

Assembly

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Item 5

24 September 2012

**(b) SPECIAL GENDER PARTNERSHIP SESSION ON GENDER-SENSITIVE PARLIAMENTS**

**PLAN OF ACTION FOR GENDER-SENSITIVE PARLIAMENTS**

**PRELIMINARY DRAFT**

As decided by the IPU governing bodies, a Special gender partnership session will be held on the occasion of the 127<sup>th</sup> IPU Assembly in Québec City on the theme of *Gender-sensitive Parliaments* (see the overview attached). The Special session will take place in three sittings on 23, 25 and 26 October 2012. It will conclude with the adoption of an outcome document: a Plan of Action for Gender-sensitive Parliaments. The Plan will then be submitted for adoption by the Assembly on 26 October.

The members of the Gender Partnership Group, appointed by the Executive Committee, have prepared a preliminary draft Plan of Action for Gender-sensitive Parliaments for the consideration of Member Parliaments (see the text attached). This document builds on the findings of the IPU Global Survey on Gender-sensitive Parliaments: A Global review of good practice. It aims at providing a series of possible strategies for parliaments to become more gender-sensitive institutions.

Members are kindly requested to review the draft Plan of Action and provide their comments or proposals to the IPU Secretariat by 12 October 2012. On the basis of the input received from Members, the Gender Partnership Group will prepare a revised draft outcome document, which will be distributed for discussion to all Members at the Special gender partnership session on Gender-sensitive Parliaments.

The Gender Partnership Group will have the overall responsibility for finalizing the document before it is submitted for adoption by the Assembly on 26 October. In so doing it will be assisted by chairs of the Special gender partnership session and members of the Coordinating Committee of Women Parliamentarians.

## **INTER-PARLIAMENTARY UNION**

### **Draft Plan of Action for Gender-sensitive Parliaments**

**To be presented at the 127<sup>th</sup> IPU Assembly, Québec City, Canada**

The 127<sup>th</sup> IPU Assembly,

*Having* before it the Plan of Action for Gender-sensitive Parliaments,

*Considering* that the document was drawn up following an extensive process of consultation with IPU Members,

*Mindful* that the document resulting from this process proposes concrete solutions to situations common to all countries while offering a wide range of options responding to individual situations - national and regional - and that it represents a common basis for the advancement of gender-sensitive parliaments in all countries,

1. *Decides* to adopt the Plan of Action for Gender-sensitive Parliaments;
2. *Invites* Members to bring this Plan of Action to the attention of their parliaments and governments, disseminate it as widely as possible and implement it at the national level;
3. *Requests* the Secretary General to ensure that this document is circulated as widely as possible at the international level and implemented at the national level.

## **Preamble**

Democracy requires constant evaluation and reassessment. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, one of the greatest changes to democracy around the world was the inclusion of increasing numbers of women, both as voters and as members of parliament.

In parallel, gender equality and women's empowerment have become an integral part of the international political and development agenda, recognized as being at the heart of progress towards, and achievement of, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Gender equality and women's empowerment are political goals, requiring a political response.

Making progress towards these goals requires direct action. While specific actions may need to take into account the individual cultural, social and religious context of parliaments around the world, progress essentially requires a widespread change in attitudes and perceptions.

Parliaments are well-placed to champion the goal of gender equality. Precisely because they aim to reflect society, so too must they reflect the changing dynamics of their electorates. A gender-sensitive parliament is one in which there are no barriers—structural or cultural—to women's full participation and equality between men and women. It is not only a place where women *can* work, but also one where women *want* to work and make a contribution. A gender-sensitive parliament sets a positive example by promoting gender equality and women's empowerment among society both nationally and internationally.

A gender-sensitive parliament is therefore a modern parliament; one that can deal with the equality demands of a modern society. Ultimately, it is a more efficient and effective parliament.

## **Objectives**

This Plan of Action is designed to support parliaments in their efforts to become more gender-sensitive. It presents a broad range of strategies in seven action areas that can be implemented by all parliaments, irrespective of the number of women members.

Parliaments are called upon to take ownership of this Plan of Action and to implement any or all of the Plan's strategies at the national level, setting concrete objectives, actions and deadlines suited to their national context. They are also called upon to regularly monitor and evaluate their progress towards achieving the goal of gender sensitivity.

