

**Statement by Carolyn Hannan, Director  
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**At the parliamentary event organized by the  
Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) and the Division for the Advancement of Women  
On the occasion of the 50<sup>th</sup> session of the Commission on the Status of Women  
United Nations, New York  
1 March, 2006**

Madame Chairperson, Senator Joan Fraser  
President of the Inter-Parliamentary Union, Mr Pier Ferdinando Casini  
Excellencies and distinguished delegates

I am delighted to have the opportunity to take part in the opening of this important parliamentary event: "Gender Equality: Making a Difference through Parliament", which the Inter-parliamentary Union is organizing in collaboration with the United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women.

I wish to welcome the distinguished participants from all regions of the world and thank you for your commitment to this important topic. The meeting is being held at a particularly important juncture – this year the Commission on the Status of Women is commemorating both its 50<sup>th</sup> session and 60 years of work to promote gender equality and empowerment of women.

Let me begin by expressing my appreciation for the excellent, long-standing collaboration the Division for the Advancement of Women has had with the Inter-Parliamentary Union. I would also like to recognize the importance of the work of the Coordinating Committee of Women Parliamentarians.

At this session the Commission is considering the theme: "Women's participation in decision-making at all levels". The parliamentary event today will make an important contribution by enhancing attention to the critical issue of women's political participation. Since its establishment in 1946, the Commission has given priority to increasing women's political participation. Early on in its history, the Commission was instrumental, for example, in the establishment of the *Convention on the Political Rights of Women* adopted by the General Assembly in 1952 - the first instrument of international law aimed at recognizing and protecting the political rights of women everywhere.

Women in power and decision-making is one of the Critical Areas of Concern in the Beijing Platform for Action adopted in 1995. The Commission on the Status of Women followed up on implementation of the recommendations at national level at its forty-first session in 1997. The agreed conclusions adopted by the Commission contained further recommendations for action to enhance implementation. They are available in a document at the back of the room.

The Division for the Advancement of Women collaborated with IPU and the UN Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) in the organization of an Expert Group Meeting on the equal participation of women and men in decision-making processes, in preparation for this session of the Commission on the Status of Women. The Expert Group Meeting was held in AddisAbaba from 24-27 October 2005. The findings and recommendations of the independent experts contributed to the report of the UN Secretary-General to the Commission. Copies are also available in the back of the room.

Yesterday, an expert interactive panel on the theme of equal participation of women and men in decision-making was held in the Commission on the Status of Women to stimulate exchange and sharing of ideas and good practices among Member States. We were very pleased the the Secretary-General of IPU, Mr Anders Johnsson, was able to participate and provide an excellent overview of the work of IPU and some of the critical issues and challenges facing us.

At its 49<sup>th</sup> session in 2005, the Commission on the Status of Women carried out the ten-year review and appraisal of implementation of the *Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action*. Responses received from Governments, and the data collected by IPU, indicated 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. The Declaration adopted by Member States during the ten-year review and appraisal, while recognizing progress made, noted remaining gaps and challenges and called for accelerated implementation.

As was mentioned at the parliamentary event here in the United Nations last year, one encouraging trend is the fact that a number of post-conflict countries have highlighted and addressed the importance of including women in reconstruction processes, and of ensuring 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, and Rwanda currently has the highest proportion of women in parliament in the world. It will be important to ensure that these gains can be maintained and that the women in parliament are able to have a significant impact on policy-making processes and outcomes from a gender perspective.

The Inter-parliamentary Union already plays a critical role at national, regional and global levels by promoting women's increased participation in parliaments, collecting and disseminating much needed statistics on women's representation in parliaments, and very importantly by providing an excellent good practice example on accountability for gender equality in its own procedures.

At national level parliamentarians can and do play a critical role in promoting and monitoring implementation of the Platform for Action, as well as the gender-sensitive implementation of the Millennium Development Goals. 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. Action by parliaments is critical to the removal of constraints to women's involvement in decision-making – such as illiteracy, poverty, stereotypical attitudes and practices, including unequal sharing of family responsibilities, and violence against women.

Parliaments can also make a significant contribution to ensuring full implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, including through reviewing the national reports to be submitted to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women and through monitoring follow-up to the recommendations made by the Committee following the consideration of the report. The Convention – which has now been ratified by 181 countries - provides a unique accountability mechanism at national level, which can support parliaments in their work of promoting gender equality. Systematic use of the Convention by parliaments would also significantly enhance the credibility and effectiveness of the Convention – thus making a major contribution to gender equality at national level.

At the 2005 World Summit, world leaders reiterated their resolve to eliminate discrimination against women, including by promoting increased representation of women in Government decision-making bodies and through increasing their equal opportunity to participate fully in the political process.

This parliamentary event provides an important opportunity to go beyond the issue of increasing women's numerical representation in political decision-making to addressing the question of how parliaments can make a difference to gender equality. This includes addressing such critical issues as increasing women's access to parliamentary decision-making, making the work of parliaments more gender-sensitive, strengthening the role of male parliamentarians in promoting gender equality and empowerment of women, and enhancing collaboration with women's

groups and networks at all levels. I am sure that the discussions today will be stimulating and fruitful in this respect.

I wish you a very successful meeting.

Thank you.