

**Remarks by Carolyn Hannan  
Director, Division for the Advancement of Women**

**At the IPU annual event at the Commission on the Status of Women  
4 March 2009**

Madame President  
Excellencies and Distinguished Delegates  
Colleagues and friends

I am delighted to have the opportunity to make some brief remarks at the closing of this event.

I would like to acknowledge the very important work of the Coordinating Committee of Women Parliamentarians on the promotion of gender equality and empowerment of women.

I also express my appreciation for the excellent, long-standing collaboration between the Division for the Advancement of Women and the Inter-Parliamentary Union. This is exemplified by the joint production of the *Map of Women in Politics 2008*, a widely utilized and appreciated tool. The Map makes an important contribution to the review theme of this session of the Commission: "*The equal participation of women in men in decision-making at all levels*".

The annual parliamentary events on the priority theme of the Commission on the Status of Women were recognized by the Commission in 2006 as an important contribution by parliaments to the work of the Commission. The increasing participation of parliamentarians at the Commission is also an indication of the relevance of parliaments as key stakeholders in the promotion of gender equality and empowerment of women.

There have been many stimulating discussions on the priority theme: "*The equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men, including caregiving in the context of HIV/AIDS*", including in the context of this meeting. The Division for the Advancement of Women's own research on the priority theme gave rise to a number of interesting findings with important implications for policy-making bodies. Many of these you will have considered. I would like to highlight a few which we feel need further attention. The first is that, regardless of the socio-economic and employment status of women, the unequal sharing of responsibilities for household and care work between women and men persists across all regions.

It is also significant that as women increasingly enter the labour market in all parts of the world this does not necessarily lead to more equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men. Many women take on a "double-shift" by attempting to undertake paid work while continuing to have the sole responsibility for unpaid work, or they hire other women as domestic workers to undertake the household and care work they no longer have time to do – which opens up serious policy issues related to decent work since many domestic workers and care-givers work for low wages, with no social security and risk of exploitation. Women may also seek care services outside the home, provided by the state or the private sector - but in many parts of the world this is simply not an option.

Policy attention to the issue of unpaid work and caregiving has been limited. Some countries have worked to provide and improve services such as child-care and elder-care outside the home, but these efforts have not in any way matched the need in many parts of the world. Many countries have also focused on labour market interventions – to provide leaves (maternity, paternity, parental) and to ensure flexible working arrangements, including part-time work, which allow reconciliation of work and family responsibilities. Many also provide a range of social security measures, such as child benefits and various forms of cash transfers. In developing countries, infrastructure and service provision have been important policy responses, including improving access to water and energy sources, improving transport facilities and ensuring that the opening times of schools and other government services take into account the fact that both women and men undertake paid employment outside the home.

As you have undoubtedly discussed, policy responses on the unequal sharing of responsibilities are complex, particularly because there are implications for a wide range of sectors. Policy attention must also be gender-responsive – it must challenge the existing unequal sharing of responsibilities and not build on or reinforce this. There have been examples of well-meant policy responses which have reinforced notions of women as the ideal caregivers, for example by only providing maternity leave and only providing part-time work for women and ignoring the responsibilities of men. Similarly cash-transfer programmes focused on child welfare may have conditionalities which add to the workload of women rather than relieve their situation.

It is also interesting to note that many policy responses are not linked directly to the goal of promoting equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men. In some countries, attention was focused on caregiving because of the need to get more women into the labour market to promote economic development. In many parts of the world, the rapidly ageing population has increased the care needs and governments are developing policy responses to this crisis. In many countries the HIV/AIDS pandemic has forced a stronger focus on caregiving. In other areas, the declining fertility rates are a cause for concern. In addition, some countries have given policy attention to caregiving in order to ensure child welfare and development.

The crisis of care in the context of HIV/AIDS has illustrated that, while the equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men is important, it will not be sufficient. A range of actors must be also involved in response to caregiving – including governments, non-governmental organizations, the private sector, and international donors.

One important factor emerging from the research around this theme is the need for a stronger focus on men and significantly increased attention to stereotypes which are embedded in many social institutions and maintain the unequal sharing of responsibilities - to the detriment of both women and men. I was therefore very pleased that this event had a session dedicated to the issue of stereotypes. We are well aware that stereotypes result in women continuing to shoulder the major burden of household and care work, but need to give more attention to the fact that they also constrain men from taking on more responsibilities and deprive families of the benefit of the active involvement of both women and men. Stereotypes is a challenging area for policy attention, but given their pervasiveness and the significant impact on gender equality outcomes across all sectors, it is important to find a way to address stereotypes from a policy perspective.

In the context of the international financial crisis, it may become more difficult to achieve many of the desired policy responses to this priority theme. Provision of the types of services and facilities required may not be possible because of lack of resources. A challenge will be to keep a clear focus on social development and gender equality in the context of the current response to the financial crisis that is largely couched in terms of macro-economic policy and changes in the financial architecture.

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Beginning on Friday this week, Member States will negotiate a set of policy recommendations – agreed conclusions – on the priority theme. Parliamentarians could play a critical role in follow-up on the agreed conclusions to be adopted by the Commission on this theme, by bringing the outcome of the Commission to the attention of parliaments and promoting active follow-up on the recommendations. The theme has engaged a broad range of stakeholders at different levels in the preparatory process, and there is potential for ensuring that the outcomes make a significant difference to gender equality work at national level.

To facilitate broad dissemination and implementation, the Division for the Advancement of Women provides the agreed conclusions in a user-friendly brochure format in the six official languages of the United Nations. We hope that the availability of the agreed conclusions in this format will strengthen their use at national level.

There will be further opportunities during the Commission for parliamentarians to discuss with a broader group of stakeholders, including representatives of governments, United Nations entities, national Human Rights Institutes and non-governmental organizations, how the outcomes of the Commission on this priority theme can be used at different levels, and how progress can be most effectively assessed and documented when the Commission will review the implementation of the agreed conclusions in two to three years time.

Thank you