



Inter-Parliamentary Union

**Report of the Canadian Parliamentary Delegation respecting
its participation at the 62nd Session of the United Nations
Commission on the Status of Women**

Canadian Group of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU)

**New York City, New York, United States of America
March 13, 2018**

REPORT

INTRODUCTION

A Canadian delegation participated in an Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) parliamentary event that was organized with the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women (UN Women) and held on March 13, 2018 during the 62nd Session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) at the United Nations (UN) Headquarters in New York City. The IPU's parliamentary event was attended by parliamentarians from national and regional parliaments, as well as government officials and representatives of international organizations.

AGENDA¹

The theme of the IPU event was *Parliaments deliver for rural women and girls*, which complemented the CSW's priority theme for the 62nd session, *Challenges and opportunities in achieving gender equality and the empowerment of rural women and girls*. The IPU event focused on three key areas: 1) amplifying the voices of rural women and girls; 2) addressing discrimination against rural women and girls; and 3) mitigating the impact of climate change on rural women and girls. The event provided Canadian parliamentarians with the opportunity to expand their knowledge of the challenges facing rural women, and to learn about the efforts of other countries, as well as UN Women and the IPU, to address discrimination and empower rural women and girls.

THE CANADIAN DELEGATION

The Canadian delegation included the following parliamentarians:

- The Honourable Marilou McPhedran, Senator
- Ms. Christine Moore, Member of Parliament
- Mr. Marc Serré, Member of Parliament

The delegation was accompanied by Ms. Laura Munn-Rivard, Analyst, Legal and Social Affairs Division, Library of Parliament.

OPENING SESSION

Ms. Margaret Mensah-Williams, Chairperson of the National Council of Namibia and the President of the IPU Coordinating Committee of Women Parliamentarians opened the

¹ Inter-Parliamentary Union, "Information Note: Parliaments deliver for rural women and girls," [Parliamentary Meeting at the 62nd session of the Commission on the Status of Women: Parliaments deliver for rural women and girls – Documents](#).

session by welcoming participants and recognizing the ongoing collaboration between the IPU and UN Women.

Ms. Mensah-Williams stated that it is critical to every state's well-being that each state strengthens rural women's leadership at the local and national levels. She said that rural women may experience intersecting forms of discrimination, which can lead to poverty, violence, and injustice in their lives. However, rural women are also capable leaders, contributing to food security and nutrition for their families, building climate change resilience among their communities, developing land management approaches, and preventing and resolving crisis in their communities. She stated that the implementation of the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, with its 17 Sustainable Development Goals, will be an important step toward fully empowering rural communities, including the women in those communities.

Ms. Purna Sen, Director of the Policy Division, UN Women, said that the IPU meeting is an important annual event, bringing parliamentarians from around the world to contribute to the CSW. Furthermore, parliamentarians return home with new ideas and inspiration, in order to make positive changes in their countries. Ms. Sen indicated that gender inequality remains one of the most pervasive inequalities in the world. She stated that promoting rural women's equality will help communities achieve food security and climate resilience. Rural women fare worse than rural men and urban women; rural women and girls have limited access to education facilities and to health centres – those services which do exist are generally of poor quality; they have less secure livelihoods; and, they face unequal access to land and infrastructure.

In response to these challenges, Ms. Sen called on parliamentarians to take several actions: 1) repeal discriminatory laws against women; 2) include the voices of rural women in decision-making processes; and 3) establish gender-responsive budgeting and other gender analysis tools in parliaments. She applauded the rural women who are challenging the status quo and demanding their rights.

Ms. Gabriela Cuevas Barron, President of the IPU and Senator from Mexico, noted that UN Women and the IPU have a strong partnership and a common objective of advancing women's empowerment. Ms. Cuevas Barron said that while parliamentarians are working in the capitals of their countries, they must not forget that around a third of the world's population resides in rural areas. She argued that rural women need to be empowered through inclusive government policies, better access to education and health services, greater access to child care facilities, equal access to the financial system, and the recognition of property rights.

When developing policies and initiatives to assist rural women, Ms. Cuevas Barron highlighted that it is important to acknowledge that rural women are not a homogenous group and face multiple intersecting forms of discrimination. She stated that rural women need to be better represented in politics, which will amplify their voices in decision-making processes.

