

Women MPs of the World

Thursday 8 November 2018

Plenary Sessions

Session 1: Welcome and Introductions

Session 2: Women in parliament: celebrating progress, shaping the future

Session 4: What differences are women MPs making?

Session 6: Changing the future of women in parliament: next steps, commitments and actions

Women MPs of the World

9.23 am

Penny Mordaunt (Secretary of State for International Development and Minister for Women and Equalities, Member of Parliament, United Kingdom): Welcome to the UK Parliament and the Chamber of the House of Commons in this centenary year of women's suffrage. One hundred years ago, women in the UK were unable to run for office or vote, or even to be present in the public Gallery. If you look up at the top of the Chamber, you will see the ventilation shaft women would peer through, having gathered in the attic space, to view the proceedings below that affected their lives. Often, they would hear men voicing widely held concerns that if women were given the vote, it would be the end of everything—the downfall of the family, society and the nation. But those women knew, even then, that the opposite was true—that without their rights being secured and their lives being fulfilled, family, society and nation could never really thrive.

Those incredible women, who fought and suffered and endured to secure that right and pave the way for others, are the heroines of our nation. Their rallying cry was, "Courage calls to courage everywhere." They took their inspiration from the other side of the world—from New Zealand, which had secured votes for women 25 years before—and the other side of the world supported them, as 50,000 British women from all walks of life marched on London to demand the franchise. You, who sit in this Chamber today, have come to support the spirit of their cause.

I see a Chamber filled with powerful, strong, courageous women, motivated by love—of our nations, your children and humanity. You are heroines, too. Many of you travelled far around the world to be here today. Some of us had a much shorter journey, but all of us have come a long way on our journey together. One of the great joys of helping organise this event was reading your biographies—your achievements and your impact. You are passionate human rights activists, you have struggled against injustice, you have fought to protect women from domestic violence, you have advocated for girls' education, you are working to end FGM and you have promoted rights for the most marginalised women—women with disabilities, women who are lesbian, bisexual or transgender, and those living with HIV/AIDS. Many of you are the first woman to occupy the office you hold.

In this Chamber, we have vice-presidents, Ministers, shadow Ministers, a Speaker, Deputy Speakers, and chairs of committees and commissions covering every possible facet of public policy. We have representatives from women's parliamentary caucuses and national women's leagues. From the UK Parliament, we have the Mother of the House, the Leader of the Commons and the Chair of the Women and Equalities Select Committee. You are great women for those public achievements, but also for the many private achievements that only you know about—balancing your work with motherhood; juggling multiple caring responsibilities; the daily battle to be taken seriously; sexual harassment, intimidation and abuse; the restraint and resolve you need when constantly being patronised; the fight to be heard, and to keep going when you are

frightened. You have brought your ideas, your passion and your determination that we will deliver for women worldwide—and I am delighted that one of you has also brought the baby. *[Applause.]*

As well as all you have done and the nations you represent, you symbolise the many women who are not here today—those we work alongside and those we have met on our travels. I want us to think about them for a moment. Personally, I am thinking about the amazing sisters I met when visiting the Vatican. I welcome Sister Sally, who is with us today. I am thinking about women of faith who place themselves in harm's way all over the world to protect people. I am thinking about women serving in our armed forces, like Zara, who I met in Afghanistan after she had just won the sword of honour at the national officer training academy. She told me she wanted to shape her nation's future for the sake of her child. I am thinking about the brave Ministers I have met on my travels, who risk the wrath of senior colleagues by speaking up about family planning. I am thinking about the Dalit woman from Nepal who stood for election despite having little education and no experience of leadership. She is now an elected ward member and represents her village in the local planning process. And I am thinking about the brave women on peace councils, who are threatened, intimidated and stalked or their partners murdered.

Then there are those who could never be here—those held captive or killed. I am looking at the shield of my late friend and colleague, Jo Cox, and I am thinking of my colleague at the Department for International Development, Becky Dykes, who, like Jo, was brutally murdered. Those women worked to protect others—especially women and girls—and both have inspired foundations in their name to carry on their good works. Both were heroines—both did exceptional things. But we know that the violence they experienced was not exceptional. If this Chamber, and you sitting in it, were the female population of the world and I asked all those who had experienced sexual or physical violence to stand up, everyone in the front three rows would be on their feet. And if this Chamber represented the female population of some nations on earth, only a few people on the back rows would remain seated. There is much to do.

Thank you all for being here today, for all you have done on this agenda, for all you enable others to do and for all you inspire through your example. Thank you for representing your nations and the billions of women and girls who want to make the world a better place and reach their full potential, and for understanding that humanity depends on their doing so. As you get to know one another better today, think about all that the few of us here have been able to do and think about the possibilities if we were able to empower every girl and woman on earth—just think what the world could do.

There is much that we must do. Twenty-five million backstreet abortions take place every year. Two hundred million girls and women have undergone female genital mutilation, and 68 million more will be at risk by 2030. Sixty-three million girls are not in school. So let us recommit ourselves to inspiring a new generation of female social and political leaders, to ending violence against women and girls, to granting all women access to family planning, to ending the barriers to girls' education, and to economically empowering women. We must

implement CEDAW, deliver, in 12 years, the sustainable development goals, especially goal 5.5, and implement UN Security Council resolution 1325.

Let us send a clear message from this Chamber to all those who would slow progress, whether they are in the global north or the global south, that we will not stand for their nonsense. I am acutely conscious as I speak to you that this institution, the mother of all Parliaments, is still a hostile environment for some women who work within its walls. I am aware that, in parts of the UK, not all women have access to reproductive healthcare where they live, or can marry the person whom they love. I understand the challenges of tackling historical failures and sensitive issues, but tackle them we must.

In 2018, we should not have a fight on our hands to get women's rights mentioned in summit documents, especially when that summit is being held by the G7. Enough! *[Applause.]* Unless we enable every woman to reach her full potential, humanity will not reach its full potential. Unless women and girls thrive, our nations will not. Peace, prosperity and security depend on that task, and we should depend on one another. Meeting one another face to face over these two days, I can see a real interest sparking. How can we help ourselves to do more? How can we support one another when the going gets tough? How can we all pile in behind you when you need support? So let's make another outcome from today a lasting connection between us all, whether that is a commitment to a giant sisterhood WhatsApp group or greater interaction and collaboration on the issues that we discuss today, because we must succeed, because the margin of victory is in this room, because courage calls to courage everywhere and because without women's rights, there are no human rights.

I said earlier that the shadows and echoes of the women who went before us still surround us. Let us recognise here today that we, too, will become shadows and dust but our legacy must mean that, 100 years hence, a meeting like this will be nothing but a memory. Those who went before us started a great movement for equality. Let us be the generation that finishes the job. *[Applause.]*

Harriet Harman (Mother of the House, Member of Parliament, United Kingdom): I will start by introducing myself. Sorry for the layout of the House of Commons, which means that I have my back to so many of the sisters here. I am Harriet Harman. I have been a Member of Parliament since 1982, so for 36 years. *[Applause.]* I represent a constituency in south London, Camberwell and Peckham. I have three children and one grandchild. So that's me.

I extend huge thanks to Penny Mordaunt, our Secretary of State for International Development and Minister for Women and Equalities, for the commitment that she and her Department have shown in bringing us all here together. Thank you so much, Penny. I also thank Andrea Leadsom, Leader of the House of Commons. We had to have a special vote in the House of Commons to allow you to come and sit here—*[Applause.]* Andrea, as Leader of the House of Commons, led on that. On behalf of all of us, I thank Theresa May, the Prime Minister, for the reception last night in Downing Street—*[Applause.]* It was a wonderful event.

I thank all of you for coming: a huge warm welcome to Westminster. As Penny said, these benches with all of you here look very different from how they

normally look. It is a pleasure to see you. We have here women Members of Parliament from 100 different countries and from five continents. We are all from very different countries with very different backgrounds, but our goals are the same: we want nothing less than equality. We all share things in common. We are all pioneers. We have all made a lot of progress, but we are still women in politics trying to make progress in what is largely a man's world. We also look after children and elderly relatives, and we break down barriers.

When I was a girl I was brought up with the idea that the most important ambition was to get a good husband and, once I had achieved that lofty ambition, to be a good wife to that good husband. Daughters were in households where the father was the head of the household or wives' husbands were the heads of the households. We have all said, "We don't agree with that. We do not think women are inferior. We do not think women should be subordinate. We think women should be equal and we want an equal say in decision making. We are not happy with the idea that men make the decisions, but women abide by them."

We have all made progress. When I was first a Member of Parliament in 1982, it was 3% women and 97% men and women's voices were not heard. Democracy is about representation. It is not a proper democracy if women's voices are not heard, so no one is doing us a favour by letting us into Parliament. We are a democratic imperative—[Applause.] We are necessary. Now we are 30% in the UK Parliament, but we are still outnumbered by men. I talked to many of you last night and none of us is happy just to get into Parliament. We want to be on equal terms with the men in Parliament. We are not happy with a situation where it is the men who get selected to sit on Committees; the men who get the resources; and the men who get to speak. We have to not only be in Parliament; we have to be there on equal terms. If you think about it, all those countries where there are more women going forward are the countries that are clearly looking to the future. Imagine a situation where all the governing people are men. That is like the past. That is backward. We women in politics are the future.

It is important for us to be in Parliament because we want to make progress for women in our countries. We want equality for women in our countries. Today I hope to hear about your ideas, what you have been doing and what has worked for you. We want to hear about your successes. What have been your setbacks? How have you overcome them?

I want to give one example of something that we have done here in the UK that has made a difference. We have always known that women at work are paid less than men. Let us be clear about this: that is not because men are cleverer than women or because men work harder than women. It is because of discrimination and inequality. We introduced a law—it came into effect in April this year—that every organisation has to publish their pay gap between men and women. Whether they are private companies or public organisations, every year they have to publish what they pay their men and what they pay their women, so that we can see the gap and can narrow it. It is no surprise to us that eight out of 10 employers pay their men more than they pay their women.

That is one thing that we have been doing, and we are obviously all trying to work hard to tackle the scourge of domestic violence. When we bring forward ideas, nobody says, "That's a good idea. That's challenging inequality. That's an interesting policy. We'll implement it." No. We have to fight for it. Nobody says "Come into Parliament and exercise power on equal terms." We have to fight for it. That is another thing that we have to have in common—we have to be resilient. Over the years, girls are encouraged to be emollient, accommodating and nice, but we have to be really tough. I always say that, if you are not having a row, you are probably not doing enough. To make progress for women, you have to be tough and persistent and press forward.

We also have to work very closely with women on the outside of our Parliaments. The women's organisations outside our Parliaments are what sustain us in here and enable us to make progress. As Penny alluded to, we all face a backlash, because, deep down there, the attitude of some is: "Why are women out there speaking in public? Shouldn't they be at home looking after their husband? Shouldn't they be in the kitchen? Why are they in Parliament?" There is always a backlash of threats and verbal threats, but also abuse on social media and in the mainstream media as well.

I think it is important that we say to ourselves and to one another that that is not something that we should just expect, or that is normal or an occupational hazard. We should say that to attack us as individuals is not only wrong but an attack on democracy, because we are elected. Our voters have elected us, and they are entitled to our getting on with our job without let or hindrance and without looking over our shoulder. Sometimes, if we are threatened or attacked, we feel that we cannot speak out about it because we do not want to look weak or as though we are preoccupied with ourselves. However, we have to speak out about it, because they are attacks not only on us but on our democracy.

We have to challenge the backlash. Every time women make some steps forward, there are people trying to push us back, so we have to remain persistent. We have to work with women's organisations outside and within our own political parties. However, we also have to work across parties. As women, if we work together across parties, we can make more progress than we can on our own. We also have to work with men who are prepared to support us. When I was first in the House of Commons, there were virtually no men who supported women's equality. However, there are now men who understand the importance of women's equality and who are prepared to support that agenda. When I say support, I mean support—not lead, but support the agenda—[*Applause.*] We have to be the leadership, and they can support us. There has always been the idea that it is natural for a woman to be deputy to a male leader. We need to engender a culture among men that it is positive and progressive not necessarily to stand forward as leaders themselves, but to support a woman leader. That will take some work, I think—[*Applause.*]

I hope everybody has a productive day today. I am eager to hear from all of you about your experience. What I would like to see—this echoes what Penny has said—is ongoing discussions among us all. We all see the pictures of men at the global summits. Imagine the pictures from a normal global summit. It is all men. The international network of men is well-established. We need to establish that

international global network of women parliamentarians to work together. I hope we will be able to do that after this conference. I hope that we will have this conference somewhere in the world every year—*[Applause.]* Who would think about hosting it next year? We will not finish the job today. We will make good progress today, but we need to make progress year on year. Thank you so much for joining us. The sisterhood is global. Thank you—*[Applause.]*

Women in Parliament

[**Andrea Leadsom**, Leader of the House of Commons, Member of Parliament, United Kingdom *took the Chair*]

9.46 am

Chair: Thank you, Harriet, for those wonderful, rousing words. Also, thank you, Penny. You had an amazing opportunity to open our session today. It is a great privilege for me to chair this plenary session. I pay tribute to Harriet and Penny, my co-hosts, for their introductions.

We are normally separated by borders and oceans, but today we have come together, and we are united in our resolve to inspire women to participate in public life. Each of us can and should use our position to create change for women and girls in our own nations and around the world. As you have heard, 2018 marks the centenary of some women winning the vote in the United Kingdom. It has been a personal priority for me as Leader of the House of Commons to celebrate the successes of women during this Vote 100 year, as well as looking at what more can be done to achieve equal representation in political life. As I have said in events up and down the country, we have come a long way, but there is still so much more to do.

