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Report of the Inter-Parliamentary Union to the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (41st session June-July 2008)

1. This report is divided into two sections. **The first** provides information on initiatives taken by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) since the Committee's last session in January -February 2008 to enhance the role of parliaments in overseeing proper implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). **The second** provides country specific information on the evolution of women's participation in parliament, on parliamentary structures dealing with gender issues and on the level of each parliament's involvement in the CEDAW reporting process and follow-up. It also provides information on women in the executive.

I. IPU activities and parliamentary involvement in the CEDAW reporting process

2. The IPU plays an active role in promoting the Convention and its Optional Protocol within the parliamentary community. In recognition of the Convention's importance and comprehensive nature, the IPU endeavours to ensure that parliaments and their members provide effective oversight of and contribute to its full implementation.

Follow-up to 40th session of the Committee

3. As a follow up to the 40th session of the Committee, the IPU Secretary General wrote to all parliaments of the countries whose reports had been considered, forwarding them the concluding comments made by the Committee. The letter encouraged them to discuss the report and concluding comments in parliament and to ensure adequate follow-up.

Level of Parliamentary involvement: 41st session of the Committee

4. The IPU Secretary General sent letters to the parliaments whose country's periodic report will be examined at the Committee's 41st session, encouraging them to follow the Committee's work and provide input into it.

5. A questionnaire was also addressed to the parliaments concerned enquiring about the Parliament's involvement in the CEDAW reporting process. Responses were received from the parliaments of Finland, Lithuania, Slovakia, and United Kingdom. Country responses are detailed in section II, under each country. However, information received from the four parliaments all highlights the very minimal involvement if not the absence of involvement in the reporting process. Parliament is not involved in the production of the report and, in most cases, the report has not been presented to parliament before being sent to the Committee.

Raising awareness on the Convention and its Optional Protocol

6. The IPU held its latest Statutory Assembly in April 2008, in Cape Town, at the invitation of the Parliament of South Africa. More than 700 members of parliaments met for a week, including 196 women (28% of participants). On the occasion of the Thirteenth Meeting of Women Parliamentarians (13 April 2008) and the subsequent meeting of IPU's Coordinating Committee of Women Parliamentarians, information was shared and discussed with participants on the status of ratification of the CEDAW and its Optional Protocol. Furthermore, the list of States that have recently reported to the Committee and those that will be was distributed. The President of IPU's Coordinating Committee of Women Parliamentarian and the IPU Secretariat made a specific call to MPs to follow more attentively the CEDAW reporting process and to hold regular discussion in Parliament to monitor implementation of the Convention.

7. The IPU released in April 2008 the results of a two year survey of some 300 men and women parliamentarians which aims at taking stock of the different and complementary roles of men and women MPs, their respective relation to gender equality issues, and their efforts to mainstream gender in Parliament. The resulting publication, "Equality in Politics: a survey of men and women parliamentarians", (see: www.ipu.org/PDF/publications/equality08-e.pdf.) confirms that men and women MPs play different roles in parliament and have different centres of interests. It confirms that women change politics, whether the way politics are made or the priorities addressed, bringing in new issues to the attention of Parliament, which had previously received little attention. Within the survey's framework, questions were raised with regard to parliamentary action linked to CEDAW and its Optional Protocol. Here again, the results confirmed a poor awareness of MPs with regard to the CEDAW. Half of the respondents did however say that there existed some mechanisms which did or could monitor the Convention's enforcement.

Raising awareness on women's political participation

8. In March 2008, the IPU and the United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women produced the 2008 version of the *Women in Politics Map* (www.ipu.org/pdf/publications/wmnmap08_en.pdf). This Map is a useful tool to raise awareness on the poor level of women's political participation as it provides data on women in ministerial positions, women in parliament, women heads of state and government and women speakers of parliament. Figures show that, as at 1 January 2008, 17.7% of parliamentarians worldwide and 16.1% ministers are women. Women's participation at the highest levels of decision-making remains extremely weak: 4.7% of women heads of state, 4.2% of women heads of government and 10.7% of women speakers of parliament (as at 1 January 2008). The Map was produced in the 6 UN languages and widely distributed to parliaments, governments and civil society.

Technical assistance

9. The IPU carries out technical assistance projects in a variety of countries aimed at enhancing parliament's capacities. Training of parliaments and their members in ensuring the Convention's implementation is also mainstreamed in IPU technical assistance projects. For the past year, the IPU has implemented a project in Burundi aimed at supporting women parliamentarians. As a follow up to the presentation of Burundi's report to the 40th session of the Committee a seminar for parliamentarians will be organised in August 2008 in Burundi to discuss parliamentary follow up to the Committee's concluding comments.

