

Canadian Group
Inter-Parliamentary Union



Groupe canadien
Union interparlementaire

**Report of the Canadian Parliamentary Delegation to the
Parliamentary Meeting on the Occasion of the
55th Session of the United Nations Commission on the Status
of Women: the Role of Parliaments in Promoting Access and
Participation of Women and Girls to Education, Training,
Science and Technology**

Canadian Group of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU)

**New York, New York, United States of America
February 23, 2011**

Report of the Canadian Parliamentary Delegation to the Parliamentary Meeting on the Occasion of the 55th Session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women: the Role of Parliaments in Promoting Access and Participation of Women and Girls to Education, Training, Science and Technology

Conference Theme

A Canadian delegation participated in an event at the United Nations (UN) organized by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) and UN Women. This event took place on the occasion of the 55th session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (UNCSW). The theme was: “The Role of Parliaments in Promoting Access and Participation of Women and Girls to Education, Training, Science and Technology.” More than 100 parliamentarians from 36 countries participated in the event.

Agenda

The Conference took place at the UN Headquarters in New York City on 23 February 2011.

In parallel with the priority theme for the UNCSW, the IPU event focused on three areas: (1) Girls’ education - a prerequisite to access to science and technology; (2) Women’s employment in science and technology; and (3) How can information and communications technologies support women in politics? Parliamentarians had the opportunity to exchange views, national experiences and good practices in the areas discussed. These meetings provided an opportunity for Canadian parliamentarians to learn about debates and developments in these areas in other countries and at the UNCSW.¹

The Canadian delegation

The Canadian delegation included the following parliamentarians:

- The Hon. Linda Frum, Senator;
- The Hon. Salma Ataullahjan, Senator; and
- Mme Lise Zarac, MP.

The delegation was accompanied by Mr. Serge Pelletier, Executive Secretary, Canadian IPU Group and Ms. Lalita Acharya, Chief, Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure Section, Library of Parliament.

¹ Agenda and other documents related to the event: <http://www.ipu.org/splz-e/csw11.htm>.

Conference Proceedings

The Hon. Margaret Mensah-Williams, Vice-President of the IPU Coordinating Committee of Women Parliamentarians welcomed the conference participants.

The event opened with a keynote speech from Ms. Michelle Bachelet, former President of Chile, who was recently appointed as the UN Under-Secretary General and Executive Director of UN Women. Ms. Bachelet outlined the five thematic priorities for UN Women:

1. expanding women's voice, leadership and participation;
2. ending violence against women;
3. ensuring women's full participation in conflict resolution;
4. enhancing women's economic empowerment; and
5. making gender equality priorities central to national, local and sectoral planning, budgeting and statistics.

Ms. Bachelet called on parliamentarians attending the meeting to make sure that a gender perspective is integrated into all policies and legislation, and to ensure close follow-up in these areas. She encouraged the participants to make sure that national budgets respond to the needs of both women and men. Ms. Bachelet noted that Parliament is an important instrument for ensuring that governments are held to account in these areas. In a question-and-answer session following the speech, the parliamentarians discussed some of the challenges they face. Their main concern was how to move from words to action with respect to increasing women's political participation, ending violence against women, addressing the needs of society's most vulnerable women and empowering women economically.

Theme 1: Girls' Education: A Pre-requisite to Access to Science and Technology

The first session focused on the subject of attracting and retaining women and girls in science and technology education and addressing gender stereotypes in science.

Ms. Gulser Corat, Director, Division for Gender Equality, UNESCO discussed the subject of non-discrimination and education for all. She began by discussing two issues: (i) persistent gender inequalities around the world that prevent many girls from receiving even a basic education; and (ii) disparities specific to science and technology disciplines and careers, which (apart from the life sciences) remain male-dominated. In terms of gender differences, there are striking regional disparities, which suggest that socio-cultural factors play a role in inequalities in these areas.