I am sure that everyone here in this Chamber can think of at least one person or perhaps one event that inspired them to step up and get involved in political life. We should all be proud of the fact that it is now us who can provide that same inspiration to women and girls around the world, to campaigners and to anyone pushing for the equal, meaningful and safe participation of women on the world stage. In this particular session, we will pay tribute to the women who empower others, who set us on our paths to political office or who work tirelessly to challenge the barriers that limit women's participation in public and political life.

It is a struggle to name just one woman who inspires me, but I think it is fitting in our centenary year to highlight a very dear colleague and a trailblazing parliamentarian who we very sadly lost this year. Colleagues from around the world may have known Baroness Tessa Jowell as our incredible Minister for the Olympics. She led London's hugely successful 2012 host city campaign, but for me and for many others, she was also a woman politician who was determined to give every baby and every family the best start in life through her Sure Start initiative here in the UK. I was proud to collaborate with her to ensure that the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals reflected the importance of early years intervention. She claimed that it was her proudest achievement. In setting up Sure Start, she will have helped to support millions of families in the UK, and through her work with the United Nations, she will have helped millions of families around the world. I want to pay my own personal tribute to her.

Before we begin this session, I want to go through a couple of administrative items. It is always very tricky, particularly where you have a huge group of people who are not familiar with this Chamber. I just want to make very clear, this session is being broadcast live on YouTube via the Westminster Foundation for Democracy. In addition, *Hansard*, which is our parliamentary record, will transcribe all speakers' remarks in this room. This will provide a superb

opportunity for people right around the world to listen, to take note, and to act with us to make progress on gender equality, and to ensure women's full and equal participation in all areas of public life.

Secondly, in the working groups that follow this session, we have an opportunity to discuss important issues in a much more private space, so we therefore ask, please, that when you come back in here later today you do not quote individuals from the private working groups, or, indeed, identify them by their country, unless they have given you permission to do so, because the later session will again be recorded. This is to protect any individuals who could be identified by those stories.

Thirdly, we would be very grateful if you could all keep your contributions to the four-minute limit. We are delighted to have so many of our international colleagues to speak today, and we want to make sure everybody gets a fair turn to have their thoughts on the record. We do not have a countdown, but you can see clocks that will tell you how long you have. Contributions are limited to four minutes, and my colleague to my left will hold up a yellow card—to use a good footballing analogy—when you have 30 seconds to go, so at three and a half minutes; then we will hold up a red card when your four minutes is up. At that point, as Chair, I will have to stop you, so please do help me there.

I will now call the first speaker for today: Marta Lucía Ramírez Blanco, Vice-President of Colombia. Thank you very much.

Marta Lucía Ramírez Blanco (Vice-President, Colombia): I thank the organisers of this amazing conference and, of course, the three previous speakers. They are sharing with us a very important opportunity to learn more about United Kingdom politics.

I am speaking to you today as the first woman to be elected Vice-President of Colombia in our 199 years of independent history. This is an achievement I dedicate to all women in my country, 61 years after the first woman was elected to the Congress of Colombia. In Colombia women currently hold few public offices at national and regional level: 20% of our Congress persons, 15% of our regional governors, 16% of our regional assembly persons, 12% of our mayors and 16% of our municipal council post holders are women who had the courage to defy the odds, to lead a path towards change. When I was elected Vice-President, President Iván Duque Márquez and I agreed to the challenge of appointing, for the first time in the history of our country, a fully equal Cabinet. Due to our decision and our commitment, Colombia's Cabinet current comprises 50% women, whose average age is under 51 years. [*Applause.*]

Currently in Colombia, as well as in Latin America, political parties are suffering a crisis both in their credibility and their legitimacy. For this reason, during the last election, and despite having been a member of the Conservative party, I decided to run for the presidency of Colombia as an independent, gathering signatures from citizens who would support my candidacy. I competed against our current president in the primary elections held in March this year, when we agreed that whoever got the most votes would run as president, and the second one would run as vice-president. I got the second largest share of the vote and lost the presidency by a narrow margin, given that, unlike him, I ran a campaign

by myself, without a party to support me. Our combined efforts resulted in the highest number of votes in the history of Colombia and I truly was the first woman to be elected to a high Executive office. [*Applause.*] Never in our history had a woman had so many votes as a result of her own efforts.

My first electoral experience was in 2006, when I was elected to Congress, and at that time we organised for the first time a women's caucus. That year, no matter if we were from different parties, no matter if we were from the right or the left, we presented a Bill to protect women against violence and harassment. It was a very difficult Bill in Congress, but we were finally successful, and we now have a law on violence against women.

I have previously served as a Minister twice. I do not want to speak about myself, but I want to share this with you. I had the opportunity to be the first Minister of trade in Colombia and the first defence Minister, and now I am the first Vice-President. This is not about us. To be in office for the first time means that you have a big responsibility. We are in these positions not because we deserve it, but because many women participated in electing us to make real change in our countries.

With President Iván Duque, we have a Government based on legality, transparency and opportunity, so that every Colombian citizen can become an entrepreneur. Equality for all citizens starts with equality for women in Colombia. We have the opportunity to change the country. In Latin America, we have very different political positions, but we have the common goal of progress and benefit for all.

As women of some age, we are obliged to open spaces to young women in politics in Latin America. There is a young Brazilian here—she has a Colombian boyfriend, so I am sure we are going to have a very close relationship. We have an obligation to create room for young women in business, academia and politics.

Chair: Thank you very much. I now call on Bardish Chagger, who is the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, and a Member of Parliament in Canada.

Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Member of Parliament, Canada): Thank you, first of all, for the invitation to be with you in this historic place, and for all the effort that made it possible. In 1916—102 years ago—some women got the right to vote in Canada. In 1921, the Canadian Parliament welcomed its first woman MP. One woman Prime Minister and over 300 women MPs later, gender parity is a reality, but only at the Cabinet table. Prime Minister Justin Trudeau set the tone early for the Government of Canada, when he appointed our country's first gender-balanced Cabinet in 2015. It changed the conversation, and the quality of our legislation is better for it.

In 2015, Canada turned 151, and I became the country's first woman Government House leader. In 2018, the hon. Karina Gould became Canada's first Cabinet Minister to take maternity leave—progress. Women hold key Cabinet portfolios in our Government, from labour to foreign affairs to justice.

Women play a significant role in shaping the direction of our country. Today, women represent 45% of our Senate. Even though there has never been a greater turnout of women elected to our House of Commons—27%—there clearly is more work to do.

In Canada, we are taking a proactive approach to gender and diversity. We have appointed a special adviser to the Prime Minister for LGBTQ2 issues. We fund organisations that empower women through the Gender Equality Network Canada. Canada's international advocacy and diplomacy efforts are driven by a feminist international assistance policy. When Canada hosted the G7 summit in Quebec, gender equality and women's empowerment were integrated into all ministerial meetings. Canada is co-chair of the Equal Rights Coalition, which promotes and protects the rights of LGBTI people—progress, yet there is still more work to do.

We have recently made changes to Canada's labour code to address harassment. We committed £50 million for education and legal support for victims of sexual harassment in the workplace. We passed the Canadian gender budgeting Act, which enshrines in law our Government's policy of applying a gender-based analysis-plus lens to federal budget processes. Last month, the Government of Canada introduced the Pay Equity Act—equal pay for equal work. We are determined to have corporate boards reflect our population, so we legislated to make them publicly declare who is on them.

We know that full and equal participation of women is essential to our competitiveness. That is why I was proud to launch Canada's first women entrepreneurship strategy when I was Minister for small business. In Canada, only 16% of businesses are majority owned by women, and we now have a plan to at least double that number by 2025.

This is some of what Canada is doing—and you should also know that we are working to increase women's representation in politics. I am sure you all agree that when we add women, we change politics for the better. Young women of the world will be her when they can see her, and they need to see her so they can be her. This is a matter of particular importance to me. I was in grade 6, aged 11, when I went to a "day with a difference" at the University of Waterloo and saw women in various fields of science. I decided that day that I, too, would be a woman in science. I was 13 years old when I volunteered on my first federal campaign—it was my dad who showed me how. Today in this House, like last night at No. 10, women and girls can see their future selves in elected office. That is progress, but there is still more work to do.

I am keen to continue this conversation, and I look forward to hearing about your progress and how we will achieve our goals. Cultivating gender diversity is our present. Reaping its benefits is for all humankind, hence it will take every single one of us. I can assure you that Prime Minister Justin Trudeau in Canada will be your ally in this journey. Thank you so much for having me here.
[Applause.]

Chair: Thank you very much. May I mention that you can deliver your remarks from where you are? The microphones will pick you up—you do not need to make your way to the Dispatch Box, which would be a bit complicated for

everyone. I would now like to call Diane Abbott, who is our shadow Home Secretary and a Member of Parliament in the United Kingdom.

Diane Abbott (Shadow Home Secretary, Member of Parliament, United Kingdom): Good morning, sisters.

Members: Good morning.

Diane Abbott: As you heard, my name is Diane Abbott. I have been a Member of Parliament in this legislature for 31 years. I was the first black woman ever elected to the British Parliament. *[Applause.]* I was not just the first black woman—my parents both left school at 14 in rural Jamaica, and for somebody from a corner of the British empire to take their place in this Chamber as an elected Member of Parliament was significant in more ways than one. *[Applause.]* But I would not want you to think I was elected in '87 because of some special programme. I would not want you to think I was elected because my party leaders thought it was time to have a black woman in Parliament. Actually, there was struggle. Anything worth achieving will always require struggle. It is important to stress that.

I want to say why it is important to have more women in politics. It is nice for us to be here in one of the oldest political Chambers in the world, all dressed very beautifully, but the reason it is important to have more women in politics is that it improves your politics. It is important to have political institutions and legislatures that look like the people they seek to govern. Only that gives politics real legitimacy, particularly with younger people who might be a little sceptical. We need legislators who look like the people we seek to govern.

Certainly in this Parliament, women have brought issues forward and fought for issues that were not being fought for when I became an MP. As my colleague Harriet Harman said, men were not talking about women's equality 30 years ago. It is the increasing number of women MPs, as well as what ordinary people are saying, that has brought the issues to the forefront. It is important to have more women in politics not only for reasons of justice and fairness but for the quality and relevance of our politics. If politicians are all middle-aged men who don't look like ordinary people, how can people take the political process seriously?

I want to talk about what we can do to make it possible for more women to become involved in politics. When I first became a Member of Parliament, there were just 21 women MPs, out of 650. We now have more than 100. That did not just happen. It was not about people sitting around saying, "It'd be nice to have more women." It had to be fought for. Each party, in its own way, took positive action to encourage more women to come into politics. We use different methods, but you have to have positive action and positive thinking.

I am very proud to be a Member of Parliament. I have been one for 31 years and I hope that I have encouraged more young women who look like me to come forward. If what we do does not help the poorest women and does not improve and increase the life chances of poor women who perhaps do not have some of our advantages, then what we do does not necessarily have value. It has taken struggle for all of us to be in this Chamber and it will take struggle to

increase the number of women in all our Parliaments, but we should always remember what we are doing it for: to help the poorest women in our communities.

Chair: Diane, we are incredibly proud of you and your achievements here in Parliament.

I now call Dr Heba Hagrass, who is a Member of Parliament in Egypt.

Dr Heba Hagrass (Member of Parliament, Egypt): First, I congratulate all the British women on organising such an event; I thank you for sharing it with all us women of the world.

As you well know, Egypt has been eminent in respect of not only its place in Africa and the middle east, but all over the world. Some 7,000 years ago, Egyptian women were queens, princesses and priests, too. Among the most famous of all was Hatshepsut, who ruled around 1500 BC. The most famous was Cleopatra, as you all know.

In the new era, political participation started for Egyptian women in 1919, but the first to enter Parliament did so in 1924 as auditors, not active Members. Actual participation came in 1956, when only two women managed to go through the ballot and get elected into Parliament under the individual election system, thus making history for both Egypt and the whole Arab world.

In the 1976 Parliament, women grabbed eight seats out of 360, or 2.3% of seats. It is important to note that these women were striving under the individual electoral system. In 1979, the quota system was introduced, thus marking a new milestone for Egyptian women in Parliament.

In 1986, legislators decided that it was enough—no more quotas, no more anything. Women took their place in politics and they removed the quota, which led to a drastic fall in the number of women in Parliament. By 2009, the quota was reintroduced. However, after the revolution of 2011, the quota was again removed and another drastic fall occurred and almost all the women were unable to get into Parliament. The number reached a low of 1.7% in the 2011 Parliament.

However, after the revolution of 30 June 2013, affirmative action in favour of women was again imposed, and we saw significant constitutional changes entrenched and booming. This resulted in the entry of 89 women, raising the percentage from 1.7% to 15%. We are planning to keep the quota system in place for ever. If we do not manage to have parity in Parliament, we will never have fair legislation coming from Parliament. If women do not take their rightful place in Parliament, we do not expect that they will ever take their rightful place in society.

Chair: Thank you. I call Aishatu Dukku, who is a member of the House of Representatives of Nigeria.

Aishatu Dukku (Member, House of Representatives, Nigeria): Thank you very much for this great invitation. I want to say that Nigeria only returned to democracy in 1999 and women have been participating, but the story is not

good because it was only in 2007 that we have been able to achieve 5.7%. As it is, we now have only 21 women Members of the House of Representatives, and only eight women senators.

I come from the northern part of Nigeria, from the north-east where Boko Haram has devastated the zone. More than 10.5 million children are out of school and of those, 7 million are girls. As I speak to you now, all the girls' schools in my constituency have been closed down for the last six years. All the girls who are supposed to be in school have been married off at a young age, because they cannot be kept at home doing nothing, so the fathers marry them off. My main challenge now is with Boko Haram and the kidnap of the Chibok girls and the Dapchi girls. It is very discouraging for any father wanting to send a girl to school.