**A gender-sensitive parliament responds to the needs and interests of both men and women in its structures, operations, methods and work.**

A gender-sensitive parliament is one that:

1. promotes and achieves equality in numbers of women and men across all of its bodies and internal structures.
2. develops a gender equality policy framework suited to its own national parliamentary context.
3. mainstreams gender equality in all of its work.
4. fosters an internal culture that respects women's rights, promotes gender equality and responds to the needs and realities of MPs—men and women—to balance work and family responsibilities.
5. builds on the contribution made by its men members who pursue and advocate for gender equality.
6. encourages political parties to take a proactive role in the promotion and achievement of gender equality.
7. equips its parliamentary staff with the capacity and resources to promote gender equality, actively encourages the recruitment and retention of women to senior positions, and ensures that gender equality is mainstreamed throughout the work of the parliamentary administration.

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**Key action areas of the Plan**

**Action area 1: Increase the number of women in parliament and achieve equality in participation**

**a. *Access to parliament***

While women's representation in parliaments has increased over time, it still does not match women's broader representation in society.

To redress this imbalance, parliaments should consider implementing one or more of the following:

- In line with their national context, adopt special measures to ensure that higher numbers of women are selected by parties to run for election and occupy "winnable" positions and propose amendments to electoral laws and national constitutions that provide for reserved seats.
- Condemn acts of violence against women candidates and parliamentarians and adopt legal and practical measures to prevent and punish such acts.
- Conduct awareness-raising campaigns on the importance of women in parliament.
- Support mentorship programmes and promote women parliamentarians as role models through parliament's communications tools and in the media.
- Facilitate the sharing of experiences and best practices among parliamentarians through study tours to other parliaments in the region and internationally.

**b. *Achieving equality in positions and roles***

While the number of women in parliament is important, it is equally important to have women in positions of parliamentary leadership.

To improve the leadership status of women and achieve greater gender equality in leadership positions, parliaments should consider implementing one or more of the following:

- Adopt affirmative action measures and amend the rules so as to give preference to women over men for parliamentary positions (including committee chairs and leadership positions in the Bureau or Board) in cases where qualifications are equal or commensurate with their representation in the parliament.
- Rotate positions of parliamentary leadership between men and women over a period of time.
- Introduce dual leadership for parliamentary structures, where possible, through the appointment of a man and a woman.
- Encourage the proportional and equitable distribution of women parliamentarians across all committees, not just those relating to women, children, gender, families, health and education.
- Revalue the experience women had prior to entering parliament so that it is considered as worthy and relevant as that of men.

**Action area 2: Strengthen gender equality legislation and policy**

The achievement of gender equality depends on fundamental changes in the roles attributed to men and women in society. While attitudes and beliefs may change on their own over time, research has shown that an effective catalyst for that change is legislation. Introducing and passing gender equality legislation requires significant political will.

**a. *National legislation***

To stimulate change in social and cultural attitudes on gender, parliaments should enact gender equality laws. Where gender equality laws were enacted but have become outdated or are older than 10 years, parliaments should review such legislation to include gender mainstreaming frameworks and mechanisms for monitoring and enforcing implementation.

To guarantee a legislative mandate for gender mainstreaming, parliaments should introduce a law that requires all government policy and legislation to be reviewed and assessed for their gender impact and compliance with the State's obligations under relevant international conventions, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic and Social Rights.

**b. *Parliament's strategic policies and action plans***

In order to serve as leaders and role models for championing gender equality, parliaments should:

- Develop a gender equality policy that sets out the rationale and strategic direction for implementing measures contained in this Plan of Action.
- Implement a gender equality plan that identifies concrete actions the parliament will take to address gender equality within a specific timeframe.
- Ensure that the parliament's budget is gender-sensitive.
- Identify gender equality objectives and indicators for the parliament and ensure that they are measurable and monitored regularly through an appropriate parliamentary oversight mechanism.

**c. *Operational and supporting policies of the parliament***

*i. Media and communications policies*

To ensure that the importance of promoting gender equality is well understood and given the utmost visibility, parliament should develop a gender communications strategy that identifies target audiences, key messages, methods and timeframes.

*ii. Harassment and discrimination policies*

To ensure that all members work in an environment free of discrimination and harassment, including sexual harassment, parliament should:

- Introduce a code of conduct that requires members to be respectful and courteous and penalizes any language and behaviour that is considered sexist.
- Develop and implement anti-discrimination and harassment policies for parliamentarians including the establishment of an independent body to which complaints can be lodged and addressed.
- Ensure that the language used in all official documents, including standing orders, is gender-sensitive (e.g. does not refer to members using the masculine pronoun "he" and uses Chairperson or Chair rather than Chairman).

**Action area 3: Mainstream gender throughout all parliamentary work**

Gender inequalities can only be effectively tackled if policies in all areas are designed in such a way as to address the specific concerns, needs and constraints of both women and men while building on their respective capacities and contributions.

