

Canadian Group
Inter-Parliamentary Union



Groupe canadien
Union interparlementaire

Report of the Canadian Group of the Inter-Parliamentary Union

**Parliamentary Meeting on the Occasion of the 69th Session
of the Commission of the Status of Women**

New York, New York, United States of America

On March 11, 2025

Report

A delegation from the Canadian Group of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (UIPU) participated in the 69th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women at the United Nations (UN) Headquarters in New York from 10 to 11 March 2025. The delegation's activities focused on the parliamentary meeting organized by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) and UN Women held on 11 March 2025. The Canadian delegation also participated in several side events and working meetings during its mission in New York.

The Canadian delegation was composed of:

- Ms. Pam Damoff, Member of Parliament, President of the UIPU and Head of Delegation;
- The Honourable Salma Ataullahjan, Senator;
- The Honourable Mary Coyle, Senator.

The delegation was accompanied by Ms. Laura Salter, Advisor.

PARLIAMENTARY MEETING

The topic of the parliamentary meeting was "Parliaments and Beijing +30: Resisting backlash and shifting paradigms towards gender equality." The meeting involved two sessions and a special segment:

- Session 1 – Women's political participation: Progress, setbacks and lessons learned for a way forward to achieving parity.
- Special segment – Panel discussion on shifting the paradigm towards parity.
- Session 2 – Pushing back against the pushback.

Ms. Cynthia López Castro, Senator (Mexico) and President of the IPU Bureau of Women Parliamentarians, provided opening remarks. She highlighted collaborative initiatives by the IPU and UN Women to promote gender equality, such as the Women and Youth in Democracy (WYDE) initiative and the CEDAW Handbook for Parliamentarians. She reminded participants that this year's parliamentary meeting coincided with the 30-year anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (the Beijing Declaration) and expressed the importance of reaffirming the commitment to gender equality.

Dr. Tulia Ackson, IPU President, also delivered introductory remarks. Dr. Ackson discussed the IPU's role in promoting gender equality, particularly with respect to political participation, and invited reflection about the progress that has been made in the 30 years since the adoption of the Beijing Declaration. She expressed concern about the pushback against women's rights taking place globally, and emphasized the importance of making structural and legislative changes that promote gender parity, stating: "As we look ahead, it is clear that the fight for gender equality will continue to depend on strong parliamentary action. Without legislative measures, gender equality remains an empty promise."

Next, Ms. Nyaradzayi Gumbonzvanda, Deputy Executive Director for Normative Support at UN Women, discussed the establishment of global standards through international mechanisms like the Beijing Declaration, which then inform regional and national standards. She highlighted how regional legislative tools can be important mechanisms

to promote women's rights, citing the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence (referred to as the Istanbul Convention) as an example. She noted that the targets set in the Beijing Declaration have yet to be achieved, and called on parliamentarians to use their budgetary roles to advance gender equality by investing in public services and human security.

Dr. Ackson and Ms. Gumbonzvanda then officially launched the IPU and UN Women's [Women in Politics: 2025](#) world map.

A. Session 1 – Women's political participation: progress, setbacks and lessons learned for a way forward to achieving parity

Session 1 focused on the rate of progress in advancing women's representation, presenting data from the IPU and UN [Women's report Women in Parliament: 1995–2025 – 30 years in review](#). Four presentations were delivered during this session:

1. Ms. Cynthia López Castro, Senator (Mexico) and President of the IPU Bureau of Women Parliamentarians, presented data points about women's political participation. Among other observations, she noted:
 - The proportion of women in national parliaments increased from 11.3% in 1995 to 27.2.% in 2025, with the most notable progress taking place in the Americas, followed by Europe and Sub-Saharan Africa.
 - In 1995, no parliament had achieved gender parity, but in 2025, parity has been achieved or surpassed in six countries (Rwanda, Cuba, Nicaragua, Mexico, Andorra and the United Arab Emirates).
 - In 1995, 105 countries had less than 10% women MPs; in 2025, this number has dropped to 20 countries.
 - Progress has slowed since 2015. Out of the 72 chambers that renewed in 2024, only 33 saw progress in women's representation, while 20 stagnated and 19 saw a decline.

Ms. López Castro stated that progress is not guaranteed and called for parliamentarians to work hard to “ensure that gender parity is not an aspiration, but an enduring reality in every parliament.” She encouraged the inclusion of diverse women, including young women and women from marginalized communities, to make parliaments stronger.

2. Next, Ms. Lashell Adderley, President of the Senate (the Bahamas) discussed the progress that has been made in the Bahamas since the adoption of the Beijing Declaration. For example, for the first time in the Bahamas' democracy, women currently hold the positions of Governor General, Speaker of the House and President of the Senate. However, she noted that despite some progress, barriers to women's political participation persist. She shared examples of actions that can be taken to increase women's political participation, such as implementing gender quotas; embedding parity into the Constitution; enacting legislation against political violence and harassment of women; conducting gender sensitive

parliament audits; and enhancing financial supports at the party level for women candidates.