Education, at a basic level, is very important for a girl so that she knows what she can do and what she can contribute to society, and talking to her about joining in politics. This is one of our greatest challenges. The Nigerian constitution is not favourable. Yes, section 40 of the 1999 constitution as amended has given the opportunity for every Nigerian, male or female, to have freedom of association, but that is not enough for us. Yes, we can associate in a political party, but what are the political parties doing?

Right now we have signed and transmitted to Mr President an electoral amendment in October: we do not know what will happen. Will he accept it? We have said that the political parties must allow women free participation. They should be allowed to contest for chairman of the political parties, not just for woman leader. It is only women who are allowed to be the woman leader, and even then some of the political parties have men as the woman leader.

Members: Oh!

Aishatu Dukku: Yes, in the electoral amendment we said that any place that says "women" must be occupied by the feminine gender. We have to make it categorically clear in the Electoral Act amendment, and any youths must be below the age of 45. Right now, we have a youth who is 65 years old. *[Laughter.]* It's amazing that we do not have a level playing field. It is said that yes, women can participate, but the ground is not level for us. It is very, very difficult for us as I speak to you today.

I am the first woman to represent my constituency. It is very, very difficult because for us, it's a taboo for a woman just to come out to participate in politics, but I broke that taboo—*[Applause.]* This is because the support of two men—the father and the husband—is needed in the life of a girl. I got married at the age of 16, but I had a supportive husband who was educated and my father was very educated. These two people, the father and the husband, are key in the life of a woman, so we must try to get their support. I don't know how we are going to do that, but today we will find a solution to do it.

As I speak to you today, we thank God that the president assented to what is known as the Not Too Young To Run Bill. It is now a law in Nigeria. The young girls and boys can participate in politics. We have just come out of our primary elections, so we have yet to know how many young girls have come through the

primaries, but by January, we will be able to say how many of them have been able to come through.

You mention the word "equality". For us in Nigeria, you cannot mention the word "equality". The men do not want to hear it, so we find a way of getting around that, because we want their support. That is how it is for us in Nigeria. For me, today is very important, but after today is more important. Thank you very much. *[Applause.]*

Chair: Thank you so much. I now call Ledia Hanifa Amaliah, who is a Member of Parliament in Indonesia.

Ledia Hanifa Amaliah (Member of Parliament, Indonesia): Good morning; salaam alaikum wa rahmatullahi wa barakatuh. Today, let us celebrate our gathering together as parliamentarians who serve our nations and work to make our world a better place and a better civilisation for the next generation.

Indonesia, with a population of 270 million people, started political participation in wide terms before its independence. In 1928, the Women's Congress was the start of the women's movement. Before 1998, there were appointed seats for women as Members of the People's Consultative Assembly at the upper House. The political system was changed so that all women Members should be elected in a general election.

We believe that increasing women's political participation is a question not just of increasing numbers, but of raising up their capacity and capability and women having enough endurance to fight for issues that concern them, and that collaborative work between political parties, Government and civil society is the key to that.

The path seems the right way. In 2003, we passed the election law that states that for every three candidates, there should be a minimum of one female in the list. This forced political parties to put more women on the list. In 2008, we passed political party laws that state that a minimum of 30% of the board of a political party should be women. This is to push political parties not to select a female candidate just because she is a woman, but because she is capable.

The result of the 2009 general election was that 18.1% of the Members elected were women; that was out of 550 Members in the House. In 2014, that decreased to 17.1%, but fortunately, because of the regulation at the moment about local government elections, the number increased to 18.5%. The result of the 2009 general election was that 28% of the 132 members of the Regional Representative Council were women. In 2014, the figure was only 25%.

We still have a long way to go to reach the targets on numbers, and at the same time we have to work together on issues relating to women, children and families, such as the implementation of anti-domestic violence law, child protection law and anti-human trafficking laws in Indonesia.

We have a women politicians caucus, with members from across the political parties but who are not Members of Parliament. We also have a women parliamentarians caucus and civil society organisations that work in the field.

As parliamentarians, we should be role models for other women and girls to join politics through our public accountability performances, via the media or social media. We should give training and coaching, especially to women, within political parties, let students have internship time with us, and support other female candidates. We in Indonesia hope to have more women parliamentarians and local councillors following the next election in 2019. Being elected is one step, and it should be followed by good work on women's, children's and family issues in our respective countries.

Salaam alaikum wa rahmatullahi wa barakatuh.

Chair: Thank you. I call Dr Suad bint Mohammed Al Lawati.

Dr Suad bint Mohammed Al Lawati (State Council Vice-Chairperson, Oman): Welcome. I am honoured to be here with you all. Thank you very much for organising this important conference. Women in Oman started to be elected to Parliament in 1994. They were appointed in 1997 to the State Council, which is the appointed council. I was appointed to the State Council, for the third time, for four years in 2015. I nominated myself to be deputy chairperson. It was not easy. No woman had reached that position before. I won through a live, free election. Council members of both genders elected me because of my CV. I worked for a long time at Sultan Qaboos University.

In my speech, I quoted His Majesty's saying:

"since we are convinced that the country, in its blessed march, needs both men and women. This is because—and there can be no doubt about this—it is like a bird which relies upon both its wings to fly through the sky. How could it manage to do so if one of its wings was broken? Would it be able to fly?"

No, it cannot. That is a powerful speech by His Majesty.

As an Associate Professor, I studied many times how male students think and their attitudes towards women, to find out how they think about women and their attitudes against a woman leader or women as politicians. Is the higher education system and the curriculum changing their attitude towards women? We should look at that.

As a Parliament, and as chairperson, we did many studies. One was on the role of the Omani women societies. We have 63 Omani women societies now. Their main role should be to help women and to facilitate Omani women reaching elected councils—either the Shura Council, which is elected, or the many municipal councils. That is very important. I also chaired a committee that studied how we can empower women to reach the Shura Council and what byelaws and regulations needed to change to facilitate that. Only one woman was elected last time. Some 17% of the State Council are now women, but the figure for the Council of Oman as a whole is just above 9%. We need one more woman there.

Omani women are now everywhere because the state and the laws do not differentiate between men and women. We have equal opportunity in education, higher education, work and work pay, and also land from the Government.

Women can reach the Shura Council and be elected. I hope my experience will inspire more women in Oman. Thank you very much. *[Applause.]*

Chair: Thank you. I call Catherine Martin, Chair of Ireland's Women's Parliamentary Caucus.

Catherine Martin (Chair of Ireland's Women's Parliamentary Caucus, Teachta Dála, Ireland): Woman parliamentarians of the world, mná an domhain, a dhaoine uaisle, it is a privilege and an honour to speak here at this important global gathering of women parliamentarians. It is fitting that in 2018, as the UK and Ireland mark 100 years since partial suffrage was achieved, we gather to discuss the importance of women's participation in public life and how we can most effectively continue the campaign for equality. Across the world, our right to vote was hard fought for and hard won. As women, we should always remember that we were not granted the right to vote. Rather, our grandmothers and our great-grandmothers demanded our right to vote.

One hundred years ago, the first woman elected here to Westminster was an Irishwoman, Constance Markievicz. She never took her seat in the House of Commons, but she is a pivotal figure in the political history of Ireland. Markievicz's belief in herself and in women was revolutionary at a time when women's achievements were trivialised and often disparaged, if not written out of the narrative at that time entirely. She was also the first woman elected to the first Irish Parliament, the Dáil, a century ago, and she was the first female Cabinet Minister in western Europe. Although we have come very far since then, when it comes to female representation both in Ireland and across the world we still have a long way to go.

I was elected to our Parliament, Dáil Éireann, in 2016. I'm one of 35 female Members out of 158, so upon my election in 2016 I sought a way to strengthen the political impact of the women who had been elected through the establishment of the Women's Parliamentary Caucus. The Irish Women's Parliamentary Caucus was officially founded the following year in July, and I had the honour of being elected its inaugural chair. We set up that caucus to strengthen women's engagement with political and public life and to send a message across our country that women working together and in partnership with their male colleagues can effect real change and inspire the women of the future to continue to tackle inequalities.

One of our caucus's greatest achievements to date was in September this year when we hosted in Dublin Castle the first International Congress of Parliamentary Women Caucuses, and we had the honour of having our guest speaker here, Harriet Harman, to address that conference. The objective of the congress was threefold and quite similar to today's conference: first, to bring together groups of women parliamentarians from around the globe to identify ways in which the perspectives and voices of women can help to make a real difference in the issues and challenges that affect everyone of any gender, as our unique voices are essential in building a world, a global economy and a global society that ensures inclusivity and equality for all; secondly, to engage with experts, representatives and activists from organisations who have fought for women's equality, women's rights, safety, justice, peace, and respect for women. Women parliamentarians need to work closely, not just with each other,

but with members of civil society groups on the issues that affect women. Finally, we agreed the Dublin Castle declaration, an expression of intent by the international community gathered at the congress, dedicated to improving the lives of women throughout the world. I hope that the work that our caucus did in that international congress will further women's political impact on decisions in Ireland and also help parliamentarians across the world.

Whenever or wherever we gather as women in politics, just as we do today here in Westminster, we must aim to encourage all women of every age and background to aspire, to step forward, to represent, to lead.

It is crucial that we salute the women who today, in 2018, are still persecuted and remain unfree, and tell them that they are not alone. We must pledge to work together, as an international community of women parliamentarians, to free all from discrimination, humiliation and persecution. I look forward to continuing to engage with you all over the course of the day and learning from you. Go raibh maith agat. Thank you.

Chair: Thank you very much. I call Ya Kumba Jaiteh, who is a Member of the National Assembly of Gambia. Thank you for bringing your gorgeous baby. They are very welcome.

Ya Kumba Jaiteh (Member, National Assembly, Gambia): It is such a privilege and honour to contribute to this very important discussion in the House of Commons. It has been over 100 years since our enfranchisement as women, and we are still highly under-represented. We must ask ourselves why. I am from a country—Gambia—that is just coming out of 22 years of dictatorship. Since independence 50 years ago, we have had only 22 women in Parliament in total—nine elected, and the rest nominated.

As a young parliamentarian—I am the youngest female parliamentarian at present in Gambia—I am advocating for the establishment of a women's caucus to help us, as females, to encourage young girls to join politics. That is very important. Women are a majority in almost all countries, and it is important for us to take positions in decision-making bodies, be it Parliament or the Cabinet. That is key. I am here today to learn from women—all of you—from other countries that have a high representation of women in their Parliaments. That may have been done through the establishment of caucuses. This is a learning opportunity for me. This morning, I received a text message from our Speaker, Mariam Jack-Denton. She encouraged me to gather information and literature to take back with me to help with the establishment of our caucus.

We cannot celebrate achieving the right to vote more than 100 years ago without reflecting on the right to be voted for. The reason why I brought my daughter to this Parliament today is that the late Benazir Bhutto is an inspiration to me. She was elected the first woman Prime Minister in Pakistan three months after she gave birth, so I asked myself, "Why shouldn't I go to work?" Even though I am entitled to six months' maternity leave, I decided to forgo it.

In my country, we are at a very important stage in our democracy. As has been said, it is not democracy if the majority of the population—women—are under-represented. I make sure I go to work so the work can be done properly. Benazir

Bhutto said that it is difficult being a women anywhere in the world, particularly for women leaders, as the challenges, the risks and the double-standards are greater. I would add that, as women, we take our work very seriously. It is personal to us, so our standards are higher. Our achievements are higher, and the impact we make is generally greater. I encourage all of us to work together to organise ourselves as women. Let this not be the end. Today, we are creating a network to organise and empower ourselves. Only we can empower ourselves. We have been electing these men for so long, and they have failed us. Only we understand our power, and only we can empower ourselves.

Chair: Thank you very much. We would now like to hear from Simona Petrik.

Simona Petrik (Member of Parliament, Slovakia): Thank you very much. My name is Simona Petrik, and I am a member of the board of the centre-right political party SPOLU, which means “together”. For almost three years, I have been a member of the National Council of the Slovak Republic. It is my sincere honour to be here today and to be able to say a few words about my personal story.

Let me start with a confession: I was not born a politician—a lot of you will probably feel the same. I studied politics at university, but after finishing my studies I entered the world of business straight away and became an entrepreneur. I opened up a private language school in our capital and slowly began to build a small chain. After more than 10 years in the education business and being in charge of my own working life, I discovered my strong interest, which later became my passion: helping other women to discover their potential and motivating them to build their confidence and follow their dreams.

In 2011, I was a founding member of an organisations called Real Woman, and in 2013 I was one of the 18 women who founded the Slovak Women’s Platform. I was elected as the first chairwomen, a position I held for the following two years. The Slovak Women’s Platform is an umbrella organisation that brings together 15 other women’s organisations with the aim of empowering women and supporting them to become entrepreneurs, helping them to balance their work and childcare, and educating and coaching them about their rights and capabilities.

I slowly realised that I was spending more time volunteering and travelling around the country meeting many strong, important and interesting women than I was spending on my own business, but I have never regretted it. My activities finally brought me into politics when in 2014 I was asked to write a programme document about family policy and supporting women for a political party’s parliamentary election campaign. I was elected an MP in the 2016 parliamentary elections, since when I have been trying to use my mandate to the best of my ability to fight for women’s rights and to improve the lives of young families with children.

Slovakia is a European country, which means that right now we are living in peace and not suffering from hunger or fearing for our lives, yet women in Slovakia face their own challenges and fears regarding a lack of self-confidence and the lack of support, not only from society but, more importantly, from the state. Many women, mostly in the eastern part of Slovakia, are economically

dependent on their husbands or partners and are therefore not able to take control of their own lives. Every fourth woman in Slovakia has experienced some kind of violence against her, and the state does not provide enough financial or educational support to fight it.

