

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 67th Session of
the Commission on the Status of Women**

New York, New York, United States of America

March 7 and 8, 2023

Report

From 7–8 March 2023, a delegation of Canadian parliamentarians attended the [Parliamentary Meeting on the Occasion of the 67th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women](#). The Annual Parliamentary Meeting provides an opportunity for parliamentarians to contribute directly to the deliberations of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), which met from 6–17 March 2023. Each year, the Annual Parliamentary Meeting brings together legislators from national and regional parliaments, along with representatives of relevant United Nations (UN) organizations and civil society groups, to discuss issues related to the theme of the CSW. The CSW's priority theme for the 67th session was "[Innovation and technological Change Education in the Digital Age for Achieving Gender Equality and the Empowerment of All Women and Girls](#)."

The delegation of the Canadian Group of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IUPU) was led by the Honourable Julie Miville-Dechéne, Senator, and included the Honourable Flordeliz (Gigi) Osler, Senator, and the Honourable Marie-Françoise Mégie, Senator. The delegation was accompanied by Ms. Anne-Marie Therrien-Tremblay, Advisor.

THE ANNUAL PARLIAMENTARY MEETING

Co-organized by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women), the Annual Parliamentary Meeting's theme was "The role of parliaments in advancing gender equality through technology."

In 2023, the Annual Parliamentary Meeting comprised two sessions focusing on specific issues related to the overall theme. During each session, the panellists provided presentations which were followed by a moderated debate, allowing parliamentarians to provide their perspectives on efforts to strengthen legislation, policies and programmes to make technology more inclusive and gender sensitive.

A. Opening Session

The meeting was opened by the Chair of Session 1, Ms. Véronique Riotton, Member of the National Assembly (France) and Member of the IPU Bureau of Women Parliamentarians. Ms. Riotton underscored the central role of parliamentarians in ensuring the protection of women's rights, both online and offline, including in the context of the potential challenges that technological progress presents to gender equality. She described the meeting as an opportunity for parliamentarians to discuss challenges and share good practices related to advancing gender equality through the use of technology.

Mr. Duarte Pacheco, President of the IPU, underlined the continued collaboration between UN Women and the IPU, reiterating the two institutions' common goals and commitment to strengthening gender equality. President Pacheco highlighted the opportunities and risks of technology, including for parliaments and parliamentarians. On the one hand, he noted the potential benefits of hybrid parliaments, which are enabled by technology and provide parliamentarians with flexibility. On the other hand, he underlined the increase in technology-facilitated violence against women parliamentarians, which he

identified as a factor that deters women from entering politics. President Pacheco concluded that more work remains to be done to increase the participation of women in politics.

Ms. Sarah Hendriks, Director of Programme of the Policy and Intergovernmental Division at UN Women, provided an overview of challenges related to women's participation in the technology sector. Ms. Hendriks stated that research found that: women are less likely to have basic knowledge of, and skills related to, technology; men continue to dominate the technology sector globally; the gender pay gap in the technology sector persists; and a large portion of women working in the technology sector report having experienced sexual violence in the workplace. In speaking about technology-facilitated gender-based violence (GBV), she noted that over 75% of women journalists report having experienced online violence.

To address these challenges, Ms. Hendriks identified four key areas of action for parliamentarians, as proposed in the UN Secretary General report for the CSW: (1) Addressing gender gaps in digital access and competence, including by ensuring that gender quality is embedded in national digital policies; (2) Transforming innovation ecosystems, including by promoting the participation and employment of women in the technology sector; (3) Embedding gender perspectives across innovation and technology design, development and deployment, including by increasing the representation and leadership of women in technology innovation; and (4) Preventing and eliminating technology-facilitated GBV, including by strengthening the action of the public and private sectors to protect the rights of women and girls online.¹

B. Session 1: Empowering women and girls through technology, including in decision-making processes

Session 1 focused on the theme “Empowering women and girls through technology, including in decision-making processes.” The presentations highlighted that, along with the progress and prosperity associated with technological advances, new challenges have arisen. A technology gap has emerged between groups with access to technology and those without, amplifying existing social, cultural and economic inequalities. In particular, women from developing countries face barriers to accessing technological infrastructure and skills.

