

**Asia/Africa Parliamentarian Forum on Human Security and Gender
Bangkok, Thailand 6 – 8 December 2002**

COMMUNIQUÉ

The second Asia/Africa Parliamentarian Forum on Human Security and Gender – “The Role of the Legislature” closed today, 8 December 2002.

It was organized by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Division for the Advancement of Women (UN/DESA/DAW). Participants included Members of Parliament (MPs) of 20 countries from Africa and Asia - Algeria, Bangladesh, Burundi, Ghana, India, Islamic Republic of Iran, Kenya, Laos, Malaysia, Mauritius, Mongolia, Morocco, Namibia, Nepal, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Tanzania, Thailand, Uzbekistan and Viet Nam - as well as the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), ECOWAS Parliament, the Center for Asia-Pacific Women in Politics (CAPWIP), United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), and United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM).

The three-day Forum was hosted by the Parliament and the Government of Thailand, and organized in cooperation with ESCAP and the UNDP Office in Bangkok. The initiative was funded by the Japanese Government through the Japan Women in Development (JWID) Fund in UNDP.

The first Forum was held in Marrakech, Morocco, 24 – 26 March 2002. It addressed the impact of armed conflict on women and girls; the gender dimensions of the HIV/AIDS pandemic; and the relationship between socio-economic policies and gender equality.

The second Forum was located within a global context of new challenges to human security. Participants addressed opportunities for parliamentarians to promote gender equality in the framework of human security, in particular through the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), and its Optional Protocol. The meeting also discussed the gender dimensions of regional initiatives such as NEPAD, and opportunities for parliamentarians to highlight those.

Participants strongly welcomed the concrete steps already taken by many to follow-up on and implement the communiqué adopted at the first Forum. They agreed to transmit the present communiqué, together with the results of the first Forum, as inputs to the Third Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD III) scheduled for 2003, as well as to the annual meeting of the Commission on Human Security, scheduled to take place in Bangkok, from 8 – 11 December 2002. Participants also agreed to circulate this communiqué widely within their own parliaments, and to present it to the IPU Conference to be held in Chile, in April 2003. They further agreed

to inform the Speakers of their respective parliaments and to brief women's caucuses and committees of the outcome of the meeting, and to channel the information to national and regional parliaments and networks of parliamentarians. Finally, participants will continue to network among themselves, and strengthen South-South cooperation in working towards the common goal of gender equality.

Conclusions and recommendations

Gender equality is one of the MDGs (goal 3). At the same time, gender equality is also a means towards the achievement of all the other MDGs. Promotion of gender equality must therefore be an integral part of all efforts to achieve these goals.

The MDGs are intricately linked to many commitments and obligations Governments have assumed under other international policy instruments and treaties on gender equality, such as those under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, and the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Parliaments have a vital role to play in achieving the goals of both, the CEDAW Convention and the Millennium Declaration in their responsibilities as legislators, by providing oversight over the executive branch of Government, and by advocating for gender equality within their constituencies. It is therefore essential that they be informed and consulted by the Government on steps to be taken towards the achievement of the MDGs, preparation of poverty reduction strategies, and reporting on implementation of conventions to human rights treaty bodies, especially CEDAW, and other relevant international and regional reporting structures. At present, this is rarely the case.

In order to enhance the involvement in, and opportunities for parliamentarians to exercise their responsibilities, the following is called for:

1. Political will and leadership

Political will and leadership of the entire Parliament and of Government are indispensable to promote gender equality and women's full and equal participation at all levels of decision-making. Achieving gender equality entails a transformative process.

- **Parliamentarians should challenge¹ existing societal constraints and work for the adoption of legislation and policy measures to promote gender equality**

2. Institutional frameworks and mechanisms, and accountability

Adequate institutional frameworks and mechanisms are necessary within Parliaments, to mobilize support and build consensus for the promotion of gender equality, the implementation of CEDAW and the achievement of MDGs. Promotion of gender equality is a responsibility of society as a whole. Allocation of resources

¹ The participant from the Islamic Republic of Iran expressed a reservation.

through budgetary processes requires a full understanding of the differential impact of planned expenditures on women and men.

- **Establish and/or strengthen gender caucuses or committees in Parliament**
- **Ensure that parliamentary bodies, including gender caucuses, are composed of both women and men parliamentarians to strengthen their partnership**
- **Strengthen gender expertise to support and provide advise to parliamentarians and parliamentary bodies in ensuring development of effective and sustainable gender equality initiatives**
- **Strengthen gender-sensitive budgeting so that all expenditures actively support the achievement of gender equality and of the MDGs from a gender perspective**

3. Partnership and knowledge networking

Combating poverty and promoting gender equality demand inclusive processes for sustainability. Parliamentarians are “bridges” between Government and civil society, including women’s NGOs, the private sector, political parties, religious communities, academia and regional and international entities, such as the United Nations system and the IPU.

- **Create networks and lobby groups as successful means for advancing an agenda for gender equality and ensuring sustainability within Parliaments and beyond**
- **Enhance networking with parliamentarians on gender equality at regional and international level**
- **Increase channels of communication and regular information exchange**

4. Capacity development and awareness-raising

Awareness and capacity of Parliamentarians, parliamentary staff and government officials for implementation of the Convention and the achievement of the MDGs are crucial for progress in both regards, and especially for full utilization of these commitments and obligations as tools for gender-sensitive legislating and policy making.

- **Increase gender awareness among parliamentarians and technical staff, such as legislative and justice personnel**
- **Enhance capacity for gender-sensitive budgeting**
- **Enhance the capacity of the executive to implement parliamentary decisions on gender equality**
- **Urge the international community, particularly the UN system, to provide support for national capacity development at all levels**

5. Advocacy

Parliamentarians’ advocacy for implementation of the Convention, ratification of the Optional Protocol and the achievement of the MDGs, vis-à-vis their constituencies and other stakeholders, is important. The media, especially

television, radio and the cinema, as well as new information and communications technologies, are effective means for dissemination of information.

- **Develop lobbying skills and build coalitions to advocate for gender equality**
- **Engage with the media to enhance public knowledge and information about women's human rights and sustainable development, to support a culture of gender equality, combat discrimination and violence to meet the objectives of the Convention and Millennium Declaration**
- **Encourage the UN system to support advocacy work on MDGs, including the translation into national and local languages of relevant material and preparation of advocacy material accessible to the general population**

6. Prioritizing parliamentary action for the achievement of MDGs and implementation of CEDAW

Parliamentarians have a crucial role in the creation of a legal, political, economic and social framework for implementation of CEDAW and the achievement of MDGs through legislation, budgetary allocation and policy making.

- **Take all legislative, administrative and other measures in the areas covered by the Convention and the MDGs for their effective and timely achievement**
- **Ratify the Convention in countries where this has not yet been done**
- **Ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention in countries where this has not yet been done**

7. The role of the international community, especially the United Nations system

Development demands a conducive global and national environment. National expertise and ownership are crucial for the achievement of MDGs and the implementation of the Convention. The international community should:

- **Provide technical, expert, and financial support**
- **Support country efforts with adequate development assistance and resources**
- **Support further South-South networking and cooperation**

The Forum identified a series of priority issues for action for the achievement of the MDGs and the implementation of the Convention, which are detailed in the report of the meeting.

Participants of the Forum call upon especially UNDP to exert efforts and ensure the continuity and sustainability of this initiative.