II. Country-specific information on women in Parliament

World and regional perspectives

10. As at 31 May 2008, the world average of women in parliament, both Houses combined, stands at 18.2% (18.4% in Lower or Single Houses and 17.2% in Upper Houses). The world average (both Houses combined) was 11.3% in 1995 and 13.8% in 2000.

11. A statistical breakdown by region of women in parliament is provided in the following table (situation valid at 31 May 2008):

	Single House or lower House	Upper House or Senate	Both Houses combined
Nordic countries	41.4%	---	--
Americas	21.6%	20.0%	21.4%
Europe including Nordic countries	21.2%	18.8%	20.7%
Europe excluding Nordic countries	19.3%	18.8%	19.2%
Asia	18.4	16.6%	18.2%
Sub-Saharan Africa	17.2%	20.8%	17.6%
Pacific	13.4%	31.8%	15.4%
Arab States	9.7%	7.0%	9.1%

12. With regard to women Presiding officers, the situation is as follows as at 31 May 2008

- Only **30 women** preside over one of the Houses of the 189 existing Parliaments, 76 of which are bicameral.
- The countries concerned are: **Albania** (Poeople's Assembly); **Antigua and Barbuda** (House of Representatives and Senate); **Austria** (Nationalrat); **Bahamas** (Senate); **Belize** (Senate); **Colombia** (Senado de la república); **Dominica** (House of Assembly); **Estonia** (Riigikogu); **Gambia** (National Assembly); **Hungary** (Országgyűlés); **Israel** (Knesset); **Lesotho** (National Assembly); **Mexico** (Cámara de Diputados); **Netherlands** (Eerste Kamer der Staten-Generaal and Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal); **New Zealand** (House of Representatives); **Pakistan** (National Assembly); **Saint Kitts and Nevis** (National Assembly); **Saint Lucia** (House of Assembly and Senate); **San Marino** (Consiglio Grande e Generale); **South Africa** (National Assembly); **Swaziland** (Senate); **Turkmenistan** (Mejlis); **United Kingdom** (House of Lords); **United States of America** (House of Representatives); **Uzbekistan** (Legislative chamber); **Venezuela** (Asamblea Nacional); **Zimbabwe** (Senate).
- Women therefore occupy only **11.3%** of the total number of 265 posts of Presiding Officers of Parliament or of one of its Houses.

Country-specific information

FINLAND

Women in Parliament

Election year	Chamber	Total seats	Number of women	Percentage
1995	Single	200	67	33.5%
1999	Single	200	74	37%
2003	Single	200	75	37.5%
2007	Single	200	84	42%

Presiding officers

Two women presided over the Finnish Parliament. The first was in 1991, for a three term period, till 2003. The second was in 2003. Currently the presiding officer is a man.

Women in the Executive

As at 1 January 2008, Finland leads the way in terms of the women in ministerial positions with 11 women Ministers out of 19, (57.9%). Finland is also one of the 7 countries in the world to have a woman head of State.

Parliamentary structures for the promotion of women's rights and gender equality

The Employment and Equality Committee is responsible for gender equality issues in Parliament. The Employment Committee was founded in 1991 following an amendment to the Rules of Procedure of Parliament. Its name changed to the Employment and Equality Committee in 2000.

The Employment and Equality Committee is one of 14 standing, specialized committees in Parliament. The specialized committees prepare legislative proposals for the Plenary Session. In spring 2005, the Committee dealt with the reform of the Equality Act. The Committee's report is available on the internet.

Parliamentary involvement in the CEDAW reporting process

According to information received, Parliament has not been involved in the preparation of the State party report. It is considered a purely Government report. There should however be a woman parliamentarian part of the Finnish delegation to the Committee meeting.

With regard to follow up, there is no systematic follow up mechanism. However the Ministry of Foreign Affairs reports to the Parliament on the proceedings concerning the State Party report.

ICELAND

Women in Parliament

Election year	Chamber	Total seats	Number of women	Percentage
1995	Single	63	16	25.4%
1999	Single	63	22	34.9%

2003	Single	63	19	30.2%
2007	Single	63	20	31.8%

Presiding officers

Several women presided over the Parliament of Iceland, the first being in 1961. Currently the presiding officer is a man.

Women in the Executive

As at 1 January 2008, Iceland had 4 women ministers out of 11, (36.5%).

Parliamentary structures for the promotion of women's rights and gender equality

The Standing Committee on Health and Social Affairs was first established in 1943. In 1972 its mandate was split into two separate committees and the Standing Committee on Social Affairs was created.