3. Ms. Nafeesa Shah, Chairperson of the National Assembly of Pakistan Special Committee on Gender Mainstreaming, asked the question: “Does empowerment automatically come with increase in representation?” Ms. Shah suggested that in addition to considering the number of women in politics, it is also essential to examine their lived experiences once elected and other indicators of empowerment, such as parliamentary performance. She stated that although women constitute only 17% of Pakistan’s National Assembly, they conduct more than half of its business, having initiated 55% of the legislative body’s agenda.
4. Finally, Ms. Kafilat Ogbara, Member of Parliament (Nigeria) discussed progress that has been achieved in Nigeria, such as increased representation of women in high level political and public service roles. However, she noted that further progress is needed and, to this end, recommended actions like institutionalizing gender quotas in political parties and reforming Nigeria’s electoral ballots to include candidates’ names and/or genders. Ms. Ogbara emphasized that “[g]ender parity is not a women’s issue – it is a democratic imperative. When women lead, societies grow stronger. Policies become more inclusive, and generations are inspired to dream and to act.”

During the discussion period, **Ms. Damoff** took the floor to share the Canadian perspective. She mentioned that in Canada, women compose 30% of the House of Commons, while the Senate has achieved gender parity and features a high level of diversity.

Ms. Damoff also highlighted Canada’s feminist foreign policy; the establishment of the diplomatic role of Ambassador for Women, Peace and Security; and Canada’s role in creating the Elsie Initiative for Women in Peace Operations, which aims to improve gender equity in UN peace operations.

Finally, Ms. Damoff noted her concerns about the recruitment and retention of women in politics, bringing attention to the prevalence of misogyny and harassment as potential deterrents for women candidates.

B. Special segment – Panel discussion on shifting the paradigm towards parity

The special segment included two presentations about General Recommendation 40 (GR 40) of the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW Committee) on the equal and inclusive representation of women in decision making systems:

1. First, Ms. Nahla Haidar, CEDAW Committee Chairperson, noted that the “chronic underrepresentation of women in leadership positions is undeniably linked to the persistence of gender-based violence,” and emphasized the importance of GR 40, which seeks to achieve 50-50 gender parity in decision-making systems. GR 40 has seven transformative pillars: parity, youth leadership, intersectionality, comprehensive systems, equal

power and influence, structural transformation and civil society engagement.

2. Next, Ms. Nicole Ameline, former CEDAW Committee member and former Chair of the GR 40 drafting group, stated that the equal and inclusive representation of women in all decision-making systems is not only an obligation under the CEDAW Convention, but also the best response to the challenges facing the world today, such as climate change, peace and security, the digital transformation, migration and extremism. Ms. Ameline called for renewed momentum to accelerate progress towards parity, innovate new tools and coalitions and mobilize for action.

C. C. Session 2 – Pushing back against the pushback

Session 2 examined “setbacks and the impact of the pushback on gender equality and women’s rights, with a focus on parliamentary action in addressing such challenges.”

1. Ms. Julia Braunmiller, Senior Private Sector Development Specialist of the Women, Business and the Law project of the World Bank, presented data about women’s economic participation. Ms. Braunmiller stated that only half of women participate in the global workforce, compared to nearly three-quarters of men. If women were employed at the same rate as men, data show that gross domestic product per capita would increase by nearly 20%. The World Bank’s Women, Business and the Law project identifies national laws that, if amended, would potentially create better economic opportunities for women. Ms. Braunmiller explained that data collection and analysis about women’s economic participation is an important aspect of expanding women’s opportunities, because “what gets measured can get changed.”
2. Next, Ms. Antonia Kirkland, Global Lead, Legal Equality and Access to Justice at Equality Now spoke about the impacts of discriminatory cultural or religious family laws on women and girls. As examples, she pointed out the ongoing legality of child marriage, polygamy and the denial of women’s marital property rights in various countries. Ms. Kirkland recommended that parliamentarians should:
 - work with governments and women’s rights organizations to amend or repeal all discriminatory laws;
 - adopt and ensure the enforcement of equality provisions in constitutions, without exception for personal status or religious or customary law;
 - ensure that freedom of religion, belief, tradition and customs are never used to justify discrimination against women and girls in any context, including under the law; and
 - continue to engage with the multilateral system so that states, civil society and individuals can hold institutions accountable and address violations to rights.
3. Mr. Seedy S. K. Njie, Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly (the Gambia), focused his presentation on the pushback against the Gambia’s

gender policy at the federal level. In 2023–2024, a parliamentarian introduced a bill attempting to reverse the country’s recent ban on female genital mutilation (FGM). Mr. Njie discussed the religious and cultural challenges that underlie the issue, and his role in coordinating with parliamentarians, civil society and international partners to uphold the ban on FGM. Ultimately, the bill was defeated and the ban on FGM remained in place.