SESSION 1: AMPLIFYING THE VOICES OF RURAL WOMEN AND GIRLS

The theme for the first session was *Amplifying the voices of rural women and girls*, which focused on the right of rural women to participate in decision-making processes and engage with decision-makers, especially elected officials, at all levels.

The Honourable Maryam Monsef, Minister of the Status of Women and Member of Parliament (Canada), greeted the assembly, and acknowledged the presence of her fellow parliamentarians from Canada, including the Honourable Geoff Regan, Speaker of the House of Commons.

Ms. Monsef said that when a country chooses to invest in women, it benefits the country's economy as a whole. In Canada, she explained that the Prime Minister has asked his ministers to apply an intersectional and gender lens to all cabinet proposals. As well, the Government of Canada released, in 2018, its first gender budget, whereby all budget decisions were informed by a gender-based analysis. The budget also committed to implementing legislation to enshrine gender analysis as a permanent feature of Canada's federal budget-making process.

Ms. Monsef explained that Canada has a long history of applying a gender lens to policy development, and she attributed this to three elements: 1) the 1995 *Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action*, which upheld gender-responsive policymaking and to which Canada is a signatory; 2) a strong national statistical agency and access to quality intersectional data; and 3) a reliable public service with employees that make efforts to apply a gender lens to their work.

Joël Lightbound, Member of Parliament (Canada) and Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, suggested that gender equality is a moral and economic imperative for all countries. However, there are still obstacles in Canada to women's empowerment: for instance, caregiving remains the primary responsibility of women, women are underrepresented in the skilled trades, and there is a need for pay equity legislation in the federal sector.

Mr. Lightbound described some of Canada's efforts to advance gender equality. He said that Canada's recent gender budget was guided by a gender results framework. Mr. Lightbound also outlined Canada's feminist international assistance policy, which he said dedicates significant international assistance efforts to supporting women and girls. Finally, Mr. Lightbound stated that during Canada's term as holder of the G7 presidency, Canada will be advancing gender equality as a key theme.

The presentations made by Ms. Monsef and Mr. Lightbound were followed by a discussion with four panellists.

Ms. Marième Baba Sy, Member of the National Assembly of Mauritania, showed a video of the work being done in Mauritania to address issues affecting women, such as high maternal mortality rates, the prevalence of female genital mutilation, and limited access to education. Ms. Baba Sy indicated that a significant barrier to economic independence for rural women is that only 10% of women own land in Mauritania. She said that many rural women use traditional agricultural techniques, and could benefit from training on updated agricultural practices, workshops to develop skills and knowledge, and access to resources and tools to work the land.

Ms. Annick Billon, Senator from France and Chairperson of the Senate delegation on Women's Rights and Equality between men and women, said that women play a critical role in agricultural success, but their work is undervalued and they own little land. As well, women remain underrepresented in agricultural cooperatives, and this situation has a negative effect on the recognition of their rights and equal treatment in the sector. She recommended that parliamentarians support the development of agricultural networks for women in order to empower them within their communities.

Ms. Zoe Carletide, U-Report Manager, World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts, told the assembly that Girl Guides is the leading movement for girls worldwide, with 10 million girl members across all regions of the world, in rural and urban areas. She suggested that the non-formal education provided by Girl Guides strengthens girls' leadership skills.

Ms. Carletide asked parliamentarians to consult youth in rural communities, as they are often underrepresented in decision-making processes. She said that young people want to be involved in politics and decision-making if they feel their voices are being heard. For instance, in a recent Girl Guide poll of 128,000 youth, 32% of respondents said parliamentarians should meet with them in their communities. Ms. Carletide explained that girls and young women should be consulted by parliamentarians as they are experts on girls and young women's needs, aspirations and life experiences.

Ms. Delia Canaviri, Member of the Bolivian Chamber of Deputies, noted that rural women remain underrepresented in the Bolivian Chamber of Deputies, as well as at the local political level. However, she said that thanks to recent legislative changes, a greater number of women now own deeds, giving them title to important agricultural land. Ms. Canaviri explained that owning land is a critical step towards economic independence for rural women.

