



**INTER-PARLIAMENTARY UNION**  
**OFFICE OF THE PERMANENT OBSERVER TO THE UNITED NATIONS**

**Third Committee**

**Agenda item 59:  
Advancement of Women**

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When it comes to the advancement of women, the IPU's priority area is on the question of women in politics.

With a 56 per cent share of women members in Parliament, the Rwandan National Assembly has once again made history. It is the first time ever that an elected national parliament has a majority of women. This is cause for celebration.

The number of women in parliament around the world is now well over 18 per cent - an all-time high.

The example of Rwanda is significant in that it is also an interesting case where women parliamentarians have been able to make an impact on policy-making in the country and develop a partnership with men in defence of gender equality issues.

While the question of access to parliaments has been in the spotlight over the past decades, the question of ensuring women's effective participation within parliaments has received much less attention. This particular issue was the subject of a two-year survey of men and women parliamentarians carried out by the Inter-Parliamentary Union. The survey results were recently issued by the IPU in a publication entitled *Equality in Politics* and I would like to highlight four of its key findings.

**The first message** of the report is that women change the way politics is done and bring different priorities to the fore. More than 90 per cent of the 300 parliamentarians surveyed are convinced of this.

Women are of course not a homogenous group and their different life experiences mean that they prioritize issues differently. However, it is clear that women have certain shared experiences which affect how they prioritize issues politically.

The report finds that in parliaments, it has been women who are the most ardent supporters of women. They have been responsible for putting women's concerns and issues on the parliamentary agenda. In particular, women are at the forefront of efforts to combat gender-based violence, and ensure that questions such as parental leave and childcare, pensions, gender equality laws and electoral reforms that enhance women's access to parliaments figure on the legislative agenda.

**The second message** is that numbers do count. Women in parliament face constraints in implementing their agendas. Low numbers of women in parliament limit their lobbying strength and their availability to participate in all committee work. At the very least, the more women there are in parliament, the easier it is to address women's issues and to change the gender dynamics in the chamber. Women need to be present to take part in committee debates in parliament, but sometimes there are simply not enough women to go round. They may have to take on additional

work and spread themselves too thinly by taking on several committee assignments. This also leads to women having a far heavier workload than men.

**The third message** is that we need to look at the environment in which women evolve and question the functioning of institutions and their level of gender sensitivity. Within the institution of parliament, gender is beginning to be mainstreamed, although with different levels of success. Some parliaments have implemented reforms to make them more gender-sensitive, and provide spaces for women, such as in specialized parliamentary committees and caucuses of women parliamentarians. Others have implemented reforms to make them more family-friendly, such as instituting changes in sitting times and organizing childcare facilities.

**The fourth message** is that women cannot do it alone and partnerships are key. I will highlight two examples of such partnerships— partnership with men and work with political parties.

More men need to come to the table. The views of both women and men are needed for the development of gender-sensitive legislation. Also, as men form the majority of members in parliament, and dominate leadership positions in political parties, they are important partners in garnering support for implementing change.

Political parties are key arenas for policy development and debate, and for setting political priorities. They are therefore one of the key institutions through which gender equality concerns can be promoted. However few political parties actively promote a gender equality agenda and few women hold the top decision-making positions in parties. A lack of internal democracy and accountability and selection procedures that are not transparent, can hamper women's efforts to gain rank and hold decision-making positions in political parties. More attention therefore needs to be given to parties.

While the survey findings confirm that change is on its way and women have made some inroads into the world of politics, it also highlights that much more still needs to be done. Let me conclude by reiterating that the attainment of gender equality and the full participation of women in decision-making are key indicators of democracy. The inclusion of women in political decision-making is not just about women's right to equality, it is also about using women's resources and potential to determine political and development priorities. In other words it is not just a matter of right but getting it right.

I invite you all to read IPU's survey and hope that you will find it of use in your work to promote gender equality.

