

Canadian Group
Inter-Parliamentary Union



Groupe canadien
Union interparlementaire

**Report of the Canadian Parliamentary Delegation
respecting its participation at the 59th Session of the United
Nations Commission on the Status of Women**

Canadian Group of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU)

**New York, New York, United States of America
March 11, 2015**

Report

1. Introduction

A Canadian delegation participated in the Inter-Parliamentary Union's (IPU) parliamentary event organized with the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women), held during the 59th Session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (UNCSW), on 11 March 2015 at the UN Headquarters in New York City. The IPU's theme was *Parliaments for Gender Equality: Priorities for Beijing +20 and beyond*. The IPU's parliamentary event was attended by parliamentarians from national and regional parliaments, as well as government officials and representatives of international organizations.

2. Agenda¹

In keeping with its policy of contributing to major international forums by seeking to introduce a parliamentary dimension into the proceedings of intergovernmental organizations, the IPU has organized this one-day meeting with UN Women in order to provide a forum for debate between parliamentarians from all over the world, and to contribute to the deliberations of the 59th UNCSW.

The meeting focused on taking stock of achievements made in implementing the Beijing commitments and identifying remaining challenges. It aimed to identify main priority areas that require future attention to achieve gender equality beyond the 2015 milestone. The meeting also paid particular attention to the responsibility of parliaments and the need to build strategic partnerships to achieve progress.

The morning session focused on progress made in implementing the Beijing commitments. It also identifies actions that remain to be implemented and priority areas that require future attention to achieve gender equality. The session also pinpointed the resources that parliamentarians need to implement remaining priority actions. Two sessions took place in the afternoon. The first focused on good practices developed in creating strategic partnerships with a variety of stakeholders, including civil society, youth, men and the media, to accelerate progress in implementing the Beijing commitments. The second afternoon session explored women's leadership in international fora as a strategy to mainstream gender in high level international debates and resolutions.

3. The Canadian Delegation

The Canadian delegation included the following Members of Parliament:

- The Honourable Senator Céline Hervieux-Payette, Liberal
- Ms. Jean Crowder, MP, NDP

¹ Agenda and other documents related to the event are available at the IPU's parliamentary event website, Parliamentary meeting on the occasion of the 59th session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women

- Mr. Terence Young, MP, CPC
- The delegation was accompanied by Dr. Line Gravel, Executive Secretary for the Canadian Group of the IPU.

4. Summary of Event and Canadian Participation

Opening Session

The Chair of the Meeting, the Hon. Margaret Mensah-Williams, Vice President of the National Council (Namibia) and President of the IPU Coordinating Committee of Women Parliamentarians gave the welcoming remarks, recognizing the very important cooperation between the IPU and UN Women. She then gave a brief history of the work done by the IPU since its creation in 1889.

Ms. Mensah-Williams added that over the past 30 years, the IPU has developed a comprehensive programme aimed at enhancing women's participation in parliaments. It also promotes the participation of women within its own structures, the ultimate aim being equality on participation, as stated in the statutes of the organization.

She pointed out, that the history of women in national parliaments across the globe is one of difficult but gradual progress. At first glance, the same can be said for women's attendance at IPU Assemblies which are the International meetings of parliaments from around the world. At its inception, the IPU was a "men's club". In 1921, two women parliamentarians, from Germany and Denmark, were the first ever to participate in an IPU meeting, alongside 108 male colleagues. Today women make up about 30% of the participating members of the Assemblies. She added that this progress did not happen by itself. She identified three factors that have contributed to achieving it:

First, addressing women's under-representation and achieving gender equality were clearly acknowledged as part of the IPU's priorities. The problem was identified, the will to resolve it was expressed and this provided a framework within which to take action.

The second is that a dedicated space for women was created at the IPU. The Meeting of Women Parliamentarians was established 30 years ago with the objective of enhancing the influence of women parliamentarians at the IPU and of addressing gender equality issues at the international level. The Meeting was established in response to a growing consciousness about the need for, and benefits of, gender equality. In 2015, the Meeting of Women Parliamentarians is celebrating its 30th anniversary .

The third factor was the adoption of internal quotas and incentives at the IPU. There are several mechanisms in place: The first one builds on an incentive-based approach. If parliamentary delegations participating in the IPU's Governing Council are represented by both men and women, they have an additional vote. The second is a sanction system. If a delegation attends three IPU Assemblies in a row without women or without men, it sees its voting rights and number of delegates reduced. The third is the introduction of a minimal required representation of both sexes in all IPU boards ranging from 30% in their executive committee to 50% in other committees and groups.

She finally pointed out that, since the adoption of the measures, they have seen more women participate in the IPU and seek leadership positions within the IPU. However, she

deplored the fact that despite the measures in place and a clear political will within the IPU to see a greater presence in women parliamentarians, women's participation is now beginning to stagnate. Women make up 30% of their Assemblies but this number is not rising.

She concluded by stating that they have to remain vigilant, monitor the situation closely and be creative in adopting innovative measures to break barriers and continue progressing towards gender parity.

