

Canadian Group
Inter-Parliamentary Union



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**Report of the Canadian Parliamentary Delegation
to the Fourth Conference for Members of Parliamentary
Committees on the Status of Women and Other Committees
Dealing with Gender Equality**

Canadian Group of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU)

**Geneva, Switzerland
September 28-29, 2009**

Report of the Canadian Parliamentary Delegation to the Fourth Conference for Members of Parliamentary Committees on the Status of Women and Other Committees Dealing with Gender Equality

Conference Theme

For the past four years, the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) has organized an annual Conference for Members of Parliamentary Committees on the Status of Women and other Committees Dealing with Gender Equality. The theme of the 2009 Conference was: "Is Parliament Open to Women? An Appraisal." Past conferences examined themes such as "Women and work" and violence against women.

Agenda for the 2009 Parliamentary Conference on Women and Parliament

The 2009 Conference on Women and Parliament was held on 28-29 September 2009 at the International Conference Centre (CICG) in Geneva, Switzerland.

Parliamentarians from participating countries who deal with issues related to gender equality came together to obtain relevant and timely information on the progress made towards ensuring women's full access to and participation in parliamentary life, and towards mainstreaming gender perspectives in all parliamentary work.

Over the two days of proceedings, some 80 members of parliament and parliamentary staff from 38 countries assessed progress made on women's parliamentary participation. Parliamentarians were able to exchange views and experiences with their colleagues from around the world, interact with representatives from international and regional organizations, and engage in dialogue with relevant stakeholders, including academics and members of civil society.

The Conference discussed a wide range of topics related to women's parliamentary participation, including the role of political parties, the influence of financing in politics, and the effects of electoral quotas and electoral systems, as well as the ways in which women parliamentarians are changing politics and redefining political priorities to include the concerns and priorities of women.

The Canadian Delegation

The Canadian Group of the IPU was represented at the Conference by Senator Mobina Jaffer.

Welcome Remarks: Is Parliament Open to Women?

The Conference opened with welcoming remarks from Anders Johnsson, Secretary-General of the IPU. Mr. Johnsson laid the groundwork by remarking that it has been 35 years since the first United Nations Conference on Women, which took place in Mexico in 1975, and 15 years since the fourth world conference on the status of women in Beijing in 1995. He noted that during the Mexico Conference, women's participation in decision-making processes was hardly discussed at all, which prompted the IPU to begin its work on women in politics. By the time of the Beijing Conference in 1995,

states were called on to take concrete steps to increase women's capacity to fully participate in political life and decision-making.

While the Beijing Action Plan had called for a target of 30% participation, by 2009, women accounted for 18.6% of parliamentarians around the world. Moreover, despite the progress that has been made in recent years, Mr. Johnsson noted that women are still not present in the highest levels of decision-making. Few heads of state are women.

Mr. Johnsson argued that the conference theme should not just be approached from a quantitative perspective, but also from a qualitative one. Agenda items should be examined to determine the degree to which women are having a real as opposed to symbolic ability to impact parliaments and their work. These qualitative elements point to the need to change the rules in parliaments and to build space for women.

Parliaments must be examined from an institutional perspective by looking at things such as whether committees that deal with gender issues are effective mechanisms of gender mainstreaming, and whether parliaments are family-friendly and accessible workplaces.

Mr. Johnsson remarked on the IPU's ongoing and future work on these issues. He concluded by arguing that work remains to be done, commenting that increasing women's political representation by a margin of one percent per year is not enough.

Challenges and Current Trends

Key Points:

- In 1945, women accounted for 3% of parliamentarians in lower houses; by 2008, this proportion had grown to 18.8%.
- However, there has been inconsistent progress across regions.
- It appears that current trends foresee a stagnation of progress unless new initiatives are taken.

Ms. Kareen Jabre, the IPU's Manager of Gender Partnership Programmes, opened the first session with a statistical overview which revealed that historically, much progress has been made. In 1945 women accounted for only 3% of parliamentarians in lower houses; by 2008, this proportion had grown to 18.8%. However, while there has been an overall increase in participation, there is inconsistent progress across regions. In Nordic countries, participation is as high as 42%, whereas in the Americas it is lower at 22%; parliaments in Arab states have only 9.1% women members.

Rwanda was the first lower house to elect a majority of women parliamentarians. Outside of the Nordic states, most of the parliaments that have achieved the 30% target are developing countries, and six are in post-conflict countries. Many of these have adopted measures to promote women's political participation (legislated and voluntary). Ms. Jabre noted that participation is impacted by the recruitment environment, structures, and process. Key factors can include: financial support, personal security, a country's social and cultural environment, party gatekeepers, the electoral system, the process of candidate selection, and campaign rules.