Women who give birth in Slovak hospitals are not treated with proper respect by doctors and nurses during childbirth, including through there being too many C-sections, the artificial initiation of labour, the separation of newborn children from their mothers when they are hospitalised, and the lack of support for mothers in breastfeeding and so on. For those reasons, many Slovak women go abroad to have a respectful labour.

Women in Slovakia earn 9% less than men in the same positions, and in general the gender pay gap is 23%. Women are under-represented in the senior management of the biggest companies and in our Parliament, too. Out of 150 MPs, there are only 31 women MPs, including me. We lack systematic support for young families. Although we have quite generous parental leave—75% of previous gross income for 34 weeks—we do not have the complex concept of a family policy that reflects the real needs of families and especially of the women who are the inevitable part of them.

The aforementioned examples were the reasons why I decided to enter active politics. I am trying to use my mandate as an advocate for women in the Slovak Parliament, so I speak openly about the necessity of ratifying the Istanbul convention, an EU document on the elimination of violence against women. I have also raised awareness of the importance of implementing the international baby-friendly and mother-friendly certificates in hospitals, to guarantee respectful care for mothers and children during and after birth. After I applied public pressure, the charge for allowing an accompanying person into the room during a woman's labour was cancelled. One of the Bills I recently proposed was about shrinking the gender pay gap.

Chair: Simona, could you please bring your remarks to a close?

Simona Petrik: Yes. I am doing all those things because I care deeply about how women are treated in our country, and I want Slovakia to be a good, healthy and safe place for women and families to live. Thank you for your attention. I am grateful for this chance to speak and to listen to all your stories, because they are great and dear to me. *[Applause.]*

Chair: Thank you. Our last contributor in this session will be Tamara Adrian, who is a Member of the National Assembly of Venezuela.

Tamara Adrian (Member, National Assembly, Venezuela): Ladies, gentlemen and any non-conforming gender people, as Einstein once said, it is easier to crack an atom than a prejudice. That is what we are doing. We are the voice of the voiceless. We are challenging the prejudices that prevent women, as well as people with disabilities, people who live with HIV and LGBTI people, from having equal rights. As long as we are there, stating loud and clear that our goal is to break those prejudices, we will make change in the world. I feel profoundly that equality is a very powerful force. At the end of the road, no matter what, I guess that equality will prevail.

I come from a very difficult environment. I come from the dark ages. In Venezuela, we face very difficult times. This year, inflation will be more than 2 million per cent. The economy will recede by 27%, and by two thirds in four years. More than 1.5 million Venezuelans are in Colombia. In many ways, Parliament has been annulled. We have not been able to touch any wages since being elected, because the dictatorship cut off Parliament's funds, so we do not have any kind of financial support. None the less, we are there—although not all of us. Thirty-seven of us have fled. Some, including the former president of the National Assembly, are in Colombia and have requested asylum. Others are in prison. Others are at embassies in Venezuela seeking asylum. But the rest of us are still there, fighting for democracy and for free elections. All our parties were declared illegal, so, like all Members of Parliament, I am part of an illegal party. We face a very difficult situation in our country.

I am not a member of any family commission or committee—I am the only woman member of the Committee on Security and Defence. Before, I was part of the Interior Affairs Committee, and I think next year I will be part of the Committee on Economic Affairs. We have to be there—we may make the difference. I am also the only transgender woman to be elected as a parliamentarian in the western hemisphere, and at this moment I am the only one in place in the world. *[Applause.]*

Chair: All I can say is, "Wow!" What a fantastic set of speeches! It was absolutely inspirational and so informative. Thank you all so much for your contributions so far and for all that you will be able to tell us as we go through the course of the day. This is the most fantastic networking opportunity, and it is a great privilege for me to see so many of you here and to hear your stories, so thank you all very much indeed.

In the final session today, which is session 6 in your programmes, there will be an opportunity for all colleagues to speak in the Chamber about what your personal commitments and actions will be after this event. If you would like to speak in the session, please sign up in the Members' Lobby before the end of session 4. We now have tea and coffee available in the Members' Dining Room, and colleagues and volunteers will direct you there. The working groups will then begin at 11.15 in the Committee Rooms upstairs. Again, colleagues and volunteers will guide you to those rooms. This has been a fantastic start. We all look forward to the rest of the day. I wish you every success.

Hermine Patricia Tomaino Ndam Njoya (Member of Parliament, Cameroon): This is not a speech, but women's intuition tells me that this is the right moment to give you the gifts that I brought from Cameroon. I no longer want to carry them, as they are so heavy. The gifts are to say thank you.

Chair: That is superb. Thank you so much.

10.47 am

Sitting suspended.

What difference are women MPs making?

Women's economic empowerment

Ending violence against women and girls

Voluntary family planning: championing women's choices and holding Governments to account

Breaking barriers to ensure at least 12 years of quality education for every girl

[**Maria Miller**, Chair, Women and Equalities Select Committee, Member of Parliament, United Kingdom *took the Chair*]

1.43 pm

Chair: I call our next session to order. Can everybody take their seats? While you are doing that, I will make a slight correction to some of the information you were given earlier today. The event is being livestreamed through the Westminster Foundation for Democracy Facebook Live page, not, as you were told earlier, through YouTube.

Women parliamentarians, it is a great pleasure to welcome you back to this plenary session. My name is Maria Miller, and I became the Conservative Member of Parliament for Basingstoke in 2005. Like many of you, I was the first woman to ever represent my constituency. As elected representatives, we all have the responsibility to make sure we tackle issues that perpetuate any sort of inequality. Particularly as women, we have a responsibility to shape the political agenda in the countries in which we live so that the things that stop women reaching their potential are a thing of the past. A lack of economic empowerment or education, and violence against women: these are problems holding women back the world over, and these are the issues that we are going to be discussing in our next session.

Before we hear from some excellent speakers, may I just make one point? Sometimes, to change things, we need to reshape not just our policies but our Parliaments. Many Parliaments around the world were set up by men for men. We have to recognise that. That is why I campaigned for a Women and Equalities Select Committee to be established for the first time here in Parliament in Westminster in 2015. Too often, I found that the issues that affected women were not well enough understood, did not get debating time here in the House of Commons and did not grab media headlines. Issues creating inequality for women were too often marginalised and ignored. Our Select Committee is helping to change that, and I urge all of you, if you do not have a similar Committee in your country, to consider setting one up and using it as a tool for change.

When I spoke to many of you yesterday, you told me that to change the lives of women in your countries, you wanted to see more economic empowerment and to enable women to take leadership roles—all of the issues we are about to discuss in our plenary session.

We have a number of truly inspirational speakers. Each speaker will have four minutes. As they did before, my colleagues will indicate the time with a yellow card, followed by a red card when your time is up. We want to include as many speakers as possible, so please respect the time limit. I believe that our first speaker is Lana Prlić.

Ms Lana Prlić (Member, Parliamentary Assembly of Bosnia and Herzegovina): Hello everyone. My name is Lana Prlić. I am from Bosnia and Herzegovina, where I am a newly elected Member of Parliament. I am the youngest woman ever elected to my country's Parliament. I am 25. *[Applause.]*

It is a big honour to speak to you and to meet so many amazing women. Thank you for the opportunity to be a part of the conference. When we talk about economic growth and the empowerment of women, we often forget how it is seen. For instance, when you talk about gender equality or the Gender Equality Commission in my country, men, my colleagues or people see that as 20 women in their 50s or 60s talking about how to destroy men in politics. They do not think that women actually do visible jobs and invisible jobs. The invisible jobs are everything that we do in our homes, with our children, with our mothers, with our daughters and with our neighbours and things like that.

They do not see the potential to build a good economy through female empowerment. Why is that? It is because they are not educated, to be honest. We have an older, uneducated generation of male politicians in my country. They change their political identity just to keep their position. Statistically, more men change party than women do. They are always changing party just to stay in power and to hold on to their position.

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, women are the heroes. In 1947, we got the right to vote, which was before even Switzerland. We were part of Yugoslavia then. All women in the old Yugoslav countries got the right to vote. During the war, women were like heroes. Here in London, I saw there is a monument to the women of World War Two. We do not have one. You are all familiar with the genocide that was committed in Srebrenica 25 years ago. No one honours and helps those women, except for on Memorial Day. They are not being helped to keep on track or even to stay alive. They lost a lot.

Bosnia and Herzegovina is part of the Balkans. In the Balkans, we have problems with mentalities. There are big differences and a polarisation between women in rural areas and women in urban areas. I am often thankful that it was my destiny to be born and raised in an urban area. I see women who did not have the opportunity to finish high school because they had to get married to help their family to survive. I am thankful that my parents gave me the opportunity to get educated and to find my path in how I want to contribute to society.

We do not have alimony funds in my country. For instance, I am a child of a single mum. My mum got divorced, because she had a job and somewhere to live apart from my father, but a lot of women in my country do not divorce, and they often suffer violence and so on just to keep their family together.

Chair: Our next speaker is Senator Risa Hontiveros, who is with us today from the Philippines.

Senator Risa Hontiveros (Chair of the Committee on Women, Children, Family Relations and Gender Equality, Philippines): Good afternoon, sisters. Good day, fellow parliamentarians, important guests and dear friends. What a privilege it is to talk before you today.

My country, the Philippines, is on the verge of passing a law expanding paid maternity leave from its current duration of 60 days for normal deliveries and 78 days for caesarean deliveries, to 105 days. This is a truly historic milestone for gender legislation in the Philippines—*[Applause.]* Thank you—I will share that with my sisters at home. It is a milestone not only because our current maternity leave benefit is one of the lowest in the Asia-Pacific region and below the prescribed standard of the International Labour Organisation, but because we, the Akbayan party and other women and labour advocates and champions, believe that the expanded maternity leave law will be a game changer for the economic empowerment of Filipino women workers.

Based on the latest available statistics, there are around 25 million employed women of childbearing age—women between the ages of 19 and 44—in the Philippines. That is about a quarter of the population. The vast majority of those women are minimum-wage earners. In conversations I had with ordinary women workers while I was working on the Bill in the Senate as the Chairperson of the Committee on Women, Children, Family Relations and Gender Equality, I heard at first hand about the difficulties working mothers face under our current maternity leave policy. A dismally low maternity leave benefit has resulted in many women going back to work outside the house before they have fully recuperated from the physical strain of childbirth. *[Interruption.]* The baby agrees.

A maternity leave policy that is not backed by a strong implementation framework has led to many women being discriminated against in hiring policies or demoted to lower positions, or having security of job tenure deliberately withheld. Beyond economic statistics but equally importantly, maternal and infant mortality remain conspicuously high in the Philippines, despite downward trends everywhere else. The number of infants who are exclusively breast-fed after the first month is falling.

The ratified Bill, which was passed by both houses of Congress, also contained innovative provisions for gender equality and economic empowerment. Let me note two. The first is shared parental leave—I am eager to hear about UK sisters' experiences of parental leave sharing, as I understand that is a fairly new innovation here—which allows mums to share seven days of leave with the father, to double the current one week of paternity leave. That may sound like a paltry number of days compared with what sisters in the UK are used to, but we like to think of it as a foot in the door. The second innovation is a 15-day top-up for solo mothers, to give them a total of 120 days. That important innovation takes into account the unique disadvantages faced by solo mums. I am a solo mum, like Ms Prlić's mum.

Friends, I have been asked, "How does one pass progressive gender legislation in a political terrain of toxic masculinity, extrajudicial killings and strongman populism—a terrain many believe to be hostile to the cause of gender equality and women's empowerment?" Aside from the expanded maternity leave law, we managed to move forward our Safe Streets, Workplaces and Public Spaces Act, which for the first time introduces specific penalties for street sexual harassment.

To be more direct, how do we pass laws that are good for women under a President who is bad for women? That is an interesting question, and one that may yield—*[Interruption.]* Okay, this is my last sentence. The sisterhood of women tends to rise when it is under assault, and in the face of hostile challenges the women's movement can only become stronger. The midwife—pun intended—of that will be these pieces of legislation, and hope, solidarity and possibility in these dark times. Thank you very much. Long live women! *[Applause.]*

Chair: Thank you, Risa. Our next speaker is Aida Touma Sliman, who is a Member of Parliament in Israel and head of the Knesset Committee on the Status of Women and Gender Equality.

Aida Touma Sliman: Good afternoon, ladies. Let me start by clarifying something. I am a Member of the Knesset, but I am a Palestinian woman, and I am the first Palestinian MP, woman or man, to head a Committee in our Parliament. *[Applause.]* Perhaps that will help me to explain that when we talk about women's rights, we cannot disconnect that from our political reality. If we are MPs, that means we are politicians. As politicians, we talk about every reality that creates oppression of or discrimination against women, on the basis of not only gender but nationality, economics or whatever. I wanted to make that clear from the beginning, because that is the perspective I brought to chairing the Committee on the Status of Women and Gender Equality in the Knesset. I wanted the voices of those who are not heard—who are silenced and kept away—to be heard inside our Parliament and to be echoed, and I wanted to understand their reality and the oppression they are facing. I include among them Palestinian women, ultra-Orthodox Jewish women and women who face a lot of oppression in the workplace.

When I talk about violence against women, I cannot ignore the fact that I come from a highly militarised country that is still presiding over the last occupation in the world—over the Palestinian people. That affects our lives as women. It affects the Israeli women, the Jewish Israeli women and the Palestinian women. We cannot ignore the fact that weapons are used a lot in the country. One backlash against which my Committee is trying to fight is the plan to enlarge the number of licences for any citizen for private weapons to be used for private purposes. It would put an additional 600,000 weapons in the hands of civilians. As women, we are worried what effect that will have on violence against women and the silencing and terrorising of women in their own homes.