Ms. Nicole Ameline, Member of the UN Committee on the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), noted that new technologies can deepen inequalities by reproducing negative gender stereotypes. For example, acknowledging that artificial intelligence (AI) offers opportunities, Ms. Ameline stressed that decision-makers must ensure that AI does not perpetuate harmful biases embedded in algorithms. She stated that, in the context of rapid technological advancements, decision-makers must play a positive role in closing the gender gap and she called on

¹ United Nations, Economic and Social Council, [Innovation and technological change, and education in the digital age for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls](#), Report of the Secretary-General, E/CN.6/2023/3, 30 December 2022.

parliamentarians to accelerate their actions, to innovate, and to strengthen their mobilization in this regard.

Ms. Caitlin Kraft Buchmann, CEO and Founder of Women at the Table, spoke about the need for greater diversity in the technology sector. She pointed out that the inclusion of women from diverse backgrounds in the technology sector leads to the development of inclusive technology. Mrs. Kraft Buchmann recommended some actions to decision makers, including reviewing public procurement policies in the technology sector to promote projects led by women innovators, and ensuring that education policies are adapted to current and future technologies. Finally, she presented the Women at the Table's Gender Gap App, an open-source software designed to measure the representation, participation and influence of women, youth and others, at events and in decision-making spaces.

Mr. Bojan Glavašević, Member of Parliament (Croatia), stressed the importance of diversity in leadership positions and in the development of technologies. He highlighted that parliamentarians must play a role in promoting such diversity, including by supporting measures aimed at improving gender diversity on company boards. Moreover, Mr. Glavašević suggested that decision-makers must regulate AI, and identified open source data science as an avenue to reduce bias and discrimination in the development of AI.

Dr. Andy Williamson, Senior Researcher at the IPU Centre for Innovation in Parliament, explained the ways in which the strategic use of digital technologies has changed and modernized parliaments. Dr. Williamson remarked that the COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated pre-existing trends in the innovative use of new technologies. In this regard, Dr. Williamson said that the pandemic is expected to leave a lasting impact on parliaments and, in some cases, these changes have made parliaments more inclusive. For example, hybrid and remote parliaments allow parliamentarians with families to balance their personal life and role as legislators, with women benefiting the most from virtual participation.

Ms. María José Pizarro Rodríguez, Senator (Colombia), spoke about using technology to improve trust in governments, including its ability to be used as a tool to promote transparency. In noting that Internet access is limited in rural communities in Columbia, Ms. Pizarro Rodríguez stressed that every person should have equal access to digital technologies. She maintained that the COVID-19 pandemic has shown that Internet access should be a basic public service and a human right. Finally, she spoke about some of the challenges associated digital technologies, including online violence against women.

Canadian participation:

Following these presentations, Canadian delegates participated in an open debate on the issue.

Senator Miville-Dechéne spoke about barriers to adopting legislation to address online GBV, particularly violence that occurs on social media platforms. Senator Miville-Dechéne noted that these obstacles include the persistence of strong opposition to the regulation of online platforms for fear that it will limit freedom of expression or amount to censorship.

She encouraged panellists and participants to share best practices to garner broad support for the responsible regulation of online platforms.

Senator Osler echoed comments made by Dr. Williamson regarding the benefits of hybrid parliaments. In presenting a Canadian perspective, Senator Osler noted that the Senate and the House of Commons both modified their procedures and practices to provide for hybrid sittings during the COVID-19 pandemic. Senator Osler asked if panellists could share best arguments in favour of hybrid sittings, including related to how they might benefit women parliamentarians.

C. The state of women's representation in political decision-making

Following the first session, the Honourable Paddy Torsney, Permanent Observer of the IPU to the United Nations, presented the results of the IPU report on Women in Parliament 2022. Ms. Torsney indicated that, in the countries that held elections in 2022, women won 25.8% of the seats up for election. The report suggests that quotas can play a role in increasing women's representation in national parliaments. Chambers with legislated quotas resulted in a higher percentage of women elected than those without (30.9% versus 21.2%). Ms. Torsney also drew attention to the higher levels of diverse women elected in 2022. Despite notable advancements in women's parliamentary representation, she underscored that overall, progress towards achieving gender equality in parliaments has plateaued and there is an urgent need to accelerate the pace of change. For example, less than one third of lower or single Chamber parliaments have 30% or more women representatives. In particular, at the international leadership level, women's participation remains limited. According to the report, women accounted for less than 34% of country negotiating teams in 2022 and seven out of 110 Heads of State present at COP27. The report determined that violence against women was an obstacle to gender equality in politics and that parliaments should put greater emphasis on becoming safe spaces for women.