Ms. Jabre concluded her presentation by arguing that current trends foresee a stagnation of progress until new initiatives are taken.

Ms. Linah Kilimo, a Member of Parliament from Kenya, then described the challenges faced by women running for election in her country. She described a variety of deterrents preventing women from standing as candidates and participating fully in parliamentary life once elected. These include the burden of family responsibilities, lack of education, violence perpetrated against women, negative publicity, lack of sufficient finances, as well as the fact that the top leaders of all the political parties in Kenya are men, which affects candidate nominations. Women in rural communities face more severe constraints. Ms. Kilimo concluded by pointing to hopeful signs in her country. There is now a Committee on Equal Opportunity to focus on issues affecting marginalized members of society.

Finally, Ms. Kay Hull, a Member of Parliament from Australia, described her transformation from a successful businesswoman to a parliamentarian. Ms. Hull was the first woman of her party in the state of New South Wales to be elected federally. She described her journey to the Australian Parliament, telling delegates that she used the same tools that she had developed as a small business owner to become a politician, including negotiation, mediation, communication, and assertiveness skills. She did find that there was a certain “boys club” atmosphere in the parliament, including an informal code of conduct and hierarchy. However, Ms. Hull explained how she was able to work within this environment, playing important roles in parliamentary committee work.

A plenary debate ensued. Delegates discussed the challenges facing women candidates and parliamentarians in their individual countries. They also discussed the successes achieved in recent years in expanding women’s participation.

Overcoming Barriers: Electoral Gender Quotas

Key Points:

Electoral quotas set fixed goals for the recruitment of women or other under-represented groups to address inequalities.

Many countries that have increased the representation of women in elected bodies are using some form of quota.

Quotas are adopted more often in proportional representation systems.

There are three main types of quotas: reserved seats, party quotas for candidate lists, and legislated candidate quotas for all parties.

Presenters in the second session discussed the role and effects of electoral gender quotas, a policy measure introduced in certain countries aimed at increasing women’s access to parliament.

Ms. Drude Dahlerup, a professor at Stockholm University, focused her presentation around the question of why electoral gender quotas are so controversial, yet so popular. She explained that electoral quotas are used to set a fixed goal for the recruitment of women or other under-represented groups in order to address inequalities. She argued that while quotas do not solve all problems for women in politics, under certain

conditions, they can successfully address women's under-representation. Of the countries that have dramatically increased the representation of women in their elected bodies, many are using some form of quota. Professor Dahlerup explained that quotas are used much more often in proportional representation systems. There are three main types of quotas: reserved seats, party quotas for candidate lists, and legislated candidate quotas for all parties. Other key issues include whether or not rank-order rules have been implemented (e.g. the place of women candidates on lists) and whether there are sanctions for non-compliance.

A Member of Parliament from Uruguay, Ms. Daniela Paysse, then described these issues in the context of her country. Ms. Paysse said that, while according to polls both men and women favour women's participation in politics, impediments to this participation remain in various forms, including the method of voting, and the composition and place of women on these lists. In the first parliamentary election after the end of dictatorship in Uruguay, no women were elected. However, a law of political participation was passed this year which will apply quotas for the national elections scheduled for 2014 on a trial basis, and quotas for internal party structures. Challenges, nevertheless, remain in interpretation and implementation.

Several participants, including Senator Jaffer, commented on the presentations and posed questions. In her intervention, the Senator explained that there are no quotas in the Canadian electoral system; however, party leaders can appoint women candidates in ridings, which are hopefully ones in which women stand a chance of being successful. Senator Jaffer also commented that as legislatures become less cooperative environments, notably in minority parliaments, women look to participate instead in other forums, such as global networks where access is greater and more advancement is possible. There is now also more competition from other fields that are doing a better job at attracting women, including the private industry.

Overcoming Barriers: Other Special Measures

Key Points:

- The lack of economic resources is one of the biggest obstacles to women's participation in politics; facilitating access to financial resources is therefore critical.
- Training in media awareness and engagement should be considered as the media can play an important role in women's participation in politics.
- Practical support can assist women parliamentarians; for example: mentoring; on-the-job support in research, the drafting of bills, etc.; and, information technology support.
- Other possible areas of support to overcome barriers include: communications training, leadership training, the training of women trainers, and the building of cross-party support amongst women parliamentarians.

In the afternoon session, presenters discussed other special measures to enhance women's access to parliaments, given that implementing electoral quotas can be difficult.