Another issue that my Committee is dealing with is the fact that after 20 years—it is 20 years this year since the introduction of the law against sexual harassment in Israel—we still face a situation in which for 90% of complaints charges are not pressed and the perpetrators are not prosecuted. This issue

needs to be dealt with very quickly, which is why we are pushing for budgeting for the national plan that was created to combat violence against women. It is underfunded and the Government do not support it, so we are fighting for action. We want an emergency plan to combat the different kinds of violence against women. Twenty women are killed every year in Israel, and every year more than 50% of those women are Palestinian citizens of Israel, meaning they are Arab women. They are killed by their spouses or ex-spouses. We need to protect those women and we need a clear agenda for doing so.

There is no way to ignore the fact that there is a backlash. When human rights and democracy are deteriorating in any country, women are the first to feel it. We are facing a new wave of women being excluded from public spaces and a new wave of gender segregation in academic life. We are fighting against it together. This might surprise you, but both Jewish and Arab women inside Israel are fighting it—*[Applause]*—taking into consideration the fact that our reality will never be changed totally and we will not reach our rights as long as the conflict continues. Thank you. *[Applause.]*

Chair: Thank you. Our next speaker is the Member of Parliament from Romania, Oana Bîzgan.

Oana Bîzgan (Member of Parliament, Romania): Ladies, I am so happy to be here. I have been told that I am a childish Member of the Parliament in Romania because I show my happiness. Well, people can say whatever they want; I will keep showing my happiness and I will try to share that with you today, and hopefully with my female colleagues in Romania once I am back there.

I am one of 90 women MPs in Romania. We are a little less than 20% of the Members. That is a very bad number, in my opinion, but it is the first time that we are that many in Romania, so we had better do something with it.

Being a female independent MP in the opposition in Romania, along with being a feminist and a fighter for social justice, is not an easy job. I imagine that a lot of you have the same feelings and experiences. But I take my joy, passion and energy from working together with my colleagues. There is something that gives me more power than I ever thought I would have when I join forces with my female colleagues on a cross-party basis—no matter the political affiliation—and we fight together for women's rights, children's rights and, of course, social justice in general.

We have had great results. We have been training on this for a little more than a year and we have managed, together with the ladies in the Government, to pass the laws that are aligning our local laws with the Istanbul convention. This is a great victory for us. Moreover, we have passed the first law in Romania that punishes harassment, especially street harassment, of women. That is an important achievement, and for the first time we have a clear punishment for the perpetrators.

Also, for the first time in Romania—it is crazy how we have to keep saying “for the first time”—we have proposed two laws on a women-only basis. It was a statement that we wanted to make, and it was also training for us—the women in the Parliament training on working together and proposing draft Bills that

were women-only. Of course, we managed to get the support of our male colleagues, but we produced them. Last Wednesday our first women-only law was voted for unanimously in the General Assembly in Romania. *[Applause.]* Hopefully we will be able to pass other laws that we have already proposed together. Now I think we are ready to join forces further and push this together.

One good thing that we did, which I would like to share with you, may be something that you could implement in your country. This year we have organised in Romania the Girl2Leader campaign, which I hosted. The campaign is supported by the Women Political Leaders Global Forum. I extended an invitation to 31 female colleagues of mine, and we have hosted 31 girls in the Parliament. We did shadowing sessions and helped them to understand what it is like to be an MP. More importantly, it brought us women even closer together.

Finally, what I want to do with my colleagues is to look at them and see the best in them. Most importantly, I want to help them to move forward and to hold hands as we make the change that we all fight for.

Chair: Our next speaker is Marisa Glave.

Marisa Glave (Congresswoman, Peru): Good afternoon, ladies. I am pleased to be here and to share this conference with you. I am from a democratic, feminist, leftist party in Peru. Let me tell you that, in my country, female parliamentarians have fought for our right to live without any violence—at work, at home and on the street.

Women in Peru do not settle. We are more conscious of our right to live not only without any physical violence, but without economical, psychological or cultural violence. In my country there are still shocking figures on violence against women and girls. Seven out of 10 women have suffered different types of violence in their lives. Seven out of 10 women have also reported being victims of some type of sexual harassment on public transport. Peru has the second highest number of rapes in South America. Some 76% of victims are minors, with 34 of the girls and teenagers who were raped falling pregnant.

Our current legislation includes severe penalties for those crimes. However, we still have to work hard on the most subtle types of violence, because those are the first links in the chain of violence. For instance, harassment on the street, at work and at universities has been normalised. I presented a Bill project to regulate preventive measures against harassment, as well as to typify it as a crime. This proposal has been shared by other parliamentarians and by the Government. Since last September, harassment is legally considered a crime. Nevertheless, we still have to fortify the preventive measures.

In Peru, women have the right to be elected as mayors, Members of Parliament and as President, but they do not have any right to disturb the status quo. Women do not have the right to make political mistakes. The media are cruel to women; they not only question and judge us, but sentence us to stay at home. Political harassment against women is like an alert. It is a message that, if women want to live in a man's world, we have to accept outrage. Men, listen to us carefully: we are not going to accept any more violence in our lives. *[Applause.]*

To illustrate the political harassment in Peru, two out of five women in authority have suffered these types of aggressions. The first report on political harassment against women in 2014, presented by the NGO Transparencia, pointed out that, from 115 testimonies, 51 typified as harassment. Because of that, we need a defensive tool—we all do. In the Parliament, at this moment, we have two Bill projects concerning political harassment. It is imperative that they are approved.

In conclusion, I am sure that the experiences and knowledge shared in this international conference for women Members of Parliament will help us to fortify our strategies at home to achieve what wise woman declared almost a century ago. Let us join efforts, sisters, for a world where we are socially equal, humanly different and totally free.

Chair: Our next speaker is Heidi Nordby Lunde, who is a Member of Parliament from Norway.

Heidi Nordby Lunde (Member of Parliament, Norway): “Dad, can a man be Prime Minister in Norway?” That question was put to a friend of mine by his son, last year, because right now children in Norway are growing up with a Parliament in which there is 40% women’s representation, and a centre-right Government with 50% representation, led by Prime Minister Mrs Erna Solberg of the Conservative party. After hearing all your powerful speeches today, I have just had to rewrite all my notes, because I was a bit self-conscious about how privileged we are in Norway, but that did not come by itself. All the things you say, and the struggles you have shown today, are our continuing struggles, although they may be on a lesser scale. We stand on the shoulders of women and men before us, who went through the struggles you are going through. I am trying to show you that there is a way and that it is possible to succeed.

It has taken time, from the woman who championed the right to vote and was spat on and attacked by men in the streets in 1913. Things are not that different for women on the internet today. The first family planning clinic was started by a women’s movement in the ’20s. They gave counselling and assistance to prevent unwanted pregnancies, promoting women’s rights and women’s health. These clinics also championed the right to safe abortion, which was legalised 50 years later in 1978. We are still fighting for it today. It takes time and persistence but, looking at you, I am sure we at least have persistence.

Family planning is about more than unwanted pregnancies. Voluntary family planning is helping people make better choices. A renewed focus on family planning came in the ’60s in Norway, with more contraceptives available. In the ’70s we really saw women entering the workforce. With this came the need for childcare and kindergartens, which now, 40 years later, are heavily subsidised. Then you have equal rights in relation to parental care because, as we acknowledge in Norway, men have children too.

All this can be done if you also have the right economic growth, taxation and public investment in health and education. This gives opportunities to all, so every measurement hangs together. Progress is not linear and it takes time, but there is a linearity from women getting the right to vote to the Norway of today. According to the UN, Norway has ranked highest for the standard of living, life expectancy and education 13 times in a row. According to Save the Children,

Norway is one of the best countries in the world for children to grow up in. In other words, empowering women to shape their own lives through voluntary family planning does not have to be a contradiction to family values; it is the opposite. Family planning gives us the best opportunity to care for ourselves and our families.

Whether or not you call yourselves feminists, as you should, if you argue with people who think women's liberation has gone too far—which it has not—tell them, "It's the economy, stupid." The former Prime Minister of Norway, now the Secretary-General of NATO, Mr Jens Stoltenberg, once said that it was not oil that made Norway rich, but the participation of women in the workforce. In other words, empowering women through family planning can lift not only families, but entire nations, out of poverty. "It's she-conomy, stupid!"

The chain of good policies starts with the rule of law, to provide, protect and enforce necessary sexual and reproductive healthcare and rights. We invest in public healthcare and reproductive health, including the accessibility of knowledge, subsidised contraception and regulated safe abortions. Co-operate with non-governmental organisations, because they give great advice on how to improve. We still do co-operate with them.

Norway is pledged to play a leading role in this work globally, at a time when this agenda has come under pressure, and we will continue to do so, because we women grab opportunities. So maybe one day your daughter will be asking you "Mum, can a man be Prime Minister?" in your country. Good luck with all your work, and thank you.

Chair: I have to say that there was a part of my childhood when I thought that leaders could only be women; we had a female Prime Minister and a Queen at the same time, so we have had a similar situation, though not often enough. I now call Marie Rose Romée Sawadogo Ouedraogo, who is a Member of Parliament from Burkina Faso.

Marie Rose Romée Sawadogo Ouedraogo (Member of Parliament, Burkina Faso): In the constitution of Burkina Faso it is recognised that the promotion of gender is a factor for achieving equality between men and women. Thus in this area of life, equality, rights and opportunity must be guaranteed to all citizens without any gender discrimination. However, the liberal context for FP continues to demonstrate some of the most challenging sexual and reproductive health and rights indicators since the war. The country has a very young population: 67% are under 25, almost half of whom are under 15 years of age. The fertility rate is very high, with 117 children per 1,000 women for the age group 15 to 19.

To address this situation, the national family planning week was implemented in Burkina Faso. This special week is proving to be an excellent strategy for promoting FP through advocacy with political and administrative authorities and customary, religious and community leaders at all levels. Social mobilisation and the increase of the offer of reproductive health services and FP benefits people, especially those living in rural areas.

In addition, the NFP is also a great opportunity for the participants to opt for free services such as various contraceptives and counselling. Important

achievements have been made thanks to this. At the political level is the sanctioning of political commitment under the legislative and regulatory framework, taking policy measures to improve availability and access to FP services. The permanent contribution of the state budget to the purchase of contraceptive products by the creation of regular budget lines seems to soften it. However, there are still challenges in regard to family planning and sufficient funding for the FP programme. The low quality of FP services offered due to the shortage of qualified personnel for FP is a challenge, as is the lack of services to meet the need of young people for RH/FP and the limited exploitation of opportunities such as post-operation and post-partum care.

Insufficient demand for FP services relates to religious and customary FP perception and men's reluctance to implement the FP programme. There is inadequate use of health information for decision making and planning. The importance of family planning is well established in terms of its impact on the reduction of maternal and infant mortality. The women MPs of Burkina Faso organised around the gender caucus and set up a network of women parliamentarians to provide information, education and communication action for the customary, religious and political authorities for behavioural changes favourable to the FP.

Identification campaigns for men as gender ambassadors will be conducive to advocacy with their peers for a better acceptance of FP in their respective families and communities, because the male obstacle to FP remains. It is in this sense that we as women parliamentarians have to ensure that non-discriminatory laws for our girls and women are voted for. That is our mandate as women MPs. We can do that and we will. Thank you for your kind attention.

Chair: I now have the great pleasure of inviting Shiva Maya Tumbahangphe, Deputy Speaker of the House of Representatives in Nepal, to address the House. As my constituency has a number of people who were resident in Nepal and are now living in my community, it is a great pleasure to have you here.

Shiva Maya Tumbahangphe (Deputy Speaker, House of Representatives, Nepal): Dear Chair, distinguished participants, namaste. I am thankful for the opportunity to participate in this session. The topic of today's plenary session—breaking down barriers to education—is the perfect theme to discuss in today's forum. It is deeply associated with sustainable development goal 4, on ensuring “inclusive and equitable quality education” and promoting “lifelong learning opportunities for all”.

The main essence of this discussion is about improving the education of half the world's population, and reducing unequal behaviour and activities in our society, our country, and countries around the world. Education is one of the most critical ways of empowering women. Offering girls basic education is the only sure way of giving them much greater power to create a better future. There is a great saying: “If you educate a man, you educate an individual. But if you educate a woman, you educate a family.”

In most underdeveloped countries, such as Nepal, cultural and religious beliefs, a lack knowledge of the benefits of education, gender disparity and poor infrastructure are the main barriers to girls' education. My country is working on

harmonising education policies to reduce the inequalities that prevail in Nepalese society. The constitution of Nepal contains various inclusive provisions for education. The right to education and the rights of children are the fundamental rights directly related to education in the constitution. Under the state policy on citizens' basic needs, it is the obligation of the state to provide education as a basic need. It helps to educate girls from different social origins, geographies and sections of society, in order to mainstream them.

Policy alone is not a solution to these issues; there must be a way of implementing policy. Nepal recently launched a five-year school sector development plan, with a vision of producing the human resource needed to elevate it from "least-developed country" status by 2022 and achieve "middle-income country" status by 2030. The programme aims to ensure that the education system is inclusive and equitable, in terms of access, participation and learning outcomes, with a special focus on reducing disparities for groups that are identified as having the lowest levels of access, participation and learning outcomes.

We all share the view that Parliament, as the representative body of the people, needs to focus on girls' education through laws, budgetary sanctions and oversight of the Government's policies and programmes. I am fully confident that, through our consolidated effort in this conference, we can do more to explore women's political leadership and promote girls' education.

Chair: It was New Zealand that led the way on women's right to vote, so it is a great pleasure to invite Nikki Kaye, who is Member of Parliament for Auckland Central, to address us.

