

UNION INTERPARLEMENTAIRE



INTER-PARLIAMENTARY UNION

CHEMIN DU POMMIER 5
CASE POSTALE 330
1218 LE GRAND-SACONNEX / GENEVE (SUISSE)

Retsudvalget
REU alm. del - Bilag 271
Offentligt

TÉLÉPHONE (41.22) 919 41 50
FAX (41.22) 919 41 60
E-MAIL postbox@mail.ipu.org

GRP/2008/DSG.9
Geneva, 15 December 2008

Dear Madam President,
Dear Mr. President,

Earlier this month, the Inter-Parliamentary Union held its third conference for members of parliamentary committees dealing with the status of women and gender equality. Members of parliament from 34 countries came together to discuss ways and means to provide a Parliamentary response to Violence against Women.

I am pleased to send you the summary and recommendations of the conference. As you will see, participants discussed a variety of topics, including legislation on violence against women, implementation mechanisms and raising awareness initiatives. The meeting also examined lessons learned and good practices. I hope that you will find this document of interest and trust that it can serve as a useful reference tool. I would be grateful if you would ensure its widest possible distribution within your parliament.

We are currently working on a publication that will contain a detailed account of the conference's proceedings, including the texts of the presentations made by the resource persons and excerpts from the debates. Needless to say, we will be pleased to send you copies in due course.

As you may know, this meeting was the first in a series of initiatives the IPU is planning to carry out, over the next two years, to support Parliaments in putting an end to violence against women. The conference served as a forum for members of parliament to highlight specific needs and initiatives which they would like to see developed. Attached is a questionnaire which was distributed during the conference. Should your Parliament or some of its members be interested in providing input to this needs assessment exercise, we would be grateful to receive a completed questionnaire back at the earliest convenience.

Last, I take this opportunity to send you copies of our publication *Women and Work*, which is the final report of the conference organised in 2007, with the International Labour Organisation (ILO), for members of parliamentary committees dealing with the status of women and gender equality. This publication contains the experts' contributions, extracts of the debates and the summary and recommendations of the Rapporteur of the seminar. The publication has also been posted on the IPU Web site. Should you be interested in obtaining further copies, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Yours sincerely,

Anders B. Johnsson
Secretary General



A PARLIAMENTARY RESPONSE TO VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

*Conference for Chairpersons and Members of Parliamentary Bodies
Dealing with Gender Equality
GENEVA, CICG, 2-4 December 2008*

Concluding observations by the Rapporteur, Ms. Thalia Dragona, Member of the Special Permanent Committee on Equality and Human Rights, Hellenic Parliament

We have come together these past two and a half days to discuss and exchange experiences on parliament's role in addressing violence against women (VAW). Our objective has been to identify key priority areas for action and parliamentary initiatives and strategies to put an end to this violence.

Our discussions began by recognizing that violence against women is today an issue that is on all agendas, whether at the international or the national level. Violence against women is actually a relatively new "political issue", despite the fact that it has always existed. It is now accepted and recognized as a challenge to development and a violation of women's human rights. It is also a challenge to the well-being of all of our societies. A world that is free of violence against women is not an ideal but indeed a necessity. It should be the norm.

Addressing violence against women is a complex issue which requires profound changes. It means looking at power relations; confronting patriarchy, which permeates all aspects of our societies; changing mentality and challenging social roles and stereotypes which we hold within us. Women have internalized low self-esteem and poor self-image and this will take a long time to change, but change it should.

Global political awareness offers unprecedented opportunities which we should take advantage of to step up progress and make effective change in the lives of women in our respective countries.

The figures for violence against women depict a situation which is alarming, to say the least. The challenges faced in developing responses to VAW are numerous. We mentioned some of them, such as mentalities, education, limited national capacity, lack of data collection and systems, lack of coordination between partners, limited resources, lack of effective monitoring and accountability mechanisms etc. Making progress in this field may seem impossible, but change can be achieved and our contribution as parliamentarians can make a difference.

There is no one solution for addressing these challenges and reaching the objective of putting an end to violence against women. Rather, there are a variety of approaches, reflecting the diversity of situations and country experiences. The following is by no means an exhaustive summary of the range of experiences and detailed practices that were examined during the conference. Rather, it aims to highlight the main strategies and elements that can contribute to achieving progress.

