



INTER-PARLIAMENTARY UNION
OFFICE OF THE PERMANENT OBSERVER TO THE UNITED NATIONS

Statement by Mr. Anders E. Johnsson
Secretary General of the Inter-Parliamentary Union

at the Security Council open debate on
"Women and peace and security"

United Nations
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Mr. President,

I would like to thank you, for giving the Inter-Parliamentary Union the opportunity to address the Security Council on this very important issue. Before resending this statement, I bring you the greetings of Mr. Pier Ferdinando Casini, Speaker of the Italian Chamber of Deputies, who has just been elected President of the IPU for a three year mandate and who will be joining you here in New York early next week for the annual parliamentary hearing at the United Nations.

Mr. President,

Women and children suffer the most severe consequences of conflicts that they themselves do not instigate. All of us have a responsibility to work in support of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000). At a recent IPU Assembly, parliamentarians reviewed the situation and drew up an impressive list of actions they can and do promote in parliaments and elsewhere in support of this resolution.

As befits our organization, the IPU – as the world organization of parliaments - addresses the issue of women's participation in peace processes from a parliamentary perspective. Parliaments have a fundamental role to play in peace and reconciliation processes and in the implementation of peace agreements. The very existence of a strong and effective parliament is itself an essential component of any solution to conflict and the building of peace.

Women must be full and equal participants in political processes. This is not only a question of rights – of equality in society – but also an issue of substance. Surveys we have undertaken clearly demonstrate that many women have a keen awareness of social issues that many men lack. They have a better understanding of specific gender issues, particularly violations of the rights of women during conflict, which need to be addressed in peace processes.

Hence, these processes can only be truly effective and efficient to the extent that both women and men participate in them. Yet, this is certainly not the case today. In parliaments, for example, women only make up for an average of 16 percent of the membership.

It is therefore encouraging that the presence of women members in parliament in many post-conflict countries has shown a tendency to increase markedly after the conflict, invariably resulting in figures for women members of parliament that are well above the world average. The majority of these countries rank within the top thirty in the world.

Rwanda's proportion has climbed from 17 percent before the conflict to 49 percent today. It has the highest relative score of any country. Burundi surged from nine percent to 30 percent today and went on to elect a woman Speaker of Parliament. Mozambique more than doubled from 16 percent; today it has 35. Sierra Leone had 1 percent before the conflict broke out. Today 14 percent of its parliamentarians are women.

What sets these countries apart? We believe it is the fact that they have approached the peace process as an opportunity to instigate real change.

Countries like Rwanda and Burundi have given gender equality issues special consideration from the very beginning of the peace process. They have actually written these issues into their constitutions. They have established transitional national assemblies with greater participation by women and have introduced quotas at the institutional level. And they have made sure that women receive leadership training to run for election. The results speak volumes for what countries should do when experiencing similar situations.

Mr. President,

The IPU is present in many post-conflict countries. Our efforts include working with women, helping them to develop their leadership skills and facilitating their work, both as candidates and subsequently as members of parliament.

We also seek to ensure that the institution of parliament is able to address gender issues and we do so by raising awareness of these issues with both men and women.

Ensuring effective oversight is one key function of parliament, and it includes oversight of the security forces. There are many ways in which parliament can and should exercise its oversight function in the field of security and we are now working with many parliaments to assist them in introducing a gender perspective on security policy.

We are also assisting parliaments in analyzing the national budget from a gender perspective. This is particularly valuable when consolidating peace and making sure that the national budget is allocated in a manner that allows for implementation of peace agreements, including components that may be of particular importance to women.

Mr. President,

The lesson we have learnt from our fieldwork, from parliamentary diplomacy and from our political debates is that we must treat these peace processes as a continuum extending far beyond the final conclusion of an agreement.

We must take a long-term approach to ensure that peace is consolidated and not subjected to renewed threats.

We must also ensure that gender issues are addressed from the very beginning of the peace process and that women are included among those who negotiate peace agreements. We have seen the value of transitional assemblies as a vehicle for improvement and, of course, an elected parliament is essential. It is important that the gender composition of such assemblies be discussed early on as well.

There is a need to focus on these institutions, to give them the means they require to become effective institutions, to sensitize men to gender issues, and to sustain this effort over a long period of time.

Let me conclude these remarks by reminding members of the Security Council of the declaration that 150 Speakers of Parliament adopted here at the United Nations last month. In that declaration, they pledge their support to the United Nations and United Nations reform. They called for a strategic partnership between the Inter-Parliamentary Union and the United Nations with more substantive interaction and coordination between the two organizations.

Specifically, they encourage you to avail yourselves more frequently of the political and technical expertise that the IFU together with its Member Parliaments can provide, particularly in areas relating to post-conflict institution building. The creation of a new Peace-building Commission at the United Nations offers an important opportunity to do so. We look forward to working closely with you in turning this vision into reality.

Thank you for your attention.