Nikki Kaye (Opposition Spokesperson for Education, New Zealand): Tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou katoa. I greet you in the language of the indigenous people of New Zealand. I thank the Leader of the House, the Mother of the House and the International Development Secretary for bringing us together. This is an opportunity to come together and produce some tangible measures. We are stronger if we fight not only in our own country but together abroad.

Listening to the speeches today, I realised how fortunate I am to be born in a nation where women are valued, loved, educated and empowered. How can something so simple be so hard? We still have many challenges, but I am very proud of my country, New Zealand. One hundred and twenty-five years ago, New Zealand became the first country in the world to give women the right to vote. The Duchess of Sussex, Meghan Markle, recently summed it up by saying, "Bravo, New Zealand!" We have had three woman Prime Ministers. Currently, our Prime Minister, our Governor General and our Chief Justice are all women.

We must fight together so that equality is not the exception but the birth right of every girl in the world. New Zealand's leading suffragette, Kate Sheppard, did not stop fighting in 1893 just because women in New Zealand got the vote. She travelled the world, helping other nations. We must learn from her and her legacy. We know that inequality crosses country borders. Issues of sexual harassment, bullying, violence, pay and equality may manifest themselves in

different ways and very different severities in our countries. However, there will be common solutions.

There is no greater lever to break down inequality than education. The young woman who is able to read and write is able to get a job. The woman who is educated is able to leave an abusive relationship. I have been privileged to be a Member of Parliament for 10 years and a Cabinet Minister for almost half that time. As Associate Minister of Education and Minister of Education, I have been struck by how inadequate some of the solutions I propose may seem to many of you, who struggle even to ensure that women in your countries attend school, because of violence and many other reasons.

Let me share with you some things we have focused on in our nation. The first is the power of technology. I have been involved in huge investments to roll out technology, and I have seen young women who did not have access to science and technology being able to compete with their male counterparts. That is crucial for economic development. We have also been able to invest in some of our most disadvantaged young people from ethnic minorities—Māori and Pasifika students. We made huge social investments, but also focused on numeracy and literacy. We have also invested in areas such as anti-bullying and in preventing issues such as depression and anxiety. We have a crisis of confidence among some of our young women in New Zealand. I know that those are issues you face internationally, too.

There is so much more to do. Many of you know what it is like to be elected and at the table but not always to be heard or to have a strong voice. We must change that. May you all have courage and confidence in your pursuit of equality. The future of young women in the world depends on it.

Two years ago, I was diagnosed with breast cancer. My Prime Minister refused to accept my resignation. I take a moment to acknowledge him and all the men who will fight for all of us in the future—there are some great men out there in politics who do that. I also acknowledge the women out there with breast cancer who are fighting.

I want to leave you with a famous quote from Kate Sheppard, our suffragette who helped not only in New Zealand but abroad. She said, "All that separates, whether of race, class, creed, or sex, is inhuman, and must be overcome." *[Applause.]*

Chair: Our final speaker in this session is Ms Lindiwe Zulu, who comes to us from South Africa, where she is Minister of Small Business Development.

Lindiwe Zulu (Minister of Small Business Development, South Africa): Thank you very much. I must apologise—as women, we like multitasking, so I scheduled another meeting. It took longer than anticipated and I got stuck in traffic.

First and foremost, I thank the organisers for bringing us all together here. I hope this is the first of many such conferences to come. We represent thousands and thousands of women who do not have the same privilege as us—the

privilege to get on a plane to come here and speak. If a hand needs to be raised to host the next conference, I would like to raise mine. *[Applause.]*

Secondly, we talk about women's economic empowerment, but in South Africa women are far from being empowered economically. Politically, yes, we have the right to vote, we can be voted into Parliament and we can be elected or promoted into any position, but some things continue to hold us back. One is unity among ourselves, in supporting each other in the space in which we work. Another thing is ensuring that we all create a conducive environment for women, not forgetting the women in informal settlements and rural areas, who do not see life the way I do.

I must say that the privilege for me is the fact that I participated in the liberation struggle. From a South African perspective, the current Government in the current environment has to talk about the role of women in building a new nation. Sometimes people take it for granted: "Ah, yes, South Africa; we are free. We have Mandela"—may his soul rest in peace—and so on. But the bottom line is that women are still very far from seeing the fruits of that freedom.

The good thing about it is that South African women decided to participate in the struggle long before 1994 and liberation in South Africa. The women of South Africa decided during the liberation struggle that they would not wait for their freedom before they started talking about their liberation and emancipation. So for organisations like my organisation, the African National Congress, women pulled themselves together into a women's league. On economic issues, they said "We don't only want to be politically free; we also want economic freedom."

So as the struggle was being carried out prior to 1994, women came together to say what the future should look like for women. With the decision to ensure that political freedom comes with economic freedom, women in Parliament, in every corner where we are, make sure that women's economic emancipation and empowerment happens. This is how we make it a little bit easier for ourselves. First, we need the critical mass of having so many women in Parliament. Without that, it is almost useless—but we have that critical mass. I am the Minister of Small Business Development—the first one in South Africa; but I am supported in Parliament by what we call the Portfolio Committee. The person who chairs it happens to be a woman—a woman who understands what we need to see for the empowerment of women at an economic level. What I am trying to say is that as Minister of Small Business Development I can focus on supporting women and ensuring that the policy positions also include women, and lifting women.

By the way, 50% of all programmes in my Department have to go to women, and that is a must. The Portfolio Committee Chair gives support; she is a woman and she has got a better understanding of the struggles of women from an economic point of view.

When freedom came in South Africa, again, from a financial point of view, it wasn't the women that benefited. We were able to go and vote, and all that, but from a financial point of view, there is still far to go; the banks still don't look at you, as a woman, as having potential. They still ask you about your collateral, and a whole lot of other things, but one thing I can say is that as women

collectively working together we are breaking those barriers. We are not about to stop. Thank you.

Chair: As it happens, we have a few extra minutes. I don't know whether I can call one more speaker from the floor.

Emine Sare Aydın Yılmaz (Member of Parliament, Turkey): Thank you very much for organising this, and letting us come together. While listening to the speeches that these beautiful ladies have been giving, I have felt so proud. I think we are very strong, and have made progress and are getting stronger around the world.

I am trying to get attention for refugee issues. There are ladies here from all around the world, and we have common issues—the refugee issue. In the world people are moving from one location to another, under different conditions. In the Middle East, the Syrian war has been going on for seven years. There are 3.5 million refugees in Turkey, and 80% of them are women and children, who have been through a lot of things that we cannot imagine. Before I became an MP, I was working for an NGO called the Women and Democracy Association, and we established a centre and were giving psychological and legal counselling. Also, a lot of refugees are trying to take the road from the Middle East, through Turkey, to Europe and other countries all around the world.

What I am saying is that while we have been focusing on our national issues, we have taken attention off this global issue that has been going on for seven years. In my country, we are trying to implement integration policies, because we are providing people with housing, healthcare, some education and food, but it is not enough for them. The burden that they are holding is so heavy. That is what I want to say to us as women from different countries. There are sisters of ours awaiting our power, awaiting our attention, who are under conditions of war, who are on the road, who are discriminated against and who face violence, harassment and everything else. Thank you so much. *[Applause.]*

Chair: Thank you. I am breaking all the rules here, but I am going to take three very short contributions. We have to finish in three minutes' time, so it's one minute each.

Rudina Hajdari (Member of Parliament, Albania):. Madam Chair and dear Members of Parliament, it is a pleasure to be here. I, too, am a young parliamentarian, in Albania. This is my first elected term. Being here is a great honour. It will really take us a long way when we go back home.

I would like to stress that the thing that unites us today is our struggle. No matter where we are and which country we come from, we have all come here because we are women facing struggle. In Albania, 60% to 70% of women face violence—physical violence, mental violence or even sexual violence. So for me, joining politics was a real motivation to work for women's rights. I have a background in human rights, and previously I lived in the United States. Given that a lot of young men and women are, unfortunately, leaving Albania, I thought that perhaps this would be a great step for Albania: we need our young population to come back and build our country, because our aspiration is to join

the European Union and to be a European country. Hopefully, with a joint effort, we will be able to do that very soon.

I would also like to stress that Albania has made great progress when it comes to women's rights. There are 140 Members of Parliament, and 40 of us are women. But what that misses is that these spaces unfortunately have no power. To fill those spaces with power, we have to fight more. As women are struggling in Albania, we see that we are not doing the right job. We need to do more as women, and I hope that we will continue to work for women every day. Thank you so much. *[Applause.]*

Chair: We come now to our final two contributions. Could you keep your speeches to a minute each, please?

Jessie Kabwila (Member of Parliament, Malawi): I will get straight to the point. First, I would like to register the fact that we are very happy to be in the UK when the Prime Minister is a lady. It has to be said that sometimes in feminist work, we do not celebrate ourselves enough. We have come here and the Prime Minister had time to meet us yesterday, and it is important that we do not take that for granted. The sisterhood is global, and we should recognise that.

Secondly, if parliaments always looked like this one does today—everyone watching on Facebook can see this—there would be more colour and beauty. That has to be said. In other words, we need to overturn what is said against us. Most people seem to think that the more beautiful you look, the dumber you are. That is not true. We are the only species that is beautiful and intelligent at the same time. I am just joking, but the key thing is that the personal is political. That is what is important. We need parliaments to deal with the personal.

Finally—this is a crucial point coming from a country that had the first woman president in the SADC—we underrate the backlash that we experience when we break through the ceiling. Now anyone who wants to be the President of Malawi is reminded of Joyce Banda as if everything she did was a failure, which is not true. Also, it is not as if all men have always done the right thing. They have made so many mistakes, but nobody says that no man should ever be president again. We need to plan for the backlash.

Those of us who are in politics, let us stop apologising for being emotional. Every time you speak and have an opinion, they say that you are being emotional. Know that you are striking a chord. Let us do the politics of saving lives; politics that goes beyond parties and actually saves people's lives. *[Applause.]*

Chair: I am enjoying the fact that we are getting some unscripted contributions. I call our last speaker.

Aissata Tall Sall (Member of Parliament, Senegal): I am a Member of Parliament in Senegal. I was a Minister, and I am now running to be the first female president in Senegal. *[Applause.]* Thank you. The main problem for us women is political empowerment. We must struggle for that and we must trust ourselves. If we trust ourselves, maybe we can do it. I am sure that we can. We need to go ahead, lead ourselves and change the future. It is possible.

Chair: I am sorry I could not take more speakers from the floor today, but it was a great opportunity to get some people involved who were not otherwise going to be able to do so. We have had a fantastic set of contributions from a groundbreaking set of women. There were so many firsts talked about. Can we say thank you again to our speakers? *[Applause.]*

We are now moving on to our next set of workshops. You have your papers in front of you. Please make your way back up to the Committee Rooms and join the workshop that you decided to take part in. Thank you for your contributions to this part of the session.

2.43 pm

Sitting suspended.

Changing the future of women in Parliament

[**Rushanara Ali**, Member of Parliament, United Kingdom, *took the Chair*]

4.21 pm

Chair: Good afternoon and welcome back to the Chamber for the final session of the day. My name is Rushanara Ali; I am the Member of Parliament for Bethnal Green and Bow, here in London, and vice-chair of the Westminster Foundation for Democracy.

I have a few quick announcements. This is the last session of the day, so let's liven it up, ladies—but we need to keep it clean, since we are being filmed. Do keep it lively, though. It has been inspirational to hear all the amazing speeches and stories. You can carry on tweeting live updates on social media with the hashtag #WomenMPsoftheWorld.

We want to get through as many speakers as possible, so your speeches are now limited to two minutes. That is what happens to us in the House when there are too many speakers. *[Interruption.]* Order. *[Laughter.]* You can keep an eye on the clock, and our two fantastic Clerks, Olivia and Carolyn, will use their yellow and red cards again to keep us to time. Can we give them a big round of applause? *[Applause.]*

Thank you all for the pledges that you have made to take action. Please do take a look at the Call to Action document, which will have all the outcomes of today's conference.

Sisters, it is a great honour to chair the final plenary session of this historic event in this place, which many call the mother of Parliaments. I would like to start by thanking the longest-serving female MP, who we call the Mother of the House: the right hon. and learned Harriet Harman, whose idea it was to bring us all together in this momentous year for these celebrations. Harriet was elected in 1982, which was also the year I arrived in this country from Bangladesh with my family at the age of seven. At the time, as you heard earlier, only 3% of MPs in this Parliament were women. My mother and I would certainly never have imagined that I would be a Member of Parliament by 2020. We are incredibly grateful to Harriet Harman and her generation of extraordinary parliamentarians, here and around the world, for making it possible for us to follow in their footsteps. Thank you, Harriet.

I thank the Leader of the House, the right hon. Andrea Leadsom, and Secretary of State Penny Mordaunt for their inspirational speeches and for making this amazing conference happen. I also thank the officials from all the organisations that have worked together to make this event happen on the centenary of the Representation of the People Act.

In the UK 100 years ago, women could not sit here on these benches. Nor did they have the right to vote. Today we see a different image: a truly inspiring one with women MPs from all over the world sitting on our benches. The suffragette movement has been an inspiration to women not only in this country, but to women across the world. We would not be here today without their courage and

sacrifice. For me, as the first person of British Bangladeshi heritage and one of the first three Muslim women MPs to have been elected to this Parliament, I owe a huge personal debt of gratitude to the suffragettes of the east end of London, the area that I now represent. The suffragettes risked imprisonment, violence, the torture of force-feeding, the pain of having their children taken away from them, and even death. To those women we owe so much.

Over the last 100 years there have been so many women politicians who have paid the ultimate price with their lives. As you have heard, only two years ago we lost our friend and colleague, Jo Cox, who was murdered by a far right extremist. We remember her today and miss her dearly. I know that if she were with us today she would be the heart and soul of this gathering. She would have been incredibly proud to see that this week the first native American women and the first Muslim women were elected in the US Congress. *[Applause.]* It was a truly inspiring image and the best response to the politics of hate and misogyny that is taking a hold in the politics of that country and around the world, and it highlights why we all need to work together and redouble our efforts to fight hatred, misogyny and extremism where it exists.