**a. *Committing to gender mainstreaming***

Parliaments should demonstrate their commitment to gender mainstreaming by showcasing and creating opportunities to incorporate a gender dimension in all areas of their work. In this respect, they should:

- Foster debates on legislation and budgets, including the implications of such bills and expenditure allocations for women and men, girls and boys.
- Develop clear gender-based legislative assessment guidelines or toolkits (e.g. a gender-based checklist for all pieces of legislation).
- Allocate time in the order of business for special debates on gender equality or gender-specific questioning of ministers, in which both men and women are encouraged to participate.
- Schedule the consideration of legislation that promotes gender equality at times when it will receive high media coverage.

- Ensure that committees investigating gender equality concerns have sufficient time and resources (including staff with gender expertise) to fulfil their mandate, an opportunity to report back to the plenary on their work and recommendations as well as the same powers and responsibilities as any other parliamentary committee (e.g., call for written evidence, hear from witnesses and ministers and report on findings and recommendations).
- Ensure that there is a formal mechanism by which the body that is tasked with gender mainstreaming—be it an informal women’s caucus or a dedicated parliamentary committee—can report on its studies and examination of legislation to the key political organs of the parliament. Where reports have not been presented, reasons should be given.
- Showcase and publicize gender equality activities and outputs in newspapers, on the radio or through the parliament’s communication channels, including the website.

**b. *Establishing gender mainstreaming structures and mechanisms***

Gender mainstreaming in part involves the following: obtaining gender-disaggregated data and qualitative information on the situation of men and women; conducting a gender analysis, which highlights the differences between and among women, men, girls and boys in terms of their relative distribution of resources, opportunities, constraints and power in a given context; and instituting gender-sensitive monitoring and evaluation mechanisms, including the establishment of indicators to gauge the extent to which gender equality objectives are met and changes in gender relations are achieved.

Parliaments should adopt one or more of the following mechanisms that are best-suited to their own context:

- *A dedicated parliamentary committee on gender equality* entrusted with reviewing government policies and legislation from a gender perspective, where committee members question a broad range of groups and individuals, including public agencies, academics and private organizations, about their views on the effectiveness of government programmes and activities, and where strong links are forged between the committee and national women’s machineries, civil society organizations (CSOs) and research institutes and universities.
- *Mainstreaming gender throughout all parliamentary committees*, where responsibility for raising gender issues is attributed to a man and a woman member on each committee (gender focal points), supported by parliamentary research staff with gender expertise.
- *A women’s parliamentary caucus* with a special remit for gender equality concerns, composed of women (and men, if desired) working on a commonly agreed agenda. An effective caucus relies on strong links with national women’s machineries, CSOs and research institutes and universities.
- *A Speaker’s reference group* on gender equality composed of men and women members from across the political spectrum, which reports to the Speaker directly and sets the parliament’s gender equality direction and agenda;
- *Technical research units* on gender equality or *library/research staff* with gender expertise who have access to up-to-date information, books, computers and online databases and who can assist with gender-based analyses.

#### **Action area 4: Institute or improve gender-sensitive infrastructure and parliamentary culture**

Parliaments, like any other workplace, are obliged to provide their members with a safe working environment and promote an inclusive work culture.

##### **a. *Facilitating a work-family balance***

To ensure that workplace policies reflect men's and women's contemporary work and family realities, parliaments should:

- Rearrange their sitting hours (e.g. by establishing compressed sitting weeks, creating schedules that start early, avoiding late voting, and aligning sitting times with the school calendar) so that members can return to their electorates and spend more time with their families.
- Allocate space in the parliamentary building for a child care centre and a family room so that MPs can be close to their children during sittings.
- Ensure that MPs—both men and women—are entitled to parental leave on the birth of their children.
- Give women MPs who are still breastfeeding the opportunity to use a proxy vote or vote pairing so that they need not attend the sitting.

##### **b. *Fostering a work culture free of discrimination and harassment***

To engender a safe, respectful, non-discriminatory and harassment-free workplace parliaments should:

- Conduct a gender analysis of parliamentary rituals, dress codes, forms of address and commonly used language, conventions and rules.
- Provide gender awareness training seminars for all members of parliament and ensure that induction for new members is gender-sensitive. This could take the form of mentoring for new women MPs, pairing women with experienced MPs (men or women) or presentations by senior women MPs on strategies to cope in the parliamentary environment.

##### **c. *Providing equitable resources and facilities***

To ensure that the parliamentary precinct facilities are suited to the needs of men and women and that resources are equitably distributed, parliaments should:

- Conduct a gender assessment of the facilities provided to all MPs.
- Ensure that allowances and parliamentary travel entitlements are provided to MPs equitably and transparently and that parliamentary delegations are gender-balanced.