The Standing Committee on Social Affairs has a relatively wide field of competence, including issues regarding gender equality. One of the main functions is to scrutinise bills and resolutions referred to it by the plenary. With regard to its function in the legislative process, the committee arranges hearings and collects information from government bodies, NGOs and experts. The results of the Committee's scrutiny may lead to the proposal for amendments to all bills (including government bills) and resolutions. The Committee reviews the proposed Budget Bill (Annual Appropriations for Social Affairs) and delivers an opinion to the Budget Committee. The Committee has a mandate to deal with other issues within its field, including the arrangement of hearings on specific subjects and questions. It may deliver a report to the plenary if it so wishes. It does not deal with individual complaints. Such cases are dealt with, inter alia, by the Althingi Ombudsman.

Parliamentary involvement in the CEDAW reporting process

No information was received from Parliament.

LITHUANIA

Women in Parliament

Election year	Chamber	Total seats	Number of women	Percentage
1996	Single	137	24	17.5%
2000	Single	141	15	10.6%
2004	Single	141	31	22%

Presiding officers

No woman has ever held this post.

Women in the Executive

As at 1 January 2008, Lithuania had 3 women ministers out of 13, (23.1%).

Parliamentary structures for the promotion of women's rights and gender equality

The Committee on Human Rights is in charge of gender issues in the Parliament

The Committee: a) prepares and considers draft laws and other legal instruments, as well as proposals on issues related to the status of women and gender equality; b) presents recommendations and proposals to ministries, State institutions and other organizations, as

well as Seimas committees on issues concerning the status of women and gender equality; c) considers the annual written report of the activities of the Office of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsman; and e) disseminates information, examines complaints, organizes discussions on issues concerning the status of women and gender equality.

Recent work includes the law on equal treatment and the law on equal opportunities for women and men.

Parliamentary involvement in the CEDAW reporting process

According to information received, there is no set practice for the government to consult with or report regularly to the Parliament while preparing reports to Treaty Bodies. On certain occasions though, Government officials do share information, though this is not systematic. Parliament can also exercise its right of parliamentary control and request information, but there again this has been done more on an adhoc basis.

NIGERIA

Women in Parliament

Election year	Chamber	Total seats	Number of women	Percentage
1992	Lower	593	13	2.2%
1992	Upper	91	1	1.1%
1999	Lower	351	12	3.4%
1999	Upper	108	3	2.7%
2003	Lower	359	22	6.1%
2003	Upper	106	3	2.8%
2007	Lower	358	25	6.9%
2007	Upper	109	9	8.3%

Presiding officers

One woman presided over the House of Representatives in 2007.

Women in the executive

As at 1 January 2008, Nigeria had 5 women ministers out of 22, (22.7%).

Parliamentary structures for the promotion of women's rights and gender equality

The House Committee on Women's Affairs and Youth Development was established in 1999 under the Standing Rules of the National Assembly. The Committee deals with matters relating to the status of women and gender equality and oversees compliance with relevant national and international standards, prepares legislative proposals, examines policies and budgets, advises the government, evaluates individual complaints, disseminates information, discusses the status of gender equality issues at home and abroad, and liaises with state parliaments and parliamentary organizations.

The Committee serves as a point of liaison on gender issues for all parliamentary committees and other parliamentary bodies. It mobilizes, sensitizes and interacts with all parliamentary bodies to ensure that gender is a feature of all aspects of parliamentary oversight.

The Committee handles all topics relating to women, gender mainstreaming and children. Recent work of the Committee included making national legislation consistent with the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

Parliamentary involvement in the CEDAW reporting process

No information was received from Parliament.

SLOVAKIA**Women in Parliament**

Election year	Chamber	Total seats	Number of women	Percentage
1994	Single	150	22	14.6%
1998	Single	150	19	12.7%
2002	Single	150	29	19.3%
2006	Single	150	24	16%

Presiding officers

No woman ever presided over Parliament.

Women in the executive

As at 1 January 2008, Slovakia had 2 women ministers out of 15, (13.3%).

Parliamentary structures for the promotion of women's rights and gender equality

The Committee on Human Rights, Minorities and the Status of Women was appointed by Parliament in 2002, and was re-established in 2006.

As one of parliament's regular legislative committees, it is empowered to introduce bills and to prepare amendments to the bills introduced by the government, other parliamentary committees or individual members of the National Council. In accordance with the Standing Orders, the Committee provides ex ante control of draft laws regarding their compliance with international standards. In exercising its oversight powers, the Committee may examine the policies and budgets of relevant ministries.

Recent work included national gender machinery, women in marginalized communities, and violence against women.

