



INTER-PARLIAMENTARY UNION

Third Committee of the General Assembly

Agenda item 28: Advancement of Women

**Statement by Mr. Miguel Bermeo
Permanent Observer**

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CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Chairperson,

Since the landmark Beijing conference of 1995, the participation of women in political decision-making has been high on the international agenda. It is a top priority for the Inter-Parliamentary Union, where we monitor progress, develop policy guidelines and pro-actively seek to facilitate women's empowerment in the political sphere.

Women's participation in parliaments has increased since the Beijing Conference. Today, women account for one in five (20.2 %) of all parliamentarians in the world. This proportion is not far from double what it was in 1995.

Progress aside, one can only regret how slowly change is taking place. We advance by a mere 0.5 point of percentage per year. At this speed, it will take us several more decades of hard and persistent work before the target of a minimum of 30% women in all parliaments.

It is inspiring though to look at the number of parliaments that have reached this minimum target. Their numbers are increasing. Today, 30 countries have more than 30% women in the Lower or single House of their parliament. In order to get to that point, most of them have used special or affirmative measures.

At the other side of the spectrum, many parliaments still do not have a single woman member or only a few women in their ranks. Many of those are in the Arab and the Pacific Island states. The democratization process in many countries of the Arab world provides an opportunity to systematically ensure better participation of women in politics, which is a key ingredient for democracy.

The number of women in parliament is of key importance. Our research shows that women in political decision-making are a most powerful driver to improve the situation of other women. We witness many cases where parliaments, driven by their women members, passed key legislation, improved policies and programs and allocated resources that empowered the status of women in their societies. Legislating to curb violence against women, budgeting for programs that respond to the specific needs of women, calling for gender friendly policies for education, health, and employment are among key improvements driven by women members of parliament.

One can only imagine the struggle that these women members of parliament have gone through to be able to make their voice heard. This is why numbers matter.

But this is not the end of the story.

In the most recent survey of the IPU on Gender-sensitive Parliaments, we put a key question on the table: are parliaments an enabling or are they a disabling environment for the full potential of the participation of women?

The response was far from encouraging. Political institutions were built by men, for men and it is only in recent years that women are entering these institutions.

Parliaments need to adapt themselves by opening up, in a genuine and comprehensive manner to women's full participation.

A gender-sensitive parliament is one that responds to the needs and interests of both men and women in its structures, operations, and methods of work. To become gender-sensitive institutions, we call on parliaments to:

- promote and achieve equality in numbers of women and men across all their bodies and internal structures;
- develop a parliamentary gender equality policy framework;
- mainstream gender equality in all of their work;
- foster an internal culture that respects women's rights and promotes gender equality;
- encourage men members who pursue and advocate for gender equality;

- encourage political parties to promote and achieve gender equality;
- equip parliamentary staff with capacities and resources to work for gender equality.

Chairperson,

Our 127th Assembly is taking place next week in Québec City. It will adopt a Plan of Action for Gender-sensitive Parliaments. This means that parliaments will commit to become more gender-sensitive institutions and that they will have a roadmap to do so.

A few days ago, women speakers of parliament gathered in New Delhi at the invitation of the IPU and the Speaker of the Indian Lok Sabha, the Honorable Meira Kumar. They adopted "The New Delhi Initiative for Gender-sensitive Parliaments", an innovative declaration in which this unique group of women politicians commit to making parliaments more attuned and open to issues relating to gender.

Indeed, women's access to politics and to parliaments needs a stronger impulse. We all have to continue pushing for temporary special measures, women's empowerment, sufficient resources and generally stronger political will.

Parliaments and all other political institutions also need to be transformed to become not only places where women are represented, but also places where women are able to contribute strongly, with no barriers—structural or cultural—to their full participation.

This is a mission to which the IPU will continue to spare no efforts.

I thank you for your attention.