Priority 1: Ending violence against women requires a comprehensive and all-inclusive approach

- First, violence against women stems from gender-based discrimination and gender inequality. We cannot hope to address VAW without taking into account the wider context in which women evolve and the need to secure respect for women's fundamental rights in general. All policies, laws, budget decision, etc. impact in one way or another on women and have the potential to increase their vulnerability to violence.
- Second, the response to violence against women should be holistic. We have to prevent and protect. We have to assist the victims and make sure that they are protected in the future. We have to criminalize violence against women, identify the perpetrators and bring them to justice. We need to fight impunity.
- Third, putting an end to VAW is not the responsibility of one person, actor or group. Sustainable change will require a collective response, in which we all have our role to play. Actions therefore need to involve all stakeholders, men and women, developing and developed countries,

- **First**, change starts at birth. From a very early age, children - girls and boys - should be educated on human rights and gender equality. Teaching and learning materials that are used in schools must also be reviewed to address stereotypes. Families should be targeted in terms of raising awareness about women's rights and challenging social stereotypes. Parental education on women's rights should also be developed.
- **Second**, for laws to be effective and make an impact, they must be known about and understood. Legislative reform must therefore be accompanied by campaigns to raise awareness and educate women about their rights. Boys and men should also be targeted. We should therefore not hesitate to speak up, explain the laws, and challenge the media, civil society associations, the private sector and others to join in public education programmes. Laws must also be easily accessible and translated into local languages.
- **Third**, training and education programmes should be designed to target judges and law enforcement agents such as the police. For that, we should ensure that specific programmes are designed to that end and receive sufficient funding.
- **Fourth**, sensitization campaigns should be launched to make VAW visible and raise awareness. We should not hesitate to support national campaigns on VAW or even lead some. We should also not hesitate to make use of existing campaigns, such as the White Ribbon campaign or the United Nations Secretary-General's Campaign to End Violence against Women.

Priority 5: Work in partnership

Progress will only result from the combined efforts of all stakeholders aimed at achieving equality and putting an end to VAW. We need to build a united front. It is important to maintain open channels of communication and forge alliances between the various actors, from the local to the international levels.

- **First**, partnership between men and women is at the core of progress. Specific programmes and initiatives aimed at engaging men in the fight against VAW should be developed and adequately supported. Men should also be encouraged to champion efforts to put an end to VAW, reach out to other men and contribute to transforming mentalities and societal roles. The participation of men should be valued and made visible. Discussions on masculinity and the role of men in society should be carried out.
- **Second**, as parliamentarians, we must help forge national consensus on the need to address violence against women as a priority. This should begin within our own parliaments. We must build cross-party alliances to support VAW action. We must also cooperate with other stakeholders, especially civil society and grass-root organizations.

Priority 6: Political will

Violence against Women is a political issue and needs strong political will to be addressed as a matter of priority.

- **First**, to garner political will, we need to have access to give visibility to the question, have accurate data, to know about the situation, inform others and engage them. Exercises of costing violence against women can serve as strong instruments of mobilization. We should therefore not hesitate to request and support such exercises.
- **Second**, we need to continuously put pressure on our government to follow up on its commitment or to commit to ending VAW. We should not hesitate to question government and call ministers to give account of their commitments, hold briefings and hearings in parliament to convince and engage MPs and political leaders.

Priority 7: Strong institutional framework

Effective change requires a strong institutional framework and national bodies that have the power and the capacity to take action.

- **First**, we must build our parliament's capacities to take action to put an end to VAW. We should look at what parliamentary mechanisms can be developed to support work on VAW. The establishment of a specific parliamentary committee on VAW could be an option.
- **Second**, we should build the capacities of members of parliament to address VAW. Exchange of experiences between parliaments from a same region or even at the global level should be encouraged. We should also not hesitate to seek support from international or national organizations that could facilitate training or provision of expertise.



A PARLIAMENTARY RESPONSE TO VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Conference for Chairpersons and Members of Parliamentary Bodies
Dealing with Gender Equality
GENEVA, CICG, 2-4 December 2008

Questionnaire on interests and needs of Parliaments and parliamentarians in their combat to end violence against women

Name: _____

Parliament: _____

Contact details:

Phone: _____

email: _____

1. To what extent do you consider the following actions to be a priority to end violence against women in your country?

Using the scale 1 to 5 (where 1 is absolute priority and 5 is less important), how would you rate:

- | | Absolute priority → less important | | | | |
|--|------------------------------------|---|---|---|---|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| • Enacting of laws | | | | | |
| Comments: | | | | | |
| • Implementing the legislation
and ensuring adequate funding | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Comments: | | | | | |
| • Ensuring that an effective mechanism for
monitoring and overseeing governmental
action is in place | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Comments: | | | | | |
| • Mobilizing public opinion
and raising public awareness | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Comments: | | | | | |
| • Other. Please explain: | | | | | |