Dr. Marcela Tovar, Director of the Latin American Studies Program at Queens College (City University of New York), focused her presentation on campaign financing. Dr. Tovar showed that a lack of economic resources is one of the biggest obstacles to women's participation in politics. Therefore, facilitating women's access to economic resources is critical in expanding their presence in the political realm. For example, women can be reluctant to invest family resources to become a political candidate; building a reputation within a constituency and party to secure a nomination requires significant time and money; and, while substantial funds are needed to conduct a campaign during an election, women do not always have equal access to party funds or to other sources of funding. Good practices have been adopted in regions around the world. Public funding can be directed to help women with political and leadership training, and limits on campaign financing can be set. Also, public funding for election campaign expenses can be linked directly to the level of women's participation in a party.

Ms. Colleen Lowe Morna, the Executive Director of Gender Links, a South African civil society organization, then presented on the experience in South Africa, with a particular focus on gender and the media. In response to the question of whether local government politics can be used as a stepping stone to enhance women's participation, Ms. Morna stated that results have been mixed. In terms of whether to focus on training and capacity-building, she argued that any training must be demand-driven. Ongoing support for political parties, including mentoring, on-the-job support in research, the drafting of bills, etc., and information technology support can be more effective. Finally, Ms. Morna illustrated that the media can play an important role in women's participation, as women MPs generally receive less coverage, and can be stereotyped in the press. A strategy of media engagement and awareness can be used to overcome these issues.

Finally, Ms. Alyson Kozma, Program Manager at the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI), a non-profit organization based in Washington, DC, that works with local partner organizations and groups to support and strengthen democratic institutions around the world, presented on the NDI's field work in four countries. Ms. Kozma identified the following best practices from this work: consistent communications training; building leadership skills; uniting women across parties; working with parties on internal reform; training women to train other women; developing the capacity and preparedness of elected women; exchanging information internationally; and, engaging youth as a way to change political attitudes and behavior. Other recommendations included: integrating men into efforts to promote women's political progress; strengthening partnerships between civil society and political parties; engaging women before and between elections; providing tools to manage personal and political roles and responsibilities; and facilitating opportunities for networking and advocacy practice.

A plenary debate followed. Several participants, including the representative from Canada, posed questions and commented on the presentations. Senator Jaffer asked how women parliamentarians can deal with what can sometimes be harsh treatment from the media. Ms. Moran responded that women parliamentarians do not have to accept all treatment they receive from the media; there are checks and balances in the system, and things like new media can be embraced. In commenting that

parliamentarians in Canada used to work more across party lines on a variety of issues, Senator Jaffer asked how parliamentarians can lay some ground rules to allow these types of conversations and joint initiatives to take place, considering that parties will not always share the same perspectives on issues. Ms. Kozma responded that working across parties can be frustrating, but can also yield positive results. An important strategy is to define clearly the limits of a network at the beginning, to keep the objectives of the initiative clear and narrow, and to accept that there will not be agreement on everything.

Women in Parliament: Challenges inside the House

Key Points:

Women can face new barriers once they enter parliament. These can include the rules and practices of parliaments (e.g. unwritten rules; style of debates), long-standing behavior and attitudes, and practical obstacles (e.g. the juggling of family responsibilities).

Women can also face challenges from their roles within parliament, including those associated with the allocation of committee assignments and internal political party dynamics.

The next day opened with a session on the challenges women encounter once they take their seats in parliament.

Ms. Kareen Jabre of the IPU argued that when women are elected, they face a new set of challenges in entering a parliamentary environment that has its own set of rules and manner of functioning, one that has historically been dominated by men. Drawing on various surveys conducted by the IPU, Ms. Jabre pointed to several impediments facing women. Examples include: rules and practices (e.g. unwritten rules, political party maneuvers, confrontational debates); behavior and attitudes (e.g. lack of awareness of women's issues); practical obstacles (e.g. juggling political and family responsibilities); and, personal fears and difficulties. Political party support is a key factor, especially given that women don't always enjoy a strong place within political parties.

Ms. Massuma Al Mubarak, a Member of the National Assembly in Kuwait, described the experience of women who have recently entered the political scene in her country, where women obtained the right to vote in 2005. In the June 2008 elections, none of the twenty-nine women who ran for office were successful. However, the experience offered valuable lessons. In 2009, four of the nineteen women who ran were elected, marking a historical breakthrough. Nevertheless, challenges remain. Ms. Al Mubarak noted that while the Kuwaiti Constitution does not discriminate between men and women, social customs do. Ms. Al Mubarak also described the hurdles she had to overcome in running for in-house elections, and in election to the Parliamentary Committee for Women's Affairs, which was established in 2006. She was elected as the Chairperson, despite some objections, and one of the Committee's first decisions was to suggest an amendment that would include it among the roster of permanent committees.