Interventions by Canadian Delegates

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

Ms. Christine Moore, Member of Parliament (Canada), told the delegates that she represents a large rural riding in northern Québec, in which she has established four federal riding offices to serve her constituents. Ms. Moore said that rural parliamentarians often have extra responsibilities, compared to other parliamentarians, because of the unique challenges in serving remote and small communities. She explained that her staff in the riding offices are often the only resource available to help constituents navigate the federal system, whether it is applying for employment insurance or accessing entrepreneurship grants.

As a result, Ms. Moore said that rural parliamentarians often need additional resources to properly serve their residents. In Canada, the Speaker of the House of Commons is conducting an analysis of the budgets allocated to rural parliamentarians to determine if they may require additional financial support to cover the costs of working in rural regions, such as the cost of additional riding offices.

SESSION 2: ADDRESSING DISCRIMINATION AGAINST RURAL WOMEN AND GIRLS

The theme for the second session was *Addressing discrimination against rural women and girls*, which examined the multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination that rural women and girls encounter.

Ms. Rana Bandana, Member of the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, reminded parliamentarians of the commitments made in article 14 of the *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women*, which specifically acknowledges the problems faced by rural women and the measures that states should take to address these challenges.

According to Ms. Bandana, a central challenge for rural girls is the barriers to access education, which include the need to complete chores, dangerous travel to schools, and no sanitary facilities for girls in education facilities (which is particularly challenging for girls who are menstruating). She suggested that parliamentarians should support the development of campaigns to promote gender equality, which could include awareness-raising of the benefits of girls' education, the harms caused by polygamy, or other key issues. Furthermore, she recommended that parliamentarians support the development of campaigns to engage men and boys in the fight for gender equality.

Ms. Rea Abada Chiongson, Gender Advisor, International Development Law Organization, said that in order to empower women, parliamentarians must focus on repealing discriminatory legislation. According to a recent study, 155 of 173 countries still have legal provisions that discriminate against women; for instance, laws that place men as heads of household, prohibit a woman from obtaining a passport without her husband's consent, or prohibit women from working in certain jobs. Beyond outright legal discrimination, she said that poorly conceived laws, legal gaps or piecemeal legislation can also hurt women's rights and gender equality. Once legislation upholding gender equality is adopted, she explained that there can be challenges with implementation and accountability. Parliamentarians should play a role in monitoring the implementation of legislation, highlighting any gaps between the law and its implementation, and demanding enforcement.

Ms. Violet Shivutse, Huairou Commission Board of Directors, Founder and Coordinator, Shibuye Community Health Workers, Kenya, explained that basic health services are lacking in many rural communities globally. She said that her organization was founded in the 1990s to respond to the significant health risks facing rural women at that time: many rural women were dying while pregnant or delivering babies, and HIV rates were rising among rural women.

Ms. Shivutse had a number of recommendations for parliamentarians. Parliamentarians should: 1) consult rural women, and their communities, to receive feedback on health services; 2) lobby government to establish a formalized ombudsperson for rural women; 3) promote the development of programs that raise awareness of health issues in rural communities; 4) include rural women in budget discussion and consultations; and 5) support initiatives to track health data for different segments of the population, including rural women.

Ms. Maria Lucero Saldaña, President of the Foreign Affairs Committee of NGOs of the Mexican Senate, said that there are efforts in Mexico, at the national level, to increase women's representation on government boards, particularly those relevant to industry

and to rural affairs. Furthermore, Mexico is providing rural women with assistance through microfunding and financial training with the goal of improving women's economic security and prosperity.

Mr. Charles Chauvel, United Nations Development Programme and Ms. Paddy Torsney, IPU Permanent Observer to the UN, spoke of the importance of parliaments' "oversight role" of government. They recommended that parliamentarians mainstream gender in oversight activities; for instance, by asking gender-related questions in committees and plenary debates, by publicizing successful repeals of discriminatory legislation, or by applying a gender mainstreaming checklist to government policy or legislation. In particular, they recommended the implementation of gender-responsive budgeting, whereby an entire budget is analyzed from a gender perspective to ensure financial allocations and their impacts respond to the different needs of women and men.

SESSION 3: MITIGATING THE IMPACT OF CLIMATE CHANGE ON RURAL WOMEN AND GIRLS

The theme for the third session was *Mitigating the impact of climate change on rural women and girls*, which examined the disproportionate effects of climate change on rural communities, and in particular, on rural women.