D. Session 2: Addressing online and technology-facilitated gender-based violence

The theme for the second session was "Addressing online and technology-facilitated gender-based violence, including in the public and political spheres," with a focus on the role that parliamentarians play in enacting legislation to combat digital GBV. The presentations provided an overview of the different forms GBV can take in the virtual sphere, including online threats, harassment and social media stalking and other types of surveillance. They underscored that online GBV undermines women's ability to fully engage and participate in the public and political spheres online. Moreover, presenters mentioned that those individuals facing intersecting forms of discrimination, including racialized women, women with disabilities, and 2SLGBTQI+ people face higher levels of hate speech and online violence than the general population.

Session 2 was chaired by Ms. Lia Quartapelle, Member of Parliament (Italy) and Member of the IPU Committee on the Human Rights of Parliamentarians. Ms. Quartapelle provided examples of two cases that led the Italian parliament to take action to criminalize the sharing of intimate and sexual content of an individual without their consent.

In a video message, Ms. Reem Alsalem, UN Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women, noted the findings of the 2022 thematic report on the digital dimension of violence against women released by the Platform of Independent Expert Mechanisms on Discrimination and Violence against Women (EDVAW Platform), which underscores that online and technology-facilitated violence is a violation of the human rights of women and girls. Ms. Alsalem provided examples of initiatives at the national level to address online GBV, including the introduction of criminal laws on image-based sexual abuse in Canada in 2019.

Ms. Kathleen Sherwin, Chief Strategy and Engagement Officer at Plan International, encouraged parliamentarians to focus their efforts on tackling online GBV directed against teenagers. Stating that teenagers are the most digitally connected group of individuals, she noted that it is also the group most likely to be victims of online harassment. Ms. Sherwin underscored the need for measures designed to increase the protection of adolescents, especially girls, from online violence and harassment; such measures could include age- and gender-responsive legislation.

Dr. Rebecca Kuperberg, researcher in political science, presented some of the findings of her research on online violence against women in politics. Dr. Kuperberg discussed actions that parliaments could take to combat violence against women, and particularly online violence against women in politics. In speaking about the role of digital platforms, the presenter noted that greater transparency of digital platforms and access to data can help to address online violence. As well, Dr. Kuperberg stressed the importance of incorporating gender and intersectional perspectives in collecting information and data on online violence.

Ms. Neema Lugangira, Member of Parliament (Tanzania), discussed the consequences of violence against parliamentarians. For example, she stated that this form of violence is an important barrier for women to enter and remain in politics. Ms. Lugangira stated that regulating online violence and increasing the accountability of digital platforms are essential to address online violence against women in politics.

Ms. Frances Fitzgerald, Member of the European Parliament (Ireland), echoed the findings of a 2018 IPU study on violence against women in parliaments in Europe. Ms. Fitzgerald noted that available data on such violence is concerning and she underscored that acts of violence against women in parliament are underreported. Ms. Fitzgerald spoke about the efforts of the European Parliament and in the European Union (EU) to better understand and address online violence against women, including the ongoing accession process of the EU to the Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention).²

The Chair of Session 2, Ms. Quartapelle, then delivered closing remarks. Ms. Quartapelle underlined that violence against women has a negative impact on women's participation in public life and, more generally, on the health of democracy. Ms. Quartapelle summarized some of the solutions brought forward by panellists and participants during the discussions, such as advancing efforts to include men in initiatives to address violence against women; holding digital platforms accountable for violence against women online;

² Council of Europe, *Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence*, Council of Europe Treaty Series No. 210 (Istanbul Convention).

and adopting new legislation and implementing existing legislation to combat online violence.

