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REPUBLIC OF AUSTRIA
Parliament



13th Summit of Women Speakers of Parliament (13SWSP)

Report on the Summit, Vienna, Austria, 6 September 2021



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Cover: Participants at the 13th Summit of Women Speakers of Parliament © IPU

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The 13th Summit of Women Speakers of Parliament (13SWSP) was held on 6 September 2021 in Vienna (Austria) on the theme *Women at the centre: From confronting the pandemic to preserving achievements in gender-responsive recovery*. Over 26 of the world's leading women legislators took part in the Summit which was organized by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) in partnership with the Parliament of Austria and the United Nations. The full List of participants is available on the IPU [event website](#).

The 13SWSP Preparatory Committee, established on the basis of gender-balanced nominations from all the IPU Geopolitical Groups, guided the substantive preparations for the 13SWSP. The Committee selected the theme and sub-themes of the Summit, identified the motions and drafted the concept notes for the panel debate sessions.

The 13SWSP was held in two segments – virtually on 17 and 18 August 2020 and in person on 6 September 2021. The in-person Summit preceded the in-person Fifth World Conference of Speakers of Parliament (5WCSP) which was held on 7 and 8 September 2021 also in Vienna (Austria). The outcomes of the deliberations of the 13SWSP fed into the proceedings of the 5WCSP thus making gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls a priority on the agenda of all parliaments.

Executive summary

On 6 September 2021, the world's top women legislators gathered in Vienna for the 13th Summit of Women Speakers of Parliament (13SWSP) hosted by the Inter Parliamentary Union, the Parliament of Austria and the United Nations. The Summit was held on the occasion of the Fifth World Conference of Speakers of Parliament (5WCSP). Twenty-six women Speakers of Parliament attended what was the first global in-person gathering for many of the participants in nearly two years.

The theme of the Summit was *Women at the centre: From confronting the pandemic to preserving achievements in a gender-responsive recovery*. The Speakers of Parliament discussed the essential role of women during the pandemic, as well as how the post-pandemic recovery could lead to progress in gender equality.

The economic downturn brought about by the pandemic had added to existing inequalities in many ways. Women typically earn less and have less secure jobs than men. With plummeting economic activity, women are particularly vulnerable to layoffs and loss of livelihood. During the first month of the pandemic, informal workers worldwide lost an average of 60 per cent of their income. Some of the sectors hardest hit by the pandemic were feminized sectors, such as the retail, beauty and hospitality industries. Women also have less access to land and capital, which makes it harder for them to bounce back and rebuild their businesses.

Women lead on the front lines of the pandemic response. They make up 70 per cent of the global health and social care workforce. They are more likely to be frontline health professionals, especially nurses, midwives and community health workers. These professionals are sacrificing their health for the safety of society.

Furthermore, the pandemic has increased care and domestic work which disproportionately falls on women. Women do 2.6 times more care and domestic work than men. Most of this work is unpaid, which means that even if women's domestic care workload is increasing their gainful employment is not.

The Summit discussed these pressing developments while acknowledging women's role in the pandemic response and charting the way forward in strengthening gender equality through COVID-19 recovery efforts.

The Summit was divided into two main sessions. The first session *Women in the pandemic: A tribute to everyday heroes* featured interactive debates anchored on women in the health care sector, women's unpaid care work, and women's lack of access to social protection. The women Speakers agreed that while women composed the majority of the health care sector workforce and worked in the frontlines, they were more likely than men to be in lower paid jobs and be less represented in health care leadership positions. There is therefore an urgent need to encourage and support women to be represented in all public and private spheres of leadership.

Moreover, the Speakers discussed the need to value and redistribute unpaid domestic care work that burdened many households. While it is important to financially support and compensate domestic care work, there is also a need for strong incentives to have women in the workforce. The Speakers agreed that domestic care work must not be seen