Ms. Rana Bandana, Member of the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, said that states must make an effort to apply a gender analysis to climate change policies, otherwise they risk exacerbating existing inequalities between men and women. Ms. Bandana suggested that women are at greater risk from climate change and natural disasters, compared to men, because of discriminatory social and cultural norms which lead to unequal access to land and water, limited mobility, and less decision-making power.

She recommended that women be included in leadership positions related to climate change response and disaster recovery. Moreover, she suggested that states strengthen women's economic security by encouraging entrepreneurship, adopting a social protection system, and supporting access to education.

Ms. Janet Macharia, Head, Gender and Safeguards Unit, UN Environment, told delegates that environmental and natural resource degradation will disadvantage less powerful groups, like women, children and minority populations. She recommended that parliamentarians support programs that educate and train rural women on the management of natural resources and climate change mitigation measures. As a result of climate change, there will be conflict over natural resources, and with proper training, women could play an important role in mediating such conflict.

Ms. Anne Kuriakose, Senior Gender Specialist, Climate Investment Funds / World Bank, explained that climate finance funds provide financial support to projects designed to assist countries or communities in mitigating and adapting to the impacts of climate change. She stated that the implementation of projects, financed by climate finance funds, can be strengthened in two ways: 1) the climate action goals of the project should also be upheld by the country's climate plan, policies and legislation; and

2) national and local women's organizations should be invited to participate in the development and execution of the project.

Ms. Mereseini Vuniwaqa, Minister for Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation and Member of the Parliament of the Republic of Fiji, said that Fiji has experienced the devastation of climate change-induced natural disasters, through cyclone Winston in 2016. She explained that climate change mitigation and post-disaster recovery must include the voices of the 189,000 rural women and girls living across 100 Fijian islands. Following cyclone Winston, stakeholders from a variety of organizations, including women's organizations, were invited to share their knowledge and insight on the different vulnerabilities of certain groups. Furthermore, evaluations were conducted throughout the recovery period, including interviews of women in evacuation centres, to determine how women and men were affected differently by the disaster.

Interventions by Canadian Delegates

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

Ms. Christine Moore, Member of Parliament (Canada), said that climate change and natural disasters have had a negative effect on hunting and fishing in rural, remote and isolated communities in Canada. For instance, forest fires have dispersed or killed important populations of wild animals. She told delegates that as a result, in rural, remote and isolated communities – particularly Indigenous communities, there is a shortage of food harvested from the land. When hunting and fishing do not yield sufficient food, she explained that families will purchase food sold in stores, which is often very expensive and unhealthy. Ms. Moore stated that we must recognize the important role of traditional sources of food in rural, remote and isolated communities; they are not only a source of nutrition, but also the foundation of a way of life. In particular, women are respected for their important role in the transmission of traditional knowledge of food preparation and cooking to the next generation.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Ms. Margaret Mensah-Williams, Chairperson of the National Council of Namibia and the President of the IPU Coordinating Committee of Women Parliamentarians, concluded the event by recommending that parliamentarians recognize and celebrate rural women's leadership in their families and communities, as rural women maintain food security, generate income, and contribute to agricultural and rural enterprises. However, she stated that parliamentarians should also examine the challenges facing rural women in their countries, and develop plans of action to address these challenges with the goal of advancing rural women's well-being.

Respectfully submitted,

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

President,
Canadian Group of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU)

Travel Costs

ASSOCIATION	Canadian Group of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU)
ACTIVITY	62nd Session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women
DESTINATION	New York, New York, United States of America
DATES	March 13, 2018
DELEGATION	
SENATE	Hon. Marilou McPhedran
HOUSE OF COMMONS	Ms. Christine Moore Mr. Marc Serré
STAFF	Ms. Laura Munn-Rivard, Analyst
TRANSPORTATION	\$ 3,000.57
ACCOMMODATION	\$ 1,894.80
HOSPITALITY	\$ 0.00
PER DIEMS	\$ 785.18
OFFICIAL GIFTS	\$ 0.00
MISCELLANEOUS	\$ 59.22
TOTAL	\$ 5,739.77