#### **Action area 5: Ensure that responsibility for gender equality is shared by all parliamentarians—men and women**

Gender mainstreaming, as a strategy for achieving gender equality, cannot work without the support of men. Changing social values and heightening gender awareness among men have resulted in stronger partnerships between men and women on gender equality.

Parliaments should adopt strategies that promote such partnerships, including by:

- Promoting the co-sponsorship of gender equality legislation by a man and a woman MP.
- Appointing a man and a woman MP as chairs and/or vice-chairs of a gender equality committee.
- Establishing sub-committees to enquire into gender equality issues of interest to men.
- Encouraging the inclusion of men in parliamentary celebrations of gender equality events, such as International Women's Day.
- Ensuring gender balance on study tours and in international delegations on gender equality or gender mainstreaming.

#### **Action area 6: Make political parties champions of gender equality**

Political parties are often the dominant form of political organization and the mechanism through which women and men pursue a legislative agenda on gender equality. Parliaments should encourage political parties to:

**a. *Increase the number of women in their ranks by:***

- Considering special temporary measures to fast-track the entry of women in parliament.
- Promoting men and women equally to all leadership positions in their executive bodies.
- Endorsing training and mentoring schemes that pair elected MPs with eligible women interested in running for election, including courses on various aspects of election campaigns and training in media relations.
- Establishing support networks for women candidates at elections and for elected women.

**b. *Instituting gender-sensitive meeting arrangements and work practices by:***

- Setting meeting times that do not coincide with other family responsibilities.
- Respecting the expected duration of meetings so that other family commitments can be kept.

**c. *Developing gender mainstreaming mechanisms by:***

- Developing an overarching gender equality plan with clear gender mainstreaming strategies and dedicated party committees to oversee, monitor and evaluate their implementation.
- Encouraging political parties to use gender-sensitive language in their documents.

**d. *Equitably allocate parliamentary committee positions among men and women by:***

- Encouraging parties to adopt a transparent method of appointing members to committees and to leadership positions on those committees in a way that better matches members' diverse abilities, work experience and preferences regarding committee assignments. Parties could also give preference to women over men in cases where qualifications are equal.

#### **Action area 7: Enhance the gender sensitivity of, and gender equality among, parliamentary staff**

Parliaments need to become champions of gender equality, not only for their members, but also for the many staff who service them. Parliamentary administrations need to review their workplace culture, infrastructure and act to ensure that all staff are able to support

parliament in achieving its gender equality goals. In this respect, parliaments and their administration should:

- Develop and implement anti-discrimination and harassment policies for parliamentary staff, including the establishment of an independent body to which complaints can be lodged and addressed.
- Assess the number and seniority of women in the parliamentary administration.
- Establish a committee or entrust an existing one with the task of examining the possible implementation of affirmative action policies that give preference to women over men for parliamentary positions in cases where qualifications are equal and where women are inadequately represented at leadership levels.
- Provide gender awareness training seminars for all parliamentary staff on the theme "gender equality is everyone's business".
- Build gender analysis capacity by training staff in developing checklists for analysing legislation from a gender perspective.

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## **Implementation of this Plan of Action**

### **Initiate and implement gender-sensitive reform in parliament**

Gender sensitivity is a goal towards which all parliaments must strive. To achieve this goal, parliaments should design a process suited to their national needs that should include the following core elements:

#### **a. Evaluation**

Parliaments interested in evaluating their level of gender sensitivity should:

- Use the IPU's gender-sensitive self-assessment toolkit. The purpose of the self-assessment is not to rank parliaments but rather to help parliaments identify their strengths and weaknesses against international best practices. The toolkit provides a framework for discussion among members of parliament. The method involves answering questions about the way gender equality is incorporated into the culture and work of the parliament.
- Use their own internal structures to evaluate their level of gender sensitivity, such as an audit, or other business review or committee. In this case, external stakeholders such as civil society groups, national women's machineries and research institutes could be invited to share their opinions on the state of gender sensitivity with the committee, and draw up recommendations for change. The committee would then present its own conclusions and recommendations to the plenary or parliamentary leadership for discussion and further action.

#### **b. Implementation**

Irrespective of the method used, it is vital that parliaments reflect on the importance of gender equality and the way they promote this goal not only to their electorates, but also to their members.

Taking stock is a first step, after which parliaments can draw up and implement a roadmap for reform with concrete objectives, actions and deadlines suited to their national context. For this they will need to secure resources.