The Secretary General of the Inter-Parliamentary Union, Mr. Martin Chungong spoke next recognizing the presence of Dr Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, Executive Director of the UN Women and praising the fact that the IPU and the UN Women are offering this meeting as a platform to engage parliamentarians in the Commission's work.

The Secretary General gave some examples of what was accomplished by the IPU since 1995. Twenty years ago, when the Beijing Platform was adopted, women held a mere 11.3 per cent of the world's parliamentary seats. Today, that percentage has almost doubled, to 22.1 per cent. Progress has been made in almost 90 per cent of the world's countries. Today there are 42 single or lower houses of parliament where women occupy more than 30 per cent of the seats, compared to only 12 per cent twenty years ago. The share of women has surpassed 50 per cent, for the first time ever, in three houses of parliament, and exceeds 60 per cent in one (Rwanda). The world's highest ranking countries have become a more diverse group: the top 10, of which eight were European countries in 1995, now comprise four in sub-Saharan Africa, three in Europe and three in the Americas.

However, the Secretary General pointed out that the pace of progress remains too slow. In 2014, women parliamentarians increased their share of parliamentary seats by just 0.3 percentage points, which he described as basically nothing.

He wondered whether they may have hit the glass ceiling.

He concluded by reiterating that strong parliaments and democratic governance are key for effective implementation and change and that there is now international consensus that gender equality requires strong comprehensive legislation and public policies that are non-discriminatory, support women's empowerment and address all forms of discrimination. He believes that putting laws into practice remains the key challenge. Domestic legislation must provide for appropriate mechanisms, and budgets must be scrutinized to ensure that adequate financial and human resources are allocated to the effective implementation of policies.

The Executive Director of UN Women, Dr. Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, spoke last and expressed her appreciation for the relationship between UN Women and the IPU. She believes the increase of women's participation in legislatures is an important development. According to Ms. Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, having a higher percentage of women in parliament leads to an increase in deliberation of legislation related to families, health and gender equality; to greater pressure for accountability from the government; and to the enhancement of different perspectives and voices in the legislative process.

Ms. Mlambo-Ngcuka congratulated countries on the increased participation rates of women in parliaments, but she reminded members that the focus should be not only on female representation, but also on the quality of the women being sent to parliaments.

Ms. Mlambo Ngcuka spoke of the 20th anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women and the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. In addition, she addressed the role that boys and men play in promoting gender equality. She said that parliamentarians must engage and mobilize boys and men in the fight for gender equality. UN Women has launched a campaign, “He For She,” which encourages men to speak out in support of women’s rights.

Moving on to the implementation of the Millenium Development Goals, Ms. Mlambo-Ngcuka stated that parliaments are key to this process and that women must know that parliamentarians and the countries of the UN are “in their corner.” She explained that the MDGs have provided evidence that women are significant to the development processes, and that gender equality must be part of the post-2015 development agenda.

Ms. Mlambo-Ngcuka highlighted UN Women’s recommendation for a standalone goal for women in the post-2015 development agenda. The organization proposes three target areas for the post-2015 agenda: (1) ending violence against women and girls; (2) gender distribution of capabilities (such as access to resources and opportunities); and (3) gender equality in decision-making power in both public and private spheres. As well, gender should be mainstreamed in all other development goals, which would allow for specific gender targets for each goal and tracking of gender-specific progress.

Session 1: Beijing and beyond: What more is required to achieve gender equality?

The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action were adopted in 1995 by 189 governments as a comprehensive affirmation of women’s rights and empowerment. Twenty years later, their commitments remain only partially fulfilled. This session looked at major achievements and remaining obstacles to implementing the Platform.

Panelists for the session included:

- Ms. Shahrashoub Razavi, Chief, Research and Data Section, UN Women
- Ms. Nicole Ameline, Former Chairperson of the UN Committee for the elimination of discriminations against women (CEDAW), Member of Parliament (France)
- Mr. Aodhán Ó Ríordáin, Minister of State for Equality, New Communities and Culture (Ireland)
- Ms. Ellen Chesler, Senior Fellow, The Roosevelt Institute
- Ms Kareen Jabre, Director of the Division of Programmes, IPU

Following short presentations, Ms. Julia Kennedy, acting as debate moderator invited panelists and parliamentarians to respond to the following questions:

- What are the main achievements since Beijing, including in terms of women’s participation in politics?

- Which specific actions remain to be implemented from the Beijing Platform?
- What new social and cultural norms have been developed over the past 20 years, impeding the full implementation of the Platform for Action?
- What resources – financial and logistical – do parliamentarians need to implement remaining priority actions?
- What are the main priority areas that require future attention to achieve gender equality?

Mr. Terence Young, Member of Parliament, intervened during the debate to speak to violence against Women and Girls. He stated that there are signs that forms of violence against women (physical assaults and attempted murder) have decreased in recent years while others have remained stable. As an example he mentioned that Canada has implemented a number of measures to prevent and reduce violence against women and girls including the Victims Bill of Rights and amendments to the Criminal Code of Canada including tougher sentences for repeat violent offenders. He explained that in 2012, a National Action Plan to Combat Human Trafficking was introduced to prevent trafficking, protect victims, bring perpetrators to justice and build partnerships domestically and internationally. In 2010, Canada committed \$25 million over five years to a seven-step strategy to address missing and murdered Aboriginal women.