In terms of solutions, providing high-quality education to all students is extremely important, including offering relevant curricula that stimulate girls' interest in science and technology. Ms. Corat discussed how to boost girls' confidence in the areas of science and technology. Studies demonstrate that sociocultural attitudes play a key role in determining which education choices are seen as appropriate for girls, and these attitudes are passed down from parents to children. In terms of combating negative stereotypes that deter women from pursuing science and technology, Ms. Corat suggested that the secret lies in providing ample positive examples and female role

models. UNESCO stresses the crucial role female teachers play as role models, in communicating a positive image of women in science, and in providing career guidance for girls interested in science and technology careers.

The next presentation was delivered by Mr. Mevlut Çavusoğlu, President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. He spoke about the situation in Europe with respect to access to education for girls and gender stereotypes in education. In rural areas in Europe affected by poverty and difficult socio-economic conditions, girls receive only part of the compulsory education program. In many cases, parents are not able to send all their children to school, and some parents give precedence to boys over girls. Girls' limited access to education results in a waste of human capital. Mr. Çavusoğlu asked what politicians can do to remove obstacles to girls' and women's access to education, and to combat gender stereotypes in education. The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, in a recent resolution, identified a number of concrete solutions including providing state-funded schooling for all children; and having gender balance among school staff involved in teaching, administrative and managerial activities. In order for such measures to work, societal attitudes must change as well so that, for example, household tasks are not disproportionately delegated to girls, and that girls receive the same amount of time as boys for schoolwork, hobbies and personal development.

The session ended with a presentation by Ms. Ntlhoi Motsamai, the Speaker of the National Assembly of Lesotho, who spoke about the particular challenges of providing equal access to education for girls in that country. Eliminating gender disparities in primary and secondary education and achieving gender equality is one of the education-related objectives of the Government of Lesotho. Ms. Motsamai spoke of the importance of access to a high-quality education for all students.

An open discussion on girls' education, especially with respect to science and technology curricula, and gender stereotypes in science, followed the presentations.

Theme 2: Women's Employment in Science and Technology

Ms. Jane Stewart, Director of the International Labour Organization's Office for the United Nations, began her presentation by speaking about challenges faced by women in finding employment in science and technology sectors. These challenges include educational disparities, with relatively few girls studying in the fields of science and technology, few females graduating with science degrees (globally, 30% are women), and even fewer women advancing to science-based careers (less than 30% of scientific researchers are women). Stereotypes, such as "certain fields of science are for men," and "male knowledge is more scientific and objective while female knowledge is based on maternal intuition," hamper women's advancement in scientific education and employment. In the labour market, women lose out financially when entering scientific careers since the gender wage gap is largest in male-dominated fields. Balancing a family and a career is also challenging for scientists, since the work often requires unconventional working hours and part-time work is difficult because of the nature of the work.

Various international instruments are intended to promote gender equality in the workplace, including ILO Conventions on equal remuneration, discrimination

(employment and occupation), workers with family responsibilities, and maternity protection; the Beijing Platform for Action (section on women and the economy); and the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

Ms. Stewart outlined some possible measures to support gender equality in the workplace including introducing equal opportunity legislation; “mainstreaming” a gender perspective in legislation, policies and programs; implementing targets and quotas (often controversial); and ensuring that the curricula of educational and training programs encourage both males and females to investigate all academic areas. During her presentation, Ms. Stewart highlighted the recent work of the ILO in the area of gender equality and rural employment.

An open discussion on addressing discrimination in the labour market and facilitating women’s employment in science and technology sectors followed.

Theme 3: How can Information and Communications Technologies Support Women in Politics?

Ms. Piyoo Kochar, Coordinator of iKNOW Politics,² began the final session by providing an overview of information and communications technologies (ICT) and how they can support women in politics. iKNOW Politics uses a combination of a web site and social media tools to support women and others who are interested in politics. The internet has become an important part of daily life, and ICT are being used to an increasing degree in politics. The internet enables the creation of virtual movements and communities and offers possibilities to collaborate. It is also a decentralized information system that is dynamic. ICT have the potential to help women increase their participation in all walks of life, including politics. ICT can connect women to each other and overcome the constraints of seclusion. Connections among women living in different geographical and cultural spheres can help to broaden views and change mindsets over time. New technologies have a financial cost, which hinders their penetration in certain communities. In developing countries, women in rural areas are one of the main marginalized groups with respect to access to ICT. Other barriers to women’s use of ICT in certain countries include low levels of literacy and lack of access to technical education, and language barriers since most of the information available on the internet is in English.

