

Women marginalized in the global economy, say women MPs meeting at the 120th IPU Assembly

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More than 160 women legislators from over 120 countries are attending the Meeting of Women Parliamentarians being held today as the 120th Assembly of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) gets under way in Addis Ababa (Ethiopia). They addressed the gender dimension of economic and financial crises and more particularly the role of women in ensuring financial stability and contributing to economic development.

"I feel very comfortable in this meeting, in the presence of women who are mothers, who are strong and wise and who represent half of humanity", said IPU President Theo-Ben Gurirab in his statement to the meeting. "Women need to be full and active participants in all levels of government, and we need to see their talents used to solve the problems we face today. Gender equality issues represent one of the most important themes of my presidency".

Ms. Azeb Mesfin, first lady of Ethiopia, Member of the Ethiopian Parliament and Chair of its Social Affairs Committee, recalled that women parliamentarians "are the voices of our communities, whose trust in our abilities to articulate their concerns as well as find solutions to their problems must guide us".

She added that women legislators in the region face common problems. "As parliamentarians, we demand a place at the table where laws are made to protect the political, economic and social rights of women. We must ask ourselves the following questions. Does the law guarantee women equal rights? Are women having equal access to education, health and other social services? Are programmes mainstreaming gender? Are we changing the behaviours and values of both men and women to bring about equality? Answers to these questions will lead us towards mobilizing our forces and ensuring that global promises are met and government commitments are honoured."

The first lady of Ethiopia underlined that this is critical as the region tackles the global economic crisis. "Even without the crisis, women are marginalized in the global economy. The current crisis will increase their labour, decrease their income, and negatively affect the health and well-being of their children".

Parliamentarians underscored that the economic crisis has entrenched and even reinforced gender gaps and that the consequences for women will be dramatic. However, while this is undoubtedly a time of crisis, it is perhaps also an opportunity to change and review discriminatory and outdated economic concepts. The response to the current situation and the resulting economic world order should therefore address current imbalances and misconceptions, recognize and reward women's various contributions to the economy and promote a more gender-balanced sharing of societal roles. Women should also be involved at all levels of decision-making processes.

The Meeting of Women Parliamentarians also discussed the impact of climate change on women and women's political participation.

Established in 1889 and with Headquarters in Geneva, Switzerland, the IPU - the oldest multilateral political organization in the world - currently brings together 154 parliaments and eight associated regional assemblies. The world organization of parliaments also has an Office in New York, which acts as its Permanent Observer to the United Nations.

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