Parliamentary involvement in the CEDAW reporting process

According to information received from Parliament there is no involvement of parliament in the CEDAW reporting process. No specific mechanisms exist to ensure parliamentary follow up to the concluding comments apart from parliament's parliamentary control powers.

UNITED KINGDOM**Women in Parliament**

Election year	Chamber	Total seats	Number of women	Percentage
1992	Lower	651	60	9.2%
1995	Upper	1200	82	6.8%
1997	Lower	659	120	18.2%
1997	Upper	713	104	14.6%
2001	Lower	659	118	17.9%
2004	Upper	707	126	17.8%
2005	Lower	646	128	19.8%

Presiding officers

The first woman to preside over one of the houses of parliament was in 1992. She occupied this post for 8 years. The Upper House of Parliament is currently presided over by a woman.

Women in the executive

As at 1 January 2008, the United Kingdom had 5 women ministers out of 22, (22.7%).

Parliamentary structures for the promotion of women's rights and gender equality

No data available.

Parliamentary involvement in the CEDAW reporting process

Information was received from the Joint Parliamentary Committee on Human Rights (JCHR). The JCHR explained it had been asked by the Government whether it wished to comment on a draft of the UK's report to the CEDAW Committee. The JCHR declined the invitation on the basis that it intends to follow on the next set of CEDAW concluding observations on the UK. The JCHR monitors the UK's compliance with human rights standards through a number of methods, including scrutinising primary and secondary legislation and conducting thematic inquiries into discrete areas of policy. This monitoring is conducted against the backdrop of the human rights instruments which the UK Government has ratified, including CEDAW and its Optional Protocol. In its report on its working practices, the JCHR concluded that it would continue to scrutinise compliance with UN human rights treaties: "We consider that continuation of a programme of scrutiny of the implementation in the UK of the provisions of international human rights treaties will remain an important part of our work. When we undertake such work we would intend to focus closely on the Concluding Observations of the relevant treaty body and take a limited amount of oral evidence." (Twenty-third report of session 2005-06, the Committee's Future Working practices HL Paper 239, HC 1575).

The JCHR has undertaken scrutiny of the UK compliance with the other five main treaties, and intends to consider compliance with CEDAW in the light of the Committee's concluding observations, as part of its cycle of work.

In addition the JCHR conducts regular and wide ranging evidence sessions with the Human Rights Minister. In its most recent evidence session with the Minister (26 November 2007), the Committee questioned him, amongst other issues, on the UK's experience since permitting individuals to petition CEDAW and on the steps that the UK took to ensure that civil society was aware of the right of individual petition from March 2005. A full transcript of this evidence session can be found on:

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/jtselect/jtrights/c132-i/c13202.htm>

UNITED REPUBLIC OF TANZANIA

Women in Parliament

Election year	Chamber	Total seats	Number of women	Percentage
1995	Single	275	45	16.4%
2000	Single	275	61	22.2%
2005	Single	319	97	30%

Presiding officers

The Parliament has never had a woman Presiding officer.

Women in the executive

As at 1 January 2008, the United Republic of Tanzania had 6 women ministers out of 29, (20.7%).

Parliamentary structures for the promotion of women's rights and gender equality

No data available.

Parliamentary involvement in the CEDAW reporting process

No responses received from Parliament.

YEMEN

Women in Parliament

Election year	Chamber	Total seats	Number of women	Percentage
1993	Single	301	2	0.6%
1997	Lower	301	2	0.6%
2001	Upper	111	2	1.8%
2003	Lower	301	1	0.3%

Presiding officers

The Parliament has never had a woman Presiding officer.

Women in the executive

As at 1 January 2008, Yemen had 2 women ministers out of 35, (5.7%).

Parliamentary structures for the promotion of women's rights and gender equality

The Human Rights Committee of the Lower House of Parliament follows issues related to gender. This was decided in December 2004, awaiting the formal creation of a specialised committee in the next parliament elected in 2009.

The Human Rights committee is charged, among other things, to supervise compliance with relevant national and international standards, prepare legislative proposals, examine policies and budgets and provide advice to the government.

Parliamentary involvement in the CEDAW reporting process

No responses received from Parliament.

General note on the data:

Data collected by the IPU is primarily provided by National Parliaments. Figures correspond to results of elections. The composition of a parliament can however change during the Parliament's term through bi-elections or appointments.

For more information on results of elections please consult the PARLINE Database: <http://www.ipu.org/parline-e/parlinesearch.asp>. For more information on parliamentary committees dealing with gender issues please consult IPU's online database: <http://www.ipu.org/parline-e/Instancewomen.asp>