



INTER-PARLIAMENTARY UNION
PLACE DU PETIT-SACONNEX
1211 GENEVA 19, SWITZERLAND

The IPU encouraged MPs to participate in the preparation and holding of the **Fourth World Conference on Women (FWCW)** and was actively involved in the preparatory process over a period of three years in the context of its permanent programme concerning women. On account of the role of Parliaments in the affairs of State, it was only natural that the world organization of Parliaments should ensure that they were closely involved in the preparatory process for the Conference and in its decisions which incur the responsibility of the State.

Against that background, the IPU organized a **Parliamentarians' Day** during the FWCW on 7 September 1995 at the invitation of the Chinese National People's Congress. The meeting was chaired by Mrs. Chen Muhua, Vice-President of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress and President of the All-China Women's Association who had been elected President of the FWCW on 4 September.

Five hundred MPs from 102 countries took part in the Day which concluded with the adoption by consensus of the Beijing Parliamentary Declaration.

BEIJING PARLIAMENTARY DECLARATION

*Adopted by consensus by participants to Parliamentarians' Day
on the occasion of the Fourth World Conference on Women
(Beijing, 7 September 1995)*

We, members of Parliaments and, as such, a voice for the peoples of the world in the wealth of their cultural and political diversity, resolve to bring to the attention of Governments taking part in the Fourth World Conference on Women the following statement, which was approved at the Parliamentarians' Day organized by the Inter-Parliamentary Union, the world organization of Parliaments, on 7 September 1995, at the kind invitation of the National People's Congress of China:

1. At the dawn of the twenty-first century, the principle of equality between men and women having been established in nearly all our Constitutions and fundamental laws, few indeed are the countries where the right of women to vote and be elected has not yet been recognized and exercised.
2. Women make up half or more of the populations of our countries. In addition to pursuing their family role and traditional household activities, they have in under a century become an active labour force whose nationwide economic impact is often equal to and sometimes exceeds that of men. In some little-industrialized countries, they are the mainstream of the entire "informal" sector and bear the brunt in agriculture.
3. Women's intellectual potential, often decisive electoral weight and capacity to act for change

are still inadequately understood and turned to account.

4. Women in fact remain sidelined at all levels of decision-making, especially in politics, and their economic contribution continues to be shaded over in national statistics and assessments. Our societies are still chiefly organized and run as their male element may determine, with the result that they continue either largely to forgo or to disclaim what female talent and endeavour may so vitally contribute to their development., as well as women's important role in consensus-building, conflict resolution and peace-building.

5. In April 1992, the Inter-Parliamentary Union's Council held that the concept of democracy would only come into its own when major policy objectives and national legislation were decided upon jointly by men and women with equal regard for the specific interests and aptitudes of each half of the population. Such an active partnership of both elements of society is indeed one of the surest, most lasting foundations of democracy and development, and urgently needs establishing through structural and legislative measures aimed at the equal participation of women and men in the political decision-making process.

6. Today, all our countries face global political and economic challenges that are partly beyond our control, and many are undergoing radical institutional and structural changes whose long-term social, political and economic effects are extremely hard to manage in view of an unsatisfactory international order and insufficient economic co-operation. In such a context, no country can any longer afford to overlook any portion of its human resources. This means redirectin our perspectives and policies. Our domestic policies must henceforth, at all levels, be shaped and applied not just by men but with the full and equal participation of women.

7. Women and children suffer under conditions of war and civil strife and stress. Yet, we consider that there can be no equality or development without peace and justice.

8. By transforming a mode of governance and management based upon a wrong hierarchy of gender, we shall not only let women use their ability to govern but also tap their particular creativity and values, while at the same time reflecting their realities, needs and aspirations in our policies. Such an integrated approach will make for more balanced access to resources and fairer distribution between men and women of both the costs and the benefits of an equitable, balanced and sustainable growth, which is the prime purpose of human development.

9. To this end, we believe it essential for more women to be more active in politics. Yet we regret to note that, according to surveys by the Inter-Parliamentary Union, women still make up barely 11.3% of the world's parliamentarians, a proportion only slightly higher than fifty years ago.

10. Despite considerable progress in the division of political responsibilities and power in several countries, particularly the Nordic ones and some developing countries, women are generally in a minority in the upper echelons of political parties and movements, or even not present at all. In only 20 countries do women account for over 20% of parliamentarians; just 17 have a woman presiding over Parliament or a parliamentary Chamber; and there are 15 women Heads of State or Government. Some countries continue to deny women the right to vote and to be elected, whether to Parliament or to local or regional bodies.

11. This state of affairs in politics seems indicative of the situation of women in all other sectors and, as we are deeply attached to the concepts of democracy and equality, we believe that priority should go to reversing the current trend of politics for the sake of a new dynamic in political

decision-making that would in turn benefit all other spheres of activity.

12. We believe that the *Plan of Action to correct present imbalances in the participation of men and women in political life* (adopted by the Inter-Parliamentary Union in March 1994 as a contribution to the Fourth World Conference on Women) might very well provide the basis for strategies which, in our own particular contexts and without disclaiming our traditional values, may remedy a state of affairs that has disastrous effects on our societies. We urgently call on Governments to use the Plan of Action to this end.

13. It is our resolve to ensure that the Plan of Action is taken into account by our political parties and movements. In particular, women must have access to executive posts so that candidatures for elections and electoral strategies are decided on fairly and make full allowance for the twofold nature of society, and in order that more may be done to reflect the specific interests of women in electoral campaigns and day-to-day politics.

14. We undertake to seek the enlistment of all resources that may speed up the learning process for women in politics and their exercise of leadership. We believe it essential to give decision-makers and public opinion more extensive information instilling in men and women themselves an awareness of the potential the latter represent and the essential role that is theirs in shaping new visions and policies.

15. As parliamentarians, and whether men or women, we have a basic duty to represent the views and interests of both and to serve the common interest. We believe that national legislation must focus just as much on the interests, values and aspirations of women as on those of men. We undertake to work for the reform of any legislation discriminating against or liable to harm women.

16. We further undertake to work for national ratification of the *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women* (1979) and the *Convention on the Political Rights of Women* (1952), where this is not already the case, to examine the validity of any reservations or interpretative statements placed on ratification, and to take active steps with a view to their lifting.

17. We consider that each of our countries should have a mechanism - parliamentary or otherwise - such as a national committee or an ombudsman, for measuring the impact on the situation of women of any draft law or bill and any related budgetary provisions. This could curtail a form of administration that has proved nothing but damaging to the community as a whole.

18. Finally, we believe that priority should be given to action aimed at eliminating all forms of violence against women and girls and we undertake to adopt legislation to this effect.

19. We consider the Fourth World Conference on Women to be just a further step, one that must set off a long-term process aimed at an in-depth rebalancing of society. It is for all of us, whether Governments, Parliaments, non-governmental organizations or individuals, to move towards that goal.

20. As parliamentarians, we forthwith undertake to follow up the Beijing Global Action Platform and the Regional Platforms, adopted at the preparatory conferences, as well as the IPU Plan of Action, in what we deem to be the most fitting and effective manner and with the greatest possible dispatch. It is our intention, in this respect, to ensure that the necessary resources are

made available for carrying out any measure we adopt.

[Women in politics](#) | [Home page](#) | [Main areas of activity](#) | [Structure and functioning](#)