4. Ms. Petra Bayr, Member of Parliament (Austria) discussed the underlying ideology of male supremacy as a factor that prevents progress on women’s rights. To illustrate how this ideology can lead to real life harm, she explained that in Afghanistan, women and girls can only be treated by women doctors, but because girls are being banned from higher education and exams, they are prevented from becoming doctors. As a result, women will lack medical treatment and experience higher levels of maternal mortality. Likewise, she discussed the pushback against reproductive rights in Poland, as well as the United States’ reduction of funding for global sexual and reproductive health programs. Ms. Bayr concluded that sexual and reproductive health and rights are not “exotic” but are substantial human rights.
5. A video intervention from Mr. Mohamed Farid, Senator (Egypt), emphasized that progress cannot be imposed but must rather be built through dialogue, persistence and patience. He explained how efforts to amend Egypt’s nationality law, which had prevented women from automatically passing their citizenship to their children, took decades to bear fruit. Reforms were eventually adopted through an amendment to the nationality law in 2004, and further reforms were included in the new Egyptian Constitution adopted in 2014. He explained that these changes were the result of relentless legislative efforts and partnerships with civil society.
6. Finally, Mr. Gary Barker, President and CEO of Equimundo, focused his remarks on making young men allies for the cause of gender equality. He emphasized the need to communicate the benefits of gender equality to men, noting that policies that make societies safer for women also benefit men.

During the discussion period, **Ms. Damoff** raised intersectionality as an important aspect of gender equality and discussed the unique challenges facing Indigenous women and girls. For example, she told participants that in Canada in 2018, almost half of Indigenous women and girls over the age of 15 have experienced sexual assault, while 56% have experienced physical assault – representing much higher rates than those reported by non-Indigenous women. Additionally, Ms. Damoff noted that Indigenous women are the highest-growing prison population in Canada, as a result of intergenerational trauma, poverty, mental health and addictions and a lack of culturally sensitive programming.

Ms. Damoff mentioned the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls and the resulting 231 Calls for Justice, stating that there is still a long way to go to achieve reconciliation. In conclusion, she emphasized the need to include an intersectional angle when considering gender equality to examine the unique barriers facing women with intersecting identity factors.

SIDE EVENTS AND WORKING MEETINGS

A. Side event organized by the Inter-Parliamentary Union

The IPU, in cooperation with UN Women, organized a side event on the topic of “Social norms change, networking and global advocacy to advance women’s political participation and decision-making” on 10 March 2025. The event featured a panel discussion about social norms and women’s political participation.

Social norms are the unwritten rules that guide behaviour in a given situation, and they may be impacted by various identity factors. According to the presenters, politics tend to be seen as a traditionally male arena. Pathways to change this norm include making efforts to transform narratives, strengthen feminist movements, and increase women’s access to resources.

The first panellist, Cynthia López Castro, Senator (Mexico) and President of the IPU Bureau of Women Parliamentarians, discussed the importance of combatting harmful gender norms at every level, creating safe spaces for women in politics, and establishing a strong intergenerational support framework to provide mentorship to young women.

The next presentation was given by Rumbidzai Kandawasvika-Nhundu, Principal Advisor of Democracy and Inclusion at International IDEA. Ms. Kandawasvika Nhundu highlighted the important role of the media in shaping narratives, and in questioning and debunking narratives that limit women’s leadership.

Next, Emil Broberg, Councillor of Östergötland Region (Sweden) and Member of the Board of the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions, brought attention to the role men must play in knowing when to stand back and share power with women.

Finally, Abosede George-Ogan, Founder and Executive Director of the Women in Leadership Advancement Network, highlighted the importance of storytelling and the media in showing stories about successful women leaders in order to shape narratives and change social norms.

B. Working meeting with the YWCA Canada

Ms. Damoff took part in a meeting with Aline Nizigama, CEO of YWCA Canada, on 10 March 2025. The meeting provided an opportunity to discuss the provision of social services to women and children, as well as other issues of concern, such as online harms and domestic violence.

C. Working meeting with the Delegation of France

Members of the Canadian delegation participated in a working meeting with the delegation of France on 10 March 2025. During the meeting, members of the delegations discussed topics of common interest such as women’s rights and reproductive health, and compared the political systems of Canada and France.

D. Working meeting with the Delegation of the United Kingdom

The Canadian delegation participated in a working meeting with the United Kingdom's delegation on 11 March 2025, during which they discussed subjects of common concern, such as issues currently facing women in parliaments.

Travel Expenses

Travel expenses associated with this activity can be found in the delegation's financial report. This report is available in the Financial Disclosure section of the Parliamentary Diplomacy website.

Respectfully submitted,

Hon. Rob Oliphant, P.C., M.P.

President, Canadian Group of the Inter-Parliamentary Union