Ms. Irene Yameogo, a Member of the National Assembly in Burkina Faso, wrapped up the session with an overview of her experience as a parliamentarian. In her country, the

post-1995 Beijing era saw a marked increase in the involvement of women in human rights and political participation issues at the national level. However, there is still roughly a ratio of 14:1 men to women parliamentarians in the Burkina Faso parliament as a result of persistent challenges, including the design of candidate lists, access to financing, and prevailing societal attitudes. Ms. Yameogo argued that women must work together in parliaments so they can become fully integrated in parliamentary life.

In the plenary debate that followed, some delegates discussed the challenges facing women members of parliament once they have been elected. Others described invisible barriers, such as the distribution of committee assignments, with women tending to be absent in debates on security and defence, budgetary matters, infrastructure, and foreign affairs. Moreover, there can be problems with parliamentary buildings themselves, including the adequate provision of child-friendly space. The times of sittings – especially those held at night – can have an impact considering family responsibilities and personal safety. Some parliaments have tried to address these issues. For example, a delegate from Brazil explained that her parliament has established an ombudsman for women’s issues and related legislation.

Legislative and Policy Outputs: Facilitating a Gender Perspective

Key Points:

Parliamentary Committees can play a key role in examining public policy issues affecting women, scrutinizing legislation from a gender perspective, and providing oversight of existing policies related to gender equality and women’s issues.

Women’s caucuses are another tool that can be used as a forum for debating women’s issues.

One key issue is the provision of adequate funding to implement gender equality laws and policies.

The fifth session focused on initiatives to improve the gender sensitivity of the legislative process, including specialized committees and women’s caucuses.

Dr. Bahiya Al Jishi, a Member of the Shura Council in Bahrain, described her experience as the Chair of the Services Committee, which focuses on education, health, housing, and labour issues. This assignment enabled her to have “a say” in legislation pertaining to women. Through the Committee’s work, there have been enhanced efforts to incorporate some gender analysis when legislation is being considered by the parliament. The Committee examines all laws through the equality lens, and works to counteract discrimination and raise the profile of issues affecting women and children. Women parliamentarians in Bahrain are also working to ensure that these issues are mainstreamed, and not treated on the side of other priorities.

Finally, Ms. Dina Akkelidou, a Member of the House of Representatives in Cyprus, wrapped-up the discussion with a presentation on the work of her House Standing Committee on Equal Opportunities for Men and Women, which was created in 2006. The Committee covers the status of women and gender equality, but also looks at multi-faceted issues, such as human rights. It examines government policies through draft legislation and budgets, and it monitors policies’ compliance with relevant national and international standards. Ms. Akkelidou noted that the Committee’s work has intensified

since the accession of Cyprus to the European Union, given the subsequent enactment of legislation on things like pay equity, equal access to employment, social security benefits, etc. Recognizing that certain challenges remained, a National Action Plan for the Equality of Men and Women, 2007-2013, was developed to provide a national initiative aimed at integrating gender concerns in all areas of action.

A plenary debate followed. Delegates focused on the best practices in their respective countries, including, for example, a review in India of all laws to eliminate elements of and references to gender inequality. Ongoing challenges that were identified included the provision of adequate funding to implement gender equality laws and policies. An important tool that was identified was the position of Committee chairpersons who can put women's issues on the agenda. The delegate from Cyprus also commented that even if a national framework is in place, Committees play an important role in putting pressure on ministries to implement existing legislation and policies.

Gender Sensitive Parliaments

Key Points:

More work needs to be done to ensure that parliaments respond to the needs and interests of men and women in their structure, operations, and methods of work.

Important areas include the provision of childcare facilities and the structuring of the parliamentary calendar from a family-friendly perspective. Sweden has even instituted a policy whereby parliamentarians may take parental leave.

In the afternoon, presentations focused on "gender sensitive parliaments" – those that respond to the needs and interests of men and women in their structure, operations, and methods of work.

Ms. Julie Ballington of the IPU introduced the concept of a gender sensitive parliament. Such a parliament mainstreams gender in its working arrangements, including its operations and institutional cultures. Reflecting on surveys conducted by the IPU, Ms. Ballington noted that women's increased presence in parliaments had had the least impact on sitting hours (e.g. no discontinuation of night sittings). The greatest amount of change was reported in parliamentary dress and behavior. Ms. Ballington also pointed to the importance of childcare facilities in parliaments. She argued that ensuring a family-friendly environment can set a clear example in other public and private spheres of life.