The next presentation was delivered by Mr. Jeffrey Griffith, Senior Advisor at the Global Centre for ICT in Parliament who discussed the political impact of technology on parliaments and the value of technology for women in parliaments. Technology offers another way for members of parliaments and citizens to communicate with each other. The *World e-Parliament Report 2010*³ examined how parliaments are doing in terms of their use of ICT. The report illustrates that websites have become the primary means

² The International Knowledge Network of Women in Politics (iKNOW Politics) is “an online workspace designed to serve the needs of elected officials, candidates, political party leaders and members, researchers, students and other practitioners interested in advancing women in politics.”
<http://www.iknowpolitics.org/node/220>.

³ Inter-Parliamentary Union and the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs through the Global Centre for ICT in Parliament, *World e-Parliament Report 2010*, 2010,
<http://unpan1.un.org/intradoc/groups/public/documents/un/unpan039336.pdf>.

by which parliaments can achieve the goals of transparency and accountability. Almost all parliaments have websites, but many of them do not meet the most important recommendations of the IPU *Guidelines for Parliamentary Websites*,⁴ and many of the websites scored low in the report. With respect to communication with the public, interactive technologies (e.g., blogs and e-consultations on bills) are currently used by only a small percentage of parliaments, however many parliaments plan to use these technologies in the near future. Challenges in terms of communicating with the public via ICT include members who are not familiar with the technologies, and citizens who are not familiar with the legislative process.

Regarding the value of technology for women in parliaments, Mr. Griffith noted that technology is a gender neutral tool that can help level the playing field. Information is power, and sharing information via ICT helps to empower women. Technology does not have to be expensive to be useful (e.g., cell phones, internet connections in community centres and radio).

The session's final presenter was Ms. Marija Lugaric, a Member of Parliament from Croatia who spoke about her personal experiences with ICT and how they can improve one's work as a parliamentarian. She suggested that ICT can help women enter politics, work in politics, and bridge the gender divide. Social media and e-participation permit voters to follow, support and influence politics and political campaigns like never before. ICT/social media allow parliamentarians to refine policies and proposals, improve accountability and increase personal visibility. Ms. Lugaric concluded by noting that politics on the internet/social networks is happening "with or without you."

An open discussion on the benefits and challenges for women using ICT in politics concluded the session.

Conclusion

On 28 February 2011, the Hon. Margaret Mensah-Williams, Vice-President of the IPU Coordinating Committee of Women Parliamentarians and Deputy Speaker of the National Council of Namibia delivered a statement to the plenary of the UNCSW on behalf of the delegates who had participated in the one-day session.⁵

Respectfully submitted,

The Honourable Donald H. Oliver, Q.C., Senator
President, Canadian IPU Group

⁴ Inter-Parliamentary Union and the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs through the Global Centre for ICT in Parliament, *Guidelines for Parliamentary Websites*, March 2009, <http://www.ipu.org/PDF/publications/web-e.pdf>.

⁵ Statement by the Hon. M. Mensah-Williams, Vice-President of the IPU Coordinating Committee of Women Parliamentarians Deputy Speaker of the National Council of Namibia <http://www.ipu.org/Un-e/sp-csw280211.pdf>.

Travel Costs

ASSOCIATION	Canadian Group of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU)
ACTIVITY	Parliamentary Meeting on the Occasion of the 55th Session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women: the Role of Parliaments in Promoting Access and Participation of Women and Girls to Education, Training, Science and Technology
DESTINATION	New York, New York, United States of America
DATES	February 23, 2011
DELEGATION	
SENATE	Hon. Linda Frum, Senator, Head of the Delegation Hon. Salma Ataullahjan, Senator
HOUSE OF COMMONS	Ms. Lise Zarac, M.P.
STAFF	Mr. Serge Pelletier, Executive Secretary, Canadian IPU Group Ms. Lalita Acharya, Analyst
TRANSPORTATION	\$4,745.21
ACCOMMODATION	\$2,275.20
HOSPITALITY	
PER DIEMS	\$ 699.38
OFFICIAL GIFTS	
MISCELLANEOUS	
TOTAL	\$7,719.79