



Statement International Board

Women must lead in the time of COVID-19 pandemic and beyond: Apply the 50% rule in all political and parliamentary bodies

If 2019 was the year of women's protest movements around the globe, 2020 must be the year to pass from words to action: elect more progressive women legislators, women ministers and heads of state in order to ensure policies and legislation for gender equality, disarmament, peace, social and economic justice, and human rights.

In the majority of countries, women represent less than 25% of members of parliaments, according to a special report and map published by Inter-Parliamentary Union and UN Women. As of 1 January 2020, only Rwanda, Cuba, Bolivia, and the United Arab Emirates had 50%, or more, representation of women in their lower or single chamber. Among the countries with upper chambers, the representation of women is unacceptably low, with the top exceptions of Mexico (49.2%), Australia (48.7%), Canada (48.5 %), and Bolivia (47.2%). Also noteworthy is that among the top 20 countries with the highest representation of women, 10 are in so-called “underdeveloped” countries,

The IPU-UN Women map shows all-time highs for women heads of state, women heads of government and ministers, women Speakers of parliament, and women MPs. Interestingly, most women ministers hold portfolios for conventional “women’s work”—family, children, youth, elderly persons, persons with disabilities, and social welfare more generally. Only few women lead key ministries that are the foundation of state structures and national policies such as finance, defence, human rights, transport, and information and media. There is need for correction!

Why are progressive women necessary as government leaders? Because they promote life-affirming policies and work tirelessly to protect the rights of all. Please note the following examples:

- Laura Rojas, Speaker of the Mexican Chamber of Deputies, who reacted on the deadlock or closing down of parliaments by authoritarian executives: *“One of the greatest lessons learnt from the emergence of COVID-19 is that we must adapt our rules to ensure that institutions can function in any situation, however critical. (...).”* As a result, the IPU launched a campaign called “Legislating in times of pandemic” *that reports on the efforts of parliaments around the world, most of them very similar to those of the Chamber of Deputies of Mexico, to fulfil the basic responsibilities of parliament, such as representing citizens and supervising the executive branch.*
- Simonetta Sommaruga, President of the Swiss government (Federal Council), one of the few women heads of state worldwide, who lifted the two-month-state of emergency on 27 May 2020 by stating that *“emergency powers of the executive must be limited in terms of duration and extent, in order for Parliament to be able to act and legislate according to the ordinary constitutional rules again”.*



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DONNE DI PACE NEL MONDO
ピースウーマン—国境を越え平和をつくる女たち
全球和平妇女

There are countless other examples, too many to repeat here. And women leaders not only respond to current crises and events, they also are visionaries. A most noteworthy example is Jacinda Ardern, Prime Minister of New Zealand, who proposed the “wellbeing budget” in 2019 wherein the “priorities were based on what would make contribution to New Zealand's living standards and wellbeing.”

Prime Minister Ardern’s forward-looking move reflects the premise on which the United Nations Member States committed to *“ensure women’s full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life”* to ensure the implementation of Goal 5 for Gender Equality in the [2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#) that seeks to ensure equitable and sustainable economic and social development throughout the world.

Ensuring women’s rights, empowerment, and wellbeing for the long term requires not only progressive women in official leadership positions in parliaments, as heads of state, and in highly placed government offices but also strong ties to local and international feminist movements. The two are inextricably linked as the recent Swiss example demonstrates. The nationwide women’s strike for gender equality on 14 June 2019 motivated a record number of women to run for national elections in October 2019 and kicked up the women’s representation in the lower chamber from 32% to 42%.

Progressive women *do* make a difference. Official women’s leadership and feminist movements must work together NOW to achieve the 50% balance in all political bodies in all countries. And to keep each other accountable!

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