



# INTER-PARLIAMENTARY UNION

## Statement before the Third Committee of the General Assembly

### Agenda item 28: Advancement of Women

Introduced by Mr. Alessandro Motter, Senior Advisor

New York, October 11, 2011

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Chairperson,

A key measure of women's empowerment in society at large is their participation in politics. A quick look at the IPU's statistics of women in politics over the past ten years gives ground for cautious optimism.

- In 1995, women accounted for 11.3% of parliamentarians worldwide. Today they represent nearly 19.3 of legislators.
- In 1995, Sweden topped the ranking of women in parliament. Today two countries have a majority of women in Parliament: Rwanda with 56% and Andorra with 53%.
- In 1995, just five parliaments had reached a 30% representation of women. Today there are 26.
- In 1995 there were 24 women presiding officers of parliament. Today there are 40.

All in all, the gradual progress over the past years is fairly encouraging. But we are far from parity. If current rates of progress continue – at less than one percent a year - the Beijing target of 30 per cent of women in parliament will not be reached until 2025, and parity would have to wait 50 more years. We need to do better, and we *can* do better.

As an effort to provide further impetus to this issue, the proposal that is being introduced before this committee for a new resolution on “women and political participation” is one that the IPU welcomes very much. We look forward to a text that will identify specific targets and mechanisms to promote women in politics – and a text that we can in turn take back to our member parliaments for their consideration and support.

There are three priority areas that we would like to draw attention to based on our experience in supporting women in parliament.

The first relates to the importance of examining the legal and political framework of a country with a view to reforming it to address discrimination, bottlenecks and challenges. When one looks at the countries that have more than 30% women in their parliaments, three main elements can be highlighted:

- the great majority of these countries have a proportional list system;

- the great majority have also implemented some sort of special measure to promote women in politics whether in the form of legislated quotas or voluntary quotas adopted by political parties
- many of them have recently undergone a transition period and have managed to take advantage of this time of reform to address past discrimination and challenges and adopt legal frameworks that facilitate women's political participation on an equal footing with men.

In short: electoral systems matter; special temporary measures are key; and political momentum and opportunities for change are not to be missed.

The IPU also places particular attention on the more general legal framework of a country - one cannot deny that constitutions, media laws, political party laws, campaign laws etc. all can have an impact on women's political participation. This impact must be assessed and challenges addressed. This is the subject of a research that the IPU will be carrying out in the coming months.

The second priority in our view is to focus on the overall empowerment of women. Empowerment is key to facilitating women's access to politics and enhancing their impact in this field. Doing politics requires knowledge and skills, mentors and supporters, networks and funds. These are more often than not inaccessible to women. Well thought-out electoral processes that facilitate the election of women, training and financial incentives for women candidates, access to media ahead of elections, are all key to empowering women in political participation.

Our third priority is to focus on processes and institutions and ensure that they are gender-sensitive. The challenges that women face continue after their election or nomination to a political leadership position. When women become members of political institutions, such as Parliaments, they enter a man's world. They enter institutions that were created by men and led by them for centuries. The political institutions and parliaments in particular need to genuinely open up to women. Leadership, rules, procedures, working hours and all of what makes a parliament a place of work must be made to suit the needs and expectations of both men and women.

As discussed in a recent study of ours, gender-sensitive parliaments are those that respond to the needs and interests of both men and women in their structures, operations, and methods of work. The IPU has carried out a 3-year research project on this question and the results of this work will be presented next week at our Assembly in Bern. The research focuses on five key elements that need to be looked at to develop a gender-sensitive parliament: first - the composition of parliament, aiming for gender equality in numbers and positions; second - the legal framework, looking at the existence of laws to support gender equality objectives and a plan of action for parliaments to implement gender-sensitive working policies; third - the working modalities and mechanisms for mainstreaming gender in all the work of parliament (committees, caucuses etc); fourth - the culture and infrastructure, discussing how to develop a non-sexist environment and provide facilities suited to both men and women; fifth and last - the strategic partners, meaning the importance of having men shoulder their gender equality responsibilities and pro-active and gender-sensitive political parties.

We hope that the finding of this survey will support current efforts at both national and international levels to promote women's political participation and the achievement of gender equality. The IPU commends the United Nations commitment in this field. With the establishment of UN women, we trust this commitment and focus will only grow in the years to come. We look forward to pursuing work together and can assure you of our support.

Thank you.