Mrs. Hillevi Engstrom, a Member of the Swedish Riksdag, surveyed the steps that have been taken in her country. She began by pointing out that gender mainstreaming is a continuous process that requires constant efforts. This work does, however, lead to positive results for women and men, as both are able to realize a better balance between their work and family responsibilities. Sweden has achieved a roughly equal gender balance in its parliament.

Mrs. Engstrom highlighted the opening of a subsidized day care centre in the Swedish parliament some ten years ago as an important step. She noted that family-friendly policies set an important example in society as they signal that the national parliament is inclusive of women and parents of young children. Sweden has also instituted a policy whereby parliamentarians may take parental leave, in which case a substitute

from their constituency can be deputized to replace them. They are also eligible to receive time-off to care for sick children under the same conditions as the regular workforce. Moreover, a 2003 discussion document entitled, *A gender-equal working environment in the Swedish Parliament*, and subsequent interviews with parliamentarians led to Sweden adopting a report, *15 proposals for gender equality in the Riksdag*, which had the objective of further promoting gender equality in the Swedish Parliament. Responsibility for implementing this report was given to the Secretary-General of the Riksdag.

Finally, Ms. Margaret Mensah-Williams outlined illustrative examples from her experience as the Vice-Chairperson of the National Council in Namibia and the Coordinator of all National Council Standing Committees in their parliament. She noted that women must master parliamentary rules in order to advance their issues. Effective contributions can include things such as the introduction of motions on issues that affect women, the adoption of rules in the chamber on decorum and behavior, the passage of legislation on important issues like violence against women, and the creation of specialized committees and gender-sensitive budgeting. Ms. Mensah-Williams also highlighted her important work educating young people in Namibia on these issues.

A plenary debate ensued, in which delegates discussed the steps that have been taken in their respective parliaments to ensure that their parliamentary institutions and working environments respond to the needs of women and families. For example, a delegate from Mauritius described the access to health care that has been provided to all parliamentarians in her country, as well as measures taken to institute paternity leave. Delegates also reflected on the challenges that remain to be overcome in these areas.

Violence Against Women

In the afternoon, delegates were given a special presentation on the IPU's project to end violence against women. IPU Secretary-General, Anders Johnsson told delegates that the IPU launched an action campaign in 2008 to support parliaments in their efforts to end violence against women. Key activities include the organization of regional and national seminars, a program of technical assistance, the production of website and campaign materials, and the mobilization of activities around the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, on the 25th of November.

In the discussion segment that followed, Senator Jaffer encouraged the IPU in its work to raise awareness on issues related to violence against women, noting that it should also encourage parliamentarians to commit adequate and sustained resources to this important work. Mr. Johnsson agreed that dedicated resources are required, adding that they must be additional resources, not "instead of" resources taken away from other initiatives. He also noted that parliamentarians should use all tools at their disposal – oversight, questions to ministers, private member's bills, etc. – to raise awareness. When Senator Jaffer asked if the IPU will be examining the role of culture in this work, its Secretary-General responded that it will seek to ensure that its work in this area is culturally-sensitive.

A Parliamentary Appraisal

In the final session of the conference, delegates had the opportunity to take stock of the proceedings and to discuss the way forward. Final remarks focused on the *Summary of the Seminar* prepared by the Conference Rapporteurs, the delegates from Kenya. (Due to time constraints, other delegates, including the representative from Canada, were not able to be consulted in the production of this summary.) The conference summary is available here: <http://www.ipu.org/splz-e/gender09/summary.pdf>.

Respectfully submitted,

The Honourable Mobina Jaffer, Senator
Canadian Group IPU

Travel Costs

ASSOCIATION	Canadian Group of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU)
ACTIVITY	Report of the Canadian Parliamentary Delegation to the Fourth Conference for Members of Parliamentary Committees on the Status of Women and Other Committees Dealing with Gender Equality
DESTINATION	Geneva, Switzerland
DATES	September 28-29, 2009
DELEGATION	
SENATE	Hon. Mobina Jaffer, Senator
HOUSE OF COMMONS	
STAFF	Ms. Allison Goody, Analyst
TRANSPORTATION	\$ 7,939.66
ACCOMMODATION	\$ 1,557.75
HOSPITALITY	
PER DIEMS	\$ 959.17
OFFICIAL GIFTS	
MISCELLANEOUS / REGISTRATION FEES	\$ 11.45
TOTAL	\$10,468.03