He stated that Canada accepts close to 300 immigrants a year. He explained that a Bill is now before the Canadian Parliament which specifies that a permanent resident or foreign national is inadmissible to Canada on grounds of practicing polygamy in Canada. As well, this Bill will raise the minimum age for marriage to 16 years, to deter and eliminate early and forced marriage, and ensure free and enlightened consent to marriage. It will also remove the defense of “provocation” for so-called ‘honour killings’ where men kill their own wife, or daughter or sister, and blame the victim, to reduce a murder charge to manslaughter, which has no minimum sentence.

He made the point that these measures will all reduce violence against women and represent an advance in women’s equality and empowerment.

Session 2: Partnerships for gender equality

One of the key lessons in implementing the Beijing Platform for Action has been the need to create strategic partnerships with a variety of stakeholders, including civil society, youth, men and the media. In many parliaments, synergies created with these stakeholders have led to faster and more sustainable progress. This session addressed the specific mechanisms used to create and nurture these partnerships.

Panelists for the session included:

- Ms. Roberta Blackman-Woods, Member of Parliament (United Kingdom)
- Mr. Gavin Shuker, Member of Parliament (United Kingdom)
- Ms. Rosaline Smith, Member of Parliament (Sierra Leone)
- Ms. Zoubida Bouayad, Member of Parliament (Morocco)

Following short presentations, Ms. Julia Kennedy, acting as debate moderator invited panelists and parliamentarians to respond to the following questions:

- How have parliamentarians effectively engaged civil society organizations and women's organizations to implement the 12 Critical Areas?
- How have parliamentarians engaged and inspired young people to address gender equality?
- What actions have men parliamentarians taken to achieve gender equality?
- What good practices have parliaments and MPs employed to encourage the media to report on gender equality and women's empowerment, without resorting to negative gender stereotypes

The Honourable senator Céline Hervieux-Payette spoke on how to engage civil society organizations and women's organizations to increase the number of women who sit on private boards. She gave the example of a private Bill that she had sponsored in 2007 in which quotas of 40% were imposed on boards of Canadian enterprises. With the support of many women's groups, the Bill became Law. To her knowledge, after all these years, these enterprises have not collapsed. She deplored the fact that the big Unions, the very large enterprises and the chambers of commerce have not followed. She also added that in her opinion the resistance is coming from business circles and that there is still work to be done in these areas.

Session 3: Driving global change: women's leadership in international fora

That women should be included in leadership and decision-making processes is now widely accepted as a human right. With their increasing inclusion, the benefits brought about by women's leadership have also become acknowledged and documented, and political and development priorities have shifted. This session looked at mechanisms to ensure women's participation in these global processes and the inclusion of gender equality issues on the agenda.

Panelists for the session included:

- Ms. Farah Mohamed, CEO, Girls20
- Hon. Margaret Mensah-Williams, Vice President of the of National Council (Namibia) and President of the IPU Coordinating Committee of Women Parliamentarians
- Ms. Verona Collantes, Inter-Governmental Specialist, UN Women

Following short presentations, Ms. Julia Kennedy, acting as debate moderator invited panelists and parliamentarians to respond to the following questions:

- How have parliamentarians advocated for, and contributed to, gender mainstreaming in major international dialogues and resolutions such as those on peace and security, population and development or climate change?

- What are the obstacles to women's inclusion in high-level international fora and what strategies can be used to circumvent those obstacles (e.g. temporary special measures for women's participation in global leadership, fast-track promotion routes, etc.)?
- What are the lessons learned in ensuring women are able to speak at international decision-making tables and influence global decision-making? What is the responsibility of parliaments and their members in ensuring women's voices are represented in such arenas and processes?

Ms. Jean Crowder, Member of Parliament, intervened and spoke on the inclusion of Indigenous women in the global debate. She mentioned that as a Member of Parliament it is her responsibility to promote a representative Parliament of all people and to help empower them. She then returned the question to the panellists and to the Assembly asking them what is being done globally to include indigenous women in politics.

Conclusion:

At the close of the meeting, a brief message to the CSW was issued, stressing areas for future priority action, with particular emphasis on the role of parliaments in accelerating progress and addressing remaining challenges in implementing the Beijing commitments and setting the post Beijing +20 priorities.

Respectfully submitted,

Hon. Salma Ataullahjan, Senator,
Chair
Canadian Group of the
Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU)

Travel Costs

ASSOCIATION	Canadian Group of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU)
ACTIVITY	59 th Session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women
DESTINATION	New York, New York
DATES	March 11, 2015
DELEGATION	
SENATE	The Hon. Céline Hervieux-Payette
HOUSE OF COMMONS	Jean Crowder, M.P. Terence Young, M.P.
STAFF	Line Gravel, Executive Secretary
TRANSPORTATION	\$3,250.06
ACCOMMODATION	\$2,824.25
HOSPITALITY	--
PER DIEMS	\$899.87
OFFICIAL GIFTS	--
MISCELLANEOUS / REGISTRATION FEES	--
TOTAL	\$6,974.18