

**Commission on the Status of Women  
Intervention by Senator Monica Xavier (Uruguay)  
On behalf of the Inter-Parliamentary Union**

Mr. Chairman,

It's a great pleasure for me to take the floor on behalf of the Inter-Parliamentary Union. My name is Monica Xavier, I'm a Senator from Uruguay and President of the IPU Coordinating Committee of Women Parliamentarians.

Yesterday, the Inter-Parliamentary Union and the United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women organized a parliamentary meeting focusing on the role that parliaments can play in financing for gender equality. I would like to thank UNDAW for its cooperation. It was the fourth parliamentary meeting that we jointly organize each year on the occasion of the CSW. I would like to underline how important it is for legislators to participate in the process of the Commission, contribute to the debate and learn from the information, exchanges and meetings that we have here. It is also important for us parliamentarians to go back home with the commitment to ensure national follow-up to the decisions that have been taken here.

Yesterday's meeting was very successful and it enjoyed a strong participation -over 130 parliamentarians from some 50 countries participated in a very engaging and constructive debate.

I would like to mention here a few of the issues that were discussed and commitments that we have taken.

The issue of financing is crucial to meeting national and international objectives for gender equality. How many times, we parliamentarians, have we found ourselves in a situation where we pass laws, approve programs, develop national plans for women and identify clear objectives, which however we cannot satisfactorily implement because of lack of resources.

If we are committed to meeting the MDGs and achieving gender equality in our countries, we need to establish priorities and provide necessary financing so that our efforts are effective. From this perspective we parliamentarians can play a key role. Our capacity to adopt proposals and exercise oversight of action by the executive gives us a central role in making sure that established objectives are also acted upon.

I would refer to just three main points from the many that we discussed yesterday. The first one relates to proposals that include a gender focus. Participants clearly emphasized that this can be a very effective mechanism to respond to the needs of both men and women. This does not imply a separate budget for women, but rather it is a question of integrating gender into all political and economic processes. One of the commitments we made yesterday was to initiate or strengthen this type of processes in our own parliaments.

If in our countries we do not implement gender-sensitive budgets, we parliamentarians have committed to ask ourselves why, and pressure our governments and question our institutions.

The second point refers to the parliaments' oversight role. In order to carry out this function, we have to set objectives, establish goals, defend positions and regularly monitor the situation. We should be vigilant and should examine all opportunities to secure financing for gender equality. In doing so, we need to analyze the gender impact of all economic and finance measures. We should follow more closely international aid and not be afraid of requesting the adoption of conditionalities that favor gender equality. We should also initiate discussions and analyze the impact of taxation over men and women. For example, the impact of indirect taxes such as the VAT should be analyzed with much attention, given that they have a greater impact on the lives of women. We should also think creatively and not be afraid to adopt measures such as, for example, earmarking resources for favor of gender equality. One of the experiences which we discussed yesterday was the earmarking of resources from taxation on alcohol for programs on violence against women.

The third point concerns the need to review our laws and frameworks so as to eliminate discriminatory measures. Indeed, we should avoid financing programs and systems which discriminate against women. One example that we talked a lot about is the question of financing political parties; it was said several times that we cannot increase financial support to women's political participation, without in parallel reviewing the internal functioning of political parties, which very often discriminate against women.

In order to achieve change we need political will and we need to work together. The debates in the Commission are very important for our societies. However, the responsibility to translate commitments made into effective changes does not fall exclusively upon governments. Parliaments are part of this process of change, and we call upon the Commission to include in its conclusions our role in this process. We as parliamentarians and the IPU are committed to follow up on these conclusions and contribute to their implementation in our countries.

Last but not least, I would like to mention that yesterday we presented a new Map on Women in Politics, which presents the situation of women in parliament and in government across the globe as of the 1 of January 2008. The Map shows that we are still far from parity. Only 17.7% of parliamentarians and 16% of ministers are women. This is without looking at the level of women in high decision making positions such as head of state or heads of parliaments, which remains very low.

The inequality that these numbers illustrate is closely linked to an inequality of resources provided to combating discrimination against women. In conclusion, we need to strengthen our efforts and action to achieve real equality between men and women.