to ensure women's presence in politics. Currently there are around 80 countries with their own types of electoral quotas: these may consist of reserved seats, candidate quotas or quotas adopted voluntarily by political parties. Ten countries reserve seats for women, around 40 countries have legislated quotas and 150 political parties have voluntary quotas. These measures have been used not only to ensure women's

presence in parliament, but also to implement commitments made under international instruments, including the Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination against Women.

31. A number of expectations clearly underpin the implementation of such quotas, not least of which is the idea that increasing the visibility of women in positions of power will eventually bring about a change in social perceptions of the role of women in society. Quotas, that is, are supposed to be used as ‘special temporary measures’ which act as a catalyst for broader, cultural change.

32. In practice, this theory has proven sometimes problematic, as the case of Eastern Europe demonstrates. In the heyday of communism, women accounted for one-quarter to one-third of the members of the parliaments, yet very few women were to be found in the Central Committees and Politburos. In nearly all of these countries, few women advanced beyond mid-level positions. At both the local and national levels, women were seen as representatives of official organisations, present because of quotas. In some countries their presence was considered token and frowned upon because they differed from their male colleagues in their educational or occupational backgrounds. Thus, despite women’s relatively high representation in parliament, a political culture valuing women’s political representation did not develop. The past ten years have shown that quotas must always be supplemented with a host of other measures which range from awareness-raising to the training of women and the development of gender-sensitive environments. In addition, other elements which contribute to women’s growing presence in parliament need to be factored in, including socio-economic development, political will, cultural evolution, links with women’s movements and international assistance and support.

33. As **political parties** play an ever-increasing role in the management of parliamentary politics, it is at the party level that the principle of equality must be put into practice. Political parties remain the gatekeepers to the advancement of women in politics. Research has consistently found that political parties that are centralised, effectively mobilise women activists and apply gender-related candidate rules are more likely to elect women. In particular, gender-related candidate rules, such the provision of special/allocated funds for women’s electoral campaigns and other special measures, have proven most effective in ensuring an adequate representation of women. Moreover, women’s ability to stand for election and conduct an electoral campaign has been successfully nurtured by specific ‘networks’ of women, such as EMILY’s List, including by providing the necessary financial and logistical support.

34. **International discourse** has played an instrumental role. The equal participation of women and men in public life is one of the cornerstones of the 1979 United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). Renewed pressure for the implementation of CEDAW provisions was generated at the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995, and the BPFA identified ‘inequality between men and women in the sharing of power and decision-making at all levels’ and “insufficient mechanisms at all levels to promote the advancement of women”, as two areas of critical concern where action was vital for the advancement of women. International lobbying efforts intensified after 1995, with other international instruments, such as United Nations Security Council resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security, and the Millennium Development Goals

(MDGs) making an impact. The MDGs recognize the fundamental role of women in development, with the proportion of seats held by women in national parliaments being a key indicator in measuring progress on women's empowerment. These international instruments have proved pivotal for women's movements worldwide.

35. International and regional **organizations** have also played their part. They have supported actors on the ground, through the provision of information and tools for reform, by working directly with political parties, by providing training to women candidates seeking election or those already in parliament, and through technical assistance projects. Promoting women's participation within international organizations is also important. Indeed, the IPU is one of the only international organizations, if not the only one, that has adopted specific measures and mechanisms to promote gender equality within the organization. In October 2005, women parliamentarians accounted for 16 per cent of parliamentarians worldwide. In contrast, at the last IPU Assembly held in Geneva in October 2005, 32 per cent of parliamentarians present were women. The participation of women at the IPU is strong, resulting from a dynamic women's movement and complemented by specific positive measures. Underpinning all such efforts, however, is the need for political will, both within and outside parliaments and at the international, regional and local levels.

36. While this paper has focused mainly on the quantitative aspects of women in decision-making, the IPU also works with parliaments with the aim of making them more gender-sensitive and supporting women once they are elected to parliament. The IPU has previously undertaken different surveys on women's experiences in parliament, and is currently working on a survey of experiences in decision-making, to be fielded among both male and female parliamentarians. It will seek to document the contribution of parliamentarians to the promotion of gender equality, with the aim of making parliament more gender-friendly. As the 50th session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women in 2006 will address this very question, the IPU is preparing a parliamentary event entitled *Gender Equality: Making a difference through parliaments* and is undertaking further survey research on the existence and functioning of committees related to gender equality and the status of women in parliament. Through these programmes and activities, the IPU hopes to achieve gender equality in parliaments worldwide. It is democracy in the making.