### **Monitoring**

Parliaments should identify a structure entrusted specifically with monitoring implementation of the Plan of Action for Gender-sensitive Parliaments and efforts to achieve the goal of gender sensitivity.

#### **b. Promotion**

Parliaments should give visibility to the reforms undertaken and the results achieved. Parliaments should take action at the international level to promote the principle of gender equality in all international parliamentary institutions and encourage women's equal participation therein.

It goes without saying that political will and commitment are essential to achieve all of this.

### **The role of the IPU in supporting gender-sensitive parliaments**

For the past 30 years, the IPU has demonstrated its commitment to high-quality and action-oriented research on gender and parliament. The IPU is singularly placed to support its Member Parliaments in their efforts to become gender-sensitive, and through this Plan, undertakes to:

#### **a. Take the lead role in promoting gender-sensitive parliaments by:**

- Ensuring high-level commitment to the Plan among Members and regular follow-up of the Plan at its Assemblies.
- Giving visibility to the Plan, including through its website, its Gender Partnership Programme and technical assistance activities.
- Supporting all national parliaments in conducting a gender-sensitive self-assessment by 2030.
- Encouraging parliaments to draw up action plans and establish monitoring mechanisms aimed at strengthening the implementation of parliamentary action plans.
- Strengthening cooperation on the promotion of a gender-sensitive parliament with regional partner organizations and relevant international organizations.

#### **b. Build in-house capacity on gender equality and gender mainstreaming by:**

- Implementing a gender mainstreaming strategy.
- Ensuring that professional development training for all IPU staff is gender-sensitive.
- Committing to mainstreaming gender equality throughout the Secretariat's work.

#### **c. Place gender equality issues systematically on the agenda of discussions with Member Parliaments, partner organizations and regional parliamentary organizations by:**

- Entrusting the Gender Partnership Group with responsibility for regularly monitoring the gender sensitivity of parliaments.
- Ensuring that gender is mainstreamed in all technical assistance activities.
- Promoting its work on gender-sensitive parliaments in all international forums.

## **ANNEX 1: Basic definitions**

**Gender\*:** the social attributes associated with being male and female and the relationships between women, men, girls and boys. These attributes and relationships are socially constructed and are learned through socialization. The concept of gender also includes expectations about the characteristics, aptitudes and likely behaviours of both women and men, and when applied to social analysis, reveals socially constructed roles. Sex and gender do not mean the same thing. While sex refers to biological differences, gender refers to social differences, which can be modified since gender identity, roles and relations are determined by society.

**Gender mainstreaming\*:** the process of assessing and taking into account the implications for women and men of any planned action – including legislation, policies or programmes – at all levels and in all spheres. The concept is understood as strategies that put gender issues at the centre of broad policy and programme decisions, institutional structures and resource allocation. Mainstreaming gender equality into the work of parliament should contribute to effective implementation and oversight of policies that address the needs and interests of both men and women.

**Gender-sensitive parliament\*:** a parliament that responds to the needs and interests of both men and women in its structures, operations, methods and work. Gender-sensitive parliaments remove the barriers to women's full participation and offer a positive example or model to society at large.

**Gender-sensitive budgeting\*:** an approach that aims to mainstream gender in economic policy-making and seeks to transform the entire budgetary process. Gender budgeting refers not only to expenditures earmarked for women, but also to an analysis of the entire budget from a gender perspective, including security, health, education, public works, etc. in order to ensure that the allocations and resulting impacts respond to the needs of both women and men.

**Gender-Based Violence\*\*:** Acts of physical, mental or social abuse (including sexual violence) that are attempted or threatened, with some type of force (such as violence, threats, coercion, manipulation, deception, cultural expectations, weapons or economic circumstances) and directed against a person because of his or her gender roles and expectations in a society or culture. A person facing gender-based violence has no choice: he/she cannot refuse or pursue other options without serious social, physical, or psychological consequences. Forms include sexual violence, sexual abuse, sexual harassment, sexual exploitation, early marriage or forced marriage, gender discrimination, denial (e.g. of education, food and freedom) and female genital mutilation.

\* Definitions are taken from UN/OSAGI, UNDP and UNESCO as quoted in UNDP, *Quick Entry Points to Women's Empowerment and Gender Equality in Democratic Governance Clusters*, New York, 2007 and the IPU, *Equality in Politics: A Survey of Women and Men in Parliaments*, Geneva, 2008.

\*\* The definition is adapted from UN WOMEN, Virtual Knowledge Centre to End Violence against Women and Girls, last accessed on 19.09.2010:  
<http://www.endvawnow.org/en/articles/347-glossary-of-terms-from-programming-essentials-and-monitoring-and-evaluation-sections.html>.