Canadian participation:

Following these presentations, Canadian delegates participated in an open debate on the issue:

Senator Julie Miville-Dechêne underscored that material depicting sexual violence can be easily accessed on the Internet by young persons, and drew attention to some of the consequences of consumption of sexually explicit material by young persons. Senator Miville-Dechêne spoke about Bill S-210, *An Act to restrict young persons' online access to sexually explicit material*, which was introduced in the Senate of Canada in November 2021. Senator Miville-Dechêne identified the implementation of online age-verification technology as a measure that can be taken to ensure that sexually explicit material is not accessed by young persons.

Senator Marie-Françoise Mégie pointed out that some solutions put forward to combat online violence against women put the burden on the victims of such violence. Senator Mégie asked the panellists to provide examples of concrete actions that parliamentarians could take to ensure that tech companies take some responsibility for the design and use of their platforms.

E. Additional activities of the Canadian delegation

On 7 March 2023, the delegation participated in a briefing offered by officials from the Permanent Mission of Canada to the UN, where they heard about Canadian and international perspectives on key gender issues. Ms. Béatrice Maillé, Legal Advisor at the Mission of Canada to the UN, provided an overview of Canada's priorities at the UN as well as at the 67th session of the CSW.

The delegation then met with members of the Secretariat of the Spotlight Initiative to Eliminate Violence Against Women and Girls, Nahla Valji, Global Coordinator, and Teresa Benito Lopez, Fund Coordination Manager, to learn more about the Initiative, which was launched by the UN in partnership with the EU and others. The Initiative takes a comprehensive approach to ending violence against women and girls, including by working closely with civil society. The discussion centred on some of the results contained in the Initiative's 2021–2022 impact report, in particular as they relate to the adoption of laws and policies to prevent GBV and discrimination; strengthening national governments and regional institutions to inform decision makers and promote gender-responsive policies; the provision of essential services to survivors of violence; improving the quality and availability of data related to violence against women; and promoting civil society engagement.

On 8 March 2023, as part of a briefing for the Canadian parliamentary delegates to the 67th session of the CSW, members of the UIPU delegation met with Bob Rae, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Canada to the UN, and officials from the Permanent Mission of Canada to the UN.

As well, on 8 March 2023, Canadian parliamentarians attended a side event hosted by the IPU entitled “Achieving equality in decision-making by 2030: what will it take?” Discussions at the event aimed to inform CEDAW’s new General Recommendation on Equal and Inclusive Representation of Women in Decision-Making Systems (GR40). The event was moderated by Ms. Nicole Ameline, Member of the CEDAW Committee. During the event, participants were informed about the current state of women’s global representation, and learned about best practices to achieve and sustain gender parity in politics and other spheres. Ms. Alicia Buenrostro Massieu, Deputy Permanent Representative of Mexico to the UN, spoke about the progress of women’s participation in political life in Mexico. Ms. Quartapelle (Italy), discussed the importance of women’s representation in politics to ensure that a diversity of perspectives is considered in policymaking. Ms. Mariana Duarte, Programme Officer for the Gender Partnership Programme at the IPU, presented the results of the IPU report on Women in Parliament 2022³. Ms. Ashrafun Nahar Misti, Executive Director of the Women with Disabilities Development Foundation, underscored the importance of adopting an intersectional perspective when designing measures to increase women’s participation in politics, including to ensure women with disabilities can participate in politics.

Respectfully submitted,

The Hon. David McGuinty, P.C., M.P.

President of the Canadian Group of the Inter-Parliamentary Union

Travel Costs

ASSOCIATION	Canadian Group of the Inter-Parliamentary Union
ACTIVITY	Parliamentary Meeting on the Occasion of the 167th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women
DESTINATION	New York, New York, United States of America
DATES	March 7 and 8, 2023
DELEGATION	
	Hon. Julie Miville-Dechêne, Senator
SENATE	Hon. Honourable Flordeliz (Gigi) Osler, Senator Hon. Marie-Françoise Mégie, Senator
HOUSE OF COMMONS	
STAFF	Ms. Anne-Marie Therrien-Tremblay, Advisor

³ Inter-Parliamentary Union, [Women in parliament 2022: The year in review](#), 2023.

TRANSPORTATION	\$ 4,969.89
ACCOMMODATION	\$ 3,658.31
HOSPITALITY	\$ 0.00
PER DIEMS	\$ 1,152.05
OFFICIAL GIFTS	\$ 18.56
MISCELLANEOUS	\$ 0.00
TOTAL	\$ 9,798.81