We have achieved so much in our different countries, but there is so much more to do if we are to achieve equality between men and women in our economic, social and political lives. Today over 800 million people are trapped in extreme poverty; 1 billion people suffer from hunger; and violence against women and girls continues to be a global epidemic, with rape being used as a weapon of war in conflicts around the world. As women, we have been and must continue to be in the frontline in eradicating these injustices and inequalities. I have heard time and again today about the need to use our strength to charge ahead, work together and change this century to make sure that that suffering is ended. Change only happens when women organise together. We will and we must stand in solidarity with women around the world, fighting injustices in our neighbourhoods, communities and nations.

Together we have come a long way, but we know that we have to travel a long way ahead to end those injustices that blight us and our societies in this century, because that will be the true legacy of the suffragette movement around the world and here in this country. Thank you for all that you are doing. I will now move on to our first speaker: Anne Spiegel from Germany.

Anne Spiegel (Minister for Families, Women, Youth, Integration and Consumer Protection, Rheinland-Pfalz, Member of the Bundesrat, Germany): Dear ladies from around the world, I am so happy to be here. Thank you so much for making this happen because we can send a strong sign to the world that we want equality, and we will not give up before that becomes reality.

This year we celebrate the centenary of women's right to vote in the UK and also, by the way, in Germany. Women's suffrage marks the historic turning point for women's political participation. For me it is also an inspiring example of the assertiveness and courage of women determined to achieve a goal against strong resistance. We have heard today that many women in this room have to fight day by day for their rights against strong resistance. I can only say that I support you and I hope you can move forward in your countries.

Less than 100 years ago it was unimaginable for women to hold such positions of power, but today, in both this country and my own, a woman, not a man, leads the nation. However, for all that progress, we still have a very long way to go if we wish to reach true equality. I think, for example, of sexism and discrimination, of equal pay and equal career opportunities, and of fair distribution of employment and family care. Strangely, if a man has a family and a political career, that is okay, but if a woman has a family and a political career, they are criticised and questioned. I have four small children, and I can say it is possible to have a family and a political career. *[Applause.]*

The long struggle for women's rights and the struggle of all the men and women who have fought for equality over the past 100 years obliges us to say, "We will not step back into the shadows. We shall not return to the past." There is so much power—women's power—in this room. Let's carry that power back to our home countries, and let's make this world a better place. *[Applause.]*

Chair: Thank you. Our next speaker is Assiatou Bah Epouse Diallo from Guinea.

Assiatou Bah Epouse Diallo (Member, National Assembly, Guinea): I thank you all—the organisers and every one of you—for all the beautiful moments we have spent together today. Please, let's not let the flame and the positive energy that have emanated from today die.

I have only two minutes, but I realise most of you do not even know where Guinea is, so I want to brief you a little about the country. It is a tiny country with 11 million inhabitants. We are rich in natural resources. We are second in the world for bauxite, and we have everything else, too—I will not name them all, but we have iron, diamonds, gold, and so on—but still, we are fighting to have electricity and water. The source of all the rivers in most west African countries is in Guinea, but when you turn on your tap, you do not get water. We have all those problems, not to mention the obvious difficulties, such as poverty, that most African countries face.

Having said that, I want you to know that women in Guinea make up almost 52% of the population and play a very important role in the socioeconomic development of the country. First, they are active in the agricultural sector, where they produce 60% to 80% of the basic foods. Despite their demographic weight, they represent only 9% of the workforce in the modern sector. They are found more in precarious jobs in the informal sector, which are painful, poorly paid and do not have any social protection.

Women are under-represented not only in public and political life, but in decision-making positions. For example, in the Parliament, we are 25 women out of 114 Members. In the Government, we are five out of 37. At the Supreme Court, we are five out of 40. At the Economic and Social Council, we are 10 out of 35. Only one of the 14 parliamentary Committees is chaired by a woman—*[Interruption.]* I could give you a whole list of statistics, but I do not have the time.

It was when we saw how the governing bodies of the National Assembly were, that we women decided: "This is enough—we have to get together and fight for our own cause." We created what we call the Forum des Femmes Parlementaires

de Guinée—FOFPAG. Fortunately, all these institutions—UNDP, UNICEF, the UN; name them all—help us in all the actions we want to undertake. Most of the time we are fighting for the basic—

Chair: Order.

Assiatou Bah Epouse Diallo: No—really? I waited so long!

Chair: It's been four minutes. I am so sorry—you will have to wrap up. Thank you very much. We will continue the conversation in the evening. Our next speaker is from Afghanistan: Elay Ershad. Please stick to time.

Elay Ershad (Member of Parliament, Lower House, Afghanistan): I thank the organisers of this wonderful event. I am not going to be able to implement my plans and strategies in Afghanistan due to war, but I have the privilege of talking in such an important place in front of all these wonderful and strong women.

Before I came here, I asked all my constituents on Facebook what I should say, and what I should share with the UK and all these Members of Parliament. All of them had just one request, which I will soon share with you, but before sharing their request I wanted to introduce myself briefly. When I was a kid, my father, my brothers and my uncles were killed by the Government. We were raised by my mother—I have four sisters. We had a tough time but our mother kept sending us to school. *[Applause.]*

When I came here, among all of you, I felt so isolated, lonely, and jealous, actually. Please do not get me wrong—it was not because I was among strong women. I was isolated because everyone is talking about equal rights, but we as Afghans cannot even dream of them. We Afghans cannot even think about equal rights; we just think about security, and our young generation that are being killed, day by day and every day.

When we talk about equal rights, how can I forget the mother who went to work—she was a cleaner—and when she came back home all her six children were killed? We need security. We just need peace.

That is why I am going to share my constituents' request. To all the representatives of countries, especially the UK—a strong country that has always supported us in education and everything—my constituents just have one request. Afghanistan is fighting a proxy war. It is not our war. It is the war of strong countries and neighbouring countries. It is not our war. The Taliban had just one supporter. Now they have four—four countries are supporting them. Is it okay if they support terrorism because they want to defeat other terrorists? No, it's not going to work like that. If we do not come together and fight terrorism we will not even be able to think about our rights. Dear representatives of countries, please—if we do not defeat terrorism in Afghanistan it will spread. It will spread through the region, and even to Europe and to America. Please come together. Let's fight terrorism, and let's defeat them. *[Applause.]*

Chair: Thank you very much. Our next speaker is from Greece: Evy Christofilopoulou.

Evy Christofilopoulou (Member of Parliament, Greece): The first thing I want to say is a big thank you to all our UK sisters and to the organisations that helped this conference take place. As we are in the closing session, I want to share with you my thoughts and what I will take back home to Greece. Our discussions and our exchange of views have strengthened my conviction that we women can change the world in as far as democracy, social justice and less and less violence among people are concerned.

I have heard so many of you from countries where equality is so well established that one can be jealous, and others from countries where women are still struggling. My country is perhaps in the middle: we are still not there and we have a long way to go. Problems are country specific and policy solutions can have the aspect of Greece or the aspect of Afghanistan—we have just heard our sister speak—but on the other hand, we share common problems and there are common policy solutions.

What comes to my mind is that, as we women are multitaskers, we have learned to do several things—to raise families, study, go to work, and then come into politics. I am thinking of all the women in Greece who convinced me, years ago, to leave my career as an academic and a professional and get into politics—*[Interruption.]* I am going to close in half a minute. I am thinking of all those women. It is important for us to keep sharing these experiences and to network together. I call for this conference to happen again: once in Asia, once in Europe and once in America and go round the globe.

Members: And in Africa.

Evy Christofilopoulou: And in Africa—of course. Let us unite in that. Thank you.

Chair: Thank you. Our next speaker is Sarah Flood from Saint Lucia.

Sarah Flood (Government Minister, Saint Lucia): Thank you. I have some notes here, but I will be very quick, given the time. I thank the organisers for the excellent hospitality we have received since we have been here.

I would like to raise two points and I hope I will not be hung, drawn and quartered for raising them. In a forum such as this, where so many issues regarding women have been brought up, particularly the issue of reproductive healthcare, I would like to raise two issues that I hope do not get left out of the debate just because we do not like hearing about them.

The first is the effect of abortions on women, which has to enter the debate. Post-abortion syndrome is a real issue. If we really want to deal with reproductive healthcare in a comprehensive way that addresses all the needs of women, that has to enter the debate. We cannot remain silent on it.

The second point is the whole question of gender/sex selection. A lot of our girls never have the chance to see life; they are aborted just because they are girls. Girls become women, if they are allowed to grow. I hope that that is also not forgotten in the debate, because if we as women cannot protect the most voiceless of us, we will not protect women in general. I thank you for that.

Chair: Thank you. Our next speaker is Nafisa Shah from Pakistan.

Nafisa Shah (Member, National Assembly, Pakistan): I will try to make one or two points in two minutes—or two and a half. Good afternoon, women MPs of the world. My name is Nafisa Shah. This is my third term in Parliament, and my first term elected through general election and not party lists. I am happy to report that in almost every polling station result, women's votes for me outnumbered male votes.

My country, Pakistan, voted in the first, youngest and most inspirational woman Prime Minister of the Islamic world nearly 30 years ago: Benazir Bhutto. She was the first to give birth when she was Prime Minister—I am not sure that she took the maternity leave she was entitled to. In the 2007 elections, as she stood up to challenge the militants and extremists, she was tragically assassinated. In 2008, following the year of her assassination, we set up a women's parliamentary caucus in her memory, with the aim of enhancing women's visibility and voices by joint action and by uniting on a minimum agenda on women's rights. The caucus spearheaded legislation that expanded the rights of women in the workplace and set up rights commissions, but most importantly, it became a site of consensus building. As a strategy, it involved our male colleagues, too.

Today, I am very happy to be one of the very privileged 100 women from across the world who are here celebrating the 100th year of women's suffrage. I thank the organisers for this opportunity. I am also humbled, because even as this event aims to celebrate the past, it is grounded in and concerned with the urgency of the present predicament of women and girls. I find a lot of resonance between this experience and the women's parliamentary caucus that I helped to establish. The value of this event, like that of the caucus, is in shaping a collective voice and a collective agenda.

As women, perhaps we need to present, through this forum, a different model of leadership based on teamwork, collective decisions, collective forums and collective processes. Going forward, I suggest that we make Women MPs of the World a global movement—a platform for empowerment of women MPs particularly and women generally. As with the caucus, I recommend that we agree on a minimum agenda and consensus building as a strategy.

My first recommendation for the agenda is to empower women MPs ourselves. Women MPs face discrimination and harassment, even when they become Prime Ministers. Even though women have become visible through party lists, the list system has become the basis of the very discrimination that we challenge. Our male colleagues call such seats "charity seats" and remind women every day that they are not the real representatives. Last Parliament, I made a law to ensure political parties select and nominate women to contest general seats, but it backfired badly: political parties nominated women for losing seats. I leave the issue to you, women MPs of the world, as a work in progress.

Chair: Thank you so much. Our next speaker, from Barbados, is Cynthia Forde.

Cynthia Forde (Minister of People Empowerment and Elder Affairs, Member of Parliament, Barbados): I want to say thank you very much for this privilege. It has been a wonderful learning experience to know of all the challenges that we have and the synergies that can be developed as a result of hearing one another and networking with one another. I want to say how grateful I am for the privilege of taking back home some of these opinions, to see how best we in our part of the world, the Caribbean, can assist Members or other persons in the world who have tremendous challenges that are different from ours. There are peculiarities, but there are also challenges and other successes that I am sure we can help with. The war, the strife and the exodus of people that we see on television every day are not comfortable for any human being, whether we are in them or not. We therefore sympathise and empathise with those countries. Let us see how we can work together.

My emphasis is on paying more attention to persons living with HIV/AIDS. It is really very important that we get them medication and that we expose the issue so that we can be sensitised to it in our countries. Otherwise, the high level of stigma and discrimination will keep it underground and people will not get treatment. They will still have sexual endeavours, and the disease will spiral.

Another priority is poverty, which we have also heard a lot about. We know that education and other support systems will help to lift our people out of poverty. I want to say how happy I am about that. Those who would have died in poverty may instead take our places as the leaders of the future.

Finally, I emphasise love, care and attention towards those from the LGB community. At the end of the day, we are all human beings. We have our differences, we have our pride and we have our achievements, but we cannot be discriminating against others. We have to learn to tolerate, empathise and uplift them, because they too are human beings.

Chair: Our next speaker, from Uganda, is Jovah Kamateeka.

Jovah Kamateeka (Member of Parliament, Uganda): Madam Chairperson, honourable women Members of Parliament, honourable women of the world, I am Jovah Kamateeka, the first woman Member of Parliament for my district of Mitooma and founder chairperson of the Human Rights Committee of our Parliament. I congratulate the UK and us all on 100 years of women's suffrage.

Chapter four of Uganda's constitution guarantees human rights. It gives 30% positive discrimination to women in all leadership positions. The Human Rights Committee was created in 2012 and given the mandate to ensure that all Parliament's business is human rights compliant. We hold the Government accountable for the implementation of chapter four and national and international obligations. The committee was given a wide mandate, so we set out immediately to build capacity for members, and we published a parliamentary checklist for human rights compliance, to ensure that all committees and members of parliament were involved in vetting Government human rights programmes.

I thank the British High Commission in Uganda, the civil society organisations and the national institution for human rights, which is the Uganda Human Rights

Commission, which helped us to achieve that. As a committee, we visit detention places to ensure that our prisoners, including women, have their rights. Some of those women are incarcerated with their children. We work with the women's caucus in Parliament and other parliamentary committees such as the committee on gender and equal opportunities, to fight for women's rights, especially reproductive rights, education for the girl child, children's rights in general and adolescent rights, to ensure that adolescents have sexuality education that is in tune with the social and cultural values, norms and aspirations of the people of Uganda.

The Parliament of Uganda has 161 women members, of 459. Of those women, 21 are directly elected and competed with other women. We have a woman Speaker, as you know, and the whips of the parties are women. Together, we have achieved a lot, including the Domestic Violence Act, Prohibition of Female Genital Mutilation Act and universal education to ensure that the girl child remains in school. *[Applause.]*

Chair: If we want to get more speakers in, I will need you to follow the red signal, please. If you do not, I will stand up and say, as our Speaker does, "Order." I know that you have amazing stories to tell so I feel conflicted. Our next speaker is Dima Tahboub from Jordan.

Dima Tahboub (Member of Parliament, Jordan): It is an honour to be a part of this mosaic of women. In 2021 we will celebrate 100 years since the foundation of Jordan. Today, we have seven women Ministers and 20 women in Parliament, with the number rising each term. We have 15 on quota seats and five from free ballot. The success of those five in the general free ballot is a great step, as they have been elected in tribal and conservative communities, which shows that the mindset of society is changing to support women politicians.

In Jordan, statistics show that we have more educated women—69% of the population—but that their participation in the economy is less. That is why we have introduced a new law to encourage flexible work at home and working hours. The Government support small businesses for women. We managed a breakthrough last year by annulling article 308 in the penal code, known as the rape law. Before that abolishment, the rapist could evade punishment if he married the victim, in order to avoid the scandal. Last year, we celebrated the effort of more than 10 years of official and NGO efforts to abolish the law and punish the rapist.

We have also passed a law about domestic violence, giving more protection to women and children, but our citizenship as women is still not fully fledged, because women do not get to pass citizenship to their husbands or to their children if they are not married to a Jordanian. Until we achieve that, we still consider ourselves second-class citizens.

I want to say, as I end, that Emily Davison sacrificed her life as a British suffragette, and that women are still sacrificing their lives. Near us in Jordan, sacrifice is imposed on women in Palestine, Syria and Yemen. We here should use our powers, and the luxury of the power and the peace we have, to stand with them. To allow injustice to occur somewhere is to allow injustice to spread everywhere. *[Applause.]*

Finally, I want to say that men are not the enemy. The enemy is anyone who wants to keep women behind—sometimes such people are women as well—and anyone who shifts to support women is welcome. It is time to make the cause of women the cause of humanity. *[Applause.]*

Chair: Our next speaker is from Brazil, Tabata Amaral de Pontes.

Tabata Claudia Amaral de Pontes (Deputy, Federal Congress, Brazil): Hello everyone, and thank you for this opportunity.

I will talk about a few statistics to do with Brazilian education. Right now, seven out of 10 adults in my country cannot comprehend simple text. We are not doing much to change that reality. For example, out of every 10 students who leave high school, only two have learnt the basics of Portuguese, our national language; and after 12 years of schooling, out of every 100, only three have learnt the basics of maths.

That is alarming, but a lot of things are not getting better in Brazil; in fact, they are getting much worse: education is declining, and inequality and discrimination are rising. That is due to ignorance and much neglect. Right now, hate speech is becoming more and more common. In a country such as Brazil, hate speech means that hate crimes are also becoming more common.

I am from one of the poorest parts of São Paulo, my state, my city. I had opportunities in education due to the Mathematical Olympiad, and I was able to study as an undergraduate, but I have lost many people close to me to drug addiction, like my father, and to crime and violence, like many of many of friends.

We are one of the worst countries in the representation of many groups, and we are one of the most unequal countries in the world. Right now in Brazil, it is very hard to stand up for those issues. However, I commit myself to fight even harder for education, especially the education of girls. I ask you to join me in this fight, because it is an important one. I also commit myself to be a mentor and supporter of our women, especially our young women, in every election from now on. I ask you to do the same. *[Applause.]*

To conclude, I ask you to have pride in being the first in your communities, but never to have pride in being the only one. We need to have a lot of people following us. *[Applause.]*

Chair: Next up, from Sierra Leone, is Emilia Lolloh Tongi.

Emilia Lolloh Tongi (Member, Parliament, Sierra Leone): I have to cut down my speech, because we only have 12 minutes left now.

I greet you all. It gives me great pleasure to participate in this important occasion.

It is important for us to know that being women in politics means not only to challenge men but to co-operate with them. Every human being has the right to participate in taking the decisions that define his or her life. That right is the foundation of ideal and equal decision making between men and women. Being

in politics means doing your best as a human being, and handing on to your children a country that is much better than the country that was handed on to us by our parents.

As a woman from a male-dominated society, and considering the huge and terrifying obstacles attached to that, gaining a political seat was never going to be an easy task. I will proudly say that it is one of the boldest steps I have ever taken in my life. I know there are more of them ahead of me, and I am ready to take them boldly.

Where I come from, it is somehow very rare to see a woman stand tall among a gathering of men, but with the help of modern-day constitutions and other civilised societies, we are working zealously toward breaking those unfair barriers. Of course, I have created a positive impact on the lives of my people ever since I became a female Member of Parliament. As a woman and a politician, I have always held my fellow women in high esteem, and I always seek to bring change that will leave a positive influence on them. That is why I always wanted to go into politics. *[Applause.]* One of the changes I have been working on is education. In my constituency, I have worked tirelessly to educate women, regardless of their obstacles and challenges—

Chair: Order. Apologies, but you have run out of time. Thank you very much, that is wonderful. Our next speaker is from Tunisia, Khawla Ben Aicha.

Khawla Ben Aicha (Member of Parliament, Tunisia): I am very glad to be here with you. For those I have not had the opportunity to meet, I am Khawla Ben Aicha from the Tunisian Parliament—a Parliament that today is 35% women. Being here today is an opportunity to realise what Tunisia has done for women and especially for women's rights, but also to learn and share best practice in our countries to enhance those rights.

Since independence and since 1957, Tunisian women have had many rights such as the rights to vote, to choose their husbands, to abortion and many others, but the fight continues even after the revolution. I want to share with you two best practices and two laws that you can also use in your countries; please feel free to ask me afterward if you want any other information about these laws. We voted last year on a law on violence against women that includes not only the classical definition of violence, but economic and political discrimination. We also have a very nice practice in our electoral law, which is compulsory parity in our electoral lists. That is why we have 35% women in Parliament today.

The implementation of these laws is still not perfect, because we lack women in the top positions, both in the Government and in Parliament. I end my intervention with a nice quote that I shared with my colleagues and sisters in the morning session, from Françoise Giroud. It is an ironic quote: she said there would be real equality between men and women the day we have an incompetent woman in a very high post.

Chair: Our next speaker is from Zambia, Princess Kasune Zulu.

Ms Princess Kasune Zulu (Member of Parliament, Zambia): Thank you, ladies and—no gentlemen. My standing here today is a good example that women who

have been talked about can sit at this table or in these chairs. As the first woman living with HIV for over 20 years, and as a Member of Parliament, I hope that this is a representation that people living with HIV and AIDS are in many different walks of life and are leaders in their own right. The success story of Zambia as a country in not discriminating against people living with HIV and AIDS and in giving me the mandate to be a Member of Parliament in a rural constituency, one of the largest constituencies in Zambia, is a good example to all of us.

To the many young people out there who have been orphans and vulnerable children, as I was at the age of 17, I will add this: I hope my sharing today is an encouragement to you that you can overcome being an orphan, whether a single or double orphan, and one day come into these very rooms that we are in. This is, indeed, not only a tremendous moment for Zambia, which has a female vice-president and Minister of Finance; it is also a call to each one of us ladies: there is more work to be done and together we can do a better job. Divided we fall, and enough is enough of those cases where women have been known to put each other down. I hope that young women in politics will mentor other young women, learn from older women, reduce queen bee syndrome in politics and support each other as women. Thank you—zikomo.

Chair: Our next speaker is from Bangladesh: Shirin Sharmin Chaudhary.

Shirin Sharmin Chaudhary (Speaker, Bangladesh Parliament): I am deeply honoured, as the first woman Speaker of the Bangladesh national Parliament, to speak in the Women Parliamentarians of the World conference here in the House of Commons. As I stand here, together with women MPs, celebrating progress and shaping the future, let me convey best wishes from all the women of Bangladesh, and the people of Bangladesh, a country where the honourable Prime Minister, Sheikh Hasina, is a woman, the Leader of the Opposition is a woman, and, of course, the Speaker is a woman.

Bangladesh has made significant strides on women in Parliament. We have 50 reserved seats for women in Parliament. Twenty-three are directly elected. Altogether there are 73 women Members, constituting about 22%. We have included the mother's name in the passport, along with the father's. We have six months' maternal leave with pay. We are working to ensure the economic and social empowerment of women in rural villages, through skill development, girls' education and social safety net protection.

Let me pay tribute to all the women who have struggled and suffered to uphold our rights, at this glorious moment of celebrating 100 years of women's voting rights. Any woman who can stand up for her rights and make her voice heard in a crowd, and who can break the glass ceiling, is an agent of change. Any woman who takes up the challenge of overcoming the hurdles that prevent her from developing her skills, and wins the battle, is little by little transcending boundaries to bring about a new era and a better tomorrow. She is not only materialising her own ambition, but building a society—a world—in a sustained way, where her daughter will be ensured a life of endless promise and opportunities, to be truly empowered to reach out to fulfil and attain her dreams.

To end with a quote, this is a story of transformation. It is a change that has

already begun, a change already taking place that can be accelerated if all of us unite, join and work together to make the change happen, as tomorrow must be better.

Chair: I am very sorry to those of you who have not managed to get in, but our final speaker is from Iceland— Áslaug Arna Sigurbjörnsdóttir.

Áslaug Arna Sigurbjörnsdóttir (Member, Althing, Iceland): I know my name is difficult. Dear colleagues, I want to thank the organisers for this great conference on that most timely topic, women's empowerment in the political and economic fields. The discussion has been great and it has been a pleasure to enjoy the international sisterhood of women parliamentarians, if I may call it that.

If I may, I shall introduce myself. I have been a Member of Parliament for two years now, but a part of the leadership of my party for three years, since I was 25. For too many, I am a girl not to be taken seriously. I am changing that fast, though. I am not in politics to be a decoration. Coming from Iceland, my experience is different from that of many of you, and I know that. Iceland has for nine years topped the global gender gap index, causing some to call it a global champion of gender equality.

I would like to use this opportunity to briefly introduce the measures we are taking in strengthening the global network of women politicians. First, I just want to mention that I am particularly proud of the women in politics in Iceland. We are at the forefront of the #MeToo movement there, which happened through women MPs and members of local councils stepping forward at the start of the movement to collect and officially publish a significant number of personal accounts of gender-based abuse, harassment and violence in political life. Women in other fields followed suit, and those accounts were collected and published sector by sector. In my political life, I have had my share of gender and age-based criticism, and I have had to fight to have my own identity and not to be reduced to being the daughter of my father or a puppet of some powerful male figure in my party.

The Icelandic Government and Parliament emphasise gender issues and rights throughout our international work. We have recently engaged in partnership with an NGO, Women Political Leaders, on co-hosting the Women Leaders Global Forum in Reykjavík, Iceland, for the next four years. It will take place on 26 to 28 November in Reykjavík, and we expect around 400 leaders to participate. The Women Leaders Global Forum mission is to provide a platform for women leaders to discuss and share ideas and solutions on how further to advance society.

I thank our hosts again for this great conference. Our shared goal of empowering women must never end. This is a long-term project for all women here and everywhere, and we can all make an impact and a difference—let's keep on doing so worldwide and in our own countries. *[Applause.]*

Chair: Thank you all very much, and I am extremely sorry that we could not get more speeches in. Unfortunately, we will have to depart the Chamber, but we

will have a reception where there will be further opportunities to talk.

I need to hand over to the Leader of the House, but I want to make two points. I know it is frustrating not to have had the opportunity to speak in the Chamber. I want to emphasise that I have picked up today that 10 countries have already volunteered to host annual conferences of this kind. We will not stop giving speeches and speaking up—if not here today, we will continue. I appreciate the frustration, but this is the beginning of the conversation. This is the beginning of a network and partnership of friendship and solidarity that we will build on to work together and to make the changes that we have talked about today, which is what we are here to do. I know it is frustrating, but it is the start of something special and very important that I hope we will continue not just for the next 10 years, but the next 100 years.

Thank you again to all. I now hand over to the Leader of the House to wrap up, because the Chamber will close soon.

Andrea Leadsom (Leader of the House of Commons, Member of Parliament, United Kingdom): Everybody is tired, so I will be very brief. I want just to say that it has been a fantastic day—you have all been amazing. Today, we have shown the world our contribution to public life and politics, and I hope we have inspired the next generation of female leaders. We have heard from women who have travelled more than 10,000 miles, as well as those who have hopped across the Channel. No matter our nationality, race, religion or background, and no matter how far we have travelled, we are all united by one thing: we are women in politics who want to see more women in politics.

The women's rights campaigner Wangari Maathai, the first African woman to receive the Nobel peace prize, said, "Human rights are not things that are put on the table for people to enjoy. These are things you fight for and then you protect." That is why we have strengthened our resolve and put on record our personal commitments to a range of vital policy issues that will drive progress on gender equality, ending violence against women and girls, promoting women's economic empowerment, breaking the barriers to girls' education, and championing access to voluntary family planning. We will redouble our efforts to inspire the next generation of women to become social and political leaders, and we will promote the implementation of international commitments that protect and empower women and girls. You are all a force for good and a force for change—thank you for making this such a brilliant day.