

Beyond Beijing: Towards Gender Equality in Politics

**Parliamentary Event
on the occasion of the 49th session of the
Commission on the Status of Women**

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3 March 2005**

Madame Chairperson, Senator Joan Fraser, President of the Coordinating Committee on Women Parliamentarians
Excellencies and distinguished Delegates
Ms. Rachel Mayanja, Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women, the Keynote Speaker

I am delighted to have the opportunity to take part in the Inaugural Session of this important parliamentary event: "Beyond Beijing: Towards Gender Equality in Politics", which the Inter-parliamentary Union is organizing in collaboration with the United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women. I wish to welcome all distinguished participants from all regions of the world to the United Nations and thank you for your commitment to this important topic. The holding of this event during the 49th session of the Commission on the Status of Women commemorating the tenth anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995, makes an important contribution by enhancing attention to the critical issue of women's political participation.

I want to begin by commending the Inter-Parliamentary Union Assembly's consideration and adoption of a resolution on the ten-year review of implementation the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action in the Third Standing Committee in September last year. I would also like to recognize the importance of the work of the Inter Parliament Union Coordinating Committee of Women Parliamentarians, under the strong leadership of Senator Fraser.

I would also like to express my appreciation for the excellent, long-standing collaboration the Division for the Advancement of Women has had with the Inter-Parliamentary Union. This has included the development of the Handbook for Parliamentarians on the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, which makes an important contribution to the implementation of both the Platform for Action and the Convention as well as training for parliamentarians on reporting and implementation of the Convention. Very recently, it involved collaboration on the development of a Map of Women in Politics, which highlights the current status of women in parliaments and in the executive around the world. I am sure this map will be a very important resource in

many different contexts, not least in highlighting the remaining serious gaps and challenges in implementing the Critical Area of Concern from the Beijing Platform for Action – Women in Decision-making.

The ten-year review and appraisal of implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action clearly shows that, despite political recognition of the fundamental right of women and men to participate in political and public life, the gap between de jure and de facto equality in the area of power and decision-making remains wide. While the proportion of seats held by women in legislative bodies is the highest world average reached to date, and continues a trend of gradual but sustained growth, the pace of change is clearly far too slow. Only 14 countries have at least 30 percent representation of women in parliament, which had been established as a target for 1995, and is still not achieved ten years later. This is one of the key challenges facing us in the decade to come.

One encouraging development is the fact that a number of post-conflict countries have highlighted and addressed the importance of including women in reconstruction processes, and of their participation in new democratic institutions. As a result, Rwanda, Mozambique, South Africa, Namibia, Timor-Leste, Uganda and Eritrea - appear in the top 30 countries with regard to women's participation in legislative bodies, averaging between 25 and 30 percent of women legislators. It is heartening that Rwanda has the highest proportion of women in parliament in the world and I would like to congratulate the women and men of Rwanda for this important achievement.

The Inter-parliamentary Union already plays a critical role at national, regional and global levels by promoting women's increased participation in parliaments and in providing much needed statistics on women's representation in parliaments.

At national level parliamentarians can and do play a critical role in promoting and monitoring implementation of the Platform for Action and the outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, as well as the gender-sensitive implementation of the Millennium Declaration. Parliaments can also make a significant contribution to ensuring full implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, including through reviewing national reports to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women and requiring reporting on responses to the recommendations made in the concluding comments of the Committee.

The importance of parliaments in the promotion of gender equality and empowerment of women was recognized in the Expert Group Meeting on "The role of national mechanisms in promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women: Achievements, gaps and challenges", organized by the Division for the Advancement of Women, and generously hosted by the Government of Italy, in November 2004. The independent experts at the meeting, recognized the increased diversity of mechanisms at national level and highlighted the importance of

Parliaments - including through standing committees on gender equality or caucuses of women parliamentarian - in promoting gender equality perspectives, reviewing legislative proposals for gender impact and monitoring government performance in meeting gender equality goals. Among their recommendations, the experts called for more effective partnerships between all mechanisms at national level, including parliamentary bodies, as well as more effective utilization of the expertise of non-governmental organizations and other individuals, groups and networks. They also recommended that sex-disaggregated statistics and information on gender equality indicators should be included in all government reporting to parliaments, including budgetary reporting. A further recommendation was that periodic reports to CEDAW should be tabled in national parliaments before submission to the CEDAW Committee and the concluding comments of the Committee presented to parliament. (Copies of this report are available in the room).

Increasing women's representation in parliaments was identified as one of the indicators for achieving Millennium Development Goal Three: Promote Gender Equality and Empower Women. The indicator is the proportion of seats held by women in national parliament. The recently released report of Taskforce Three of the Millennium Project, "Taking action: achieving gender equality and empowering women", included the increase of women's share in national parliaments and local government bodies as one of its recommended seven strategic priorities.

This parliamentary event will provide an important opportunity to address some of the critical issues around women's political participation, which include increasing women's access to parliamentary decision-making, making the work of parliaments more gender-sensitive, increasing the role of male parliamentarians in promoting gender equality and empowerment of women, and enhancing collaboration with intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations. I am sure that the discussions today will be stimulating and fruitful.

As well as making an important contribution to the ten-year review and appraisal process during this session of the Commission on the Status of Women, the discussions and findings from this event will also make an input into the preparation for the consideration by the 50th session of the Commission on the Status of Women in 2006 of the theme: "Equal participation of women and men in decision-making processes at all levels".

I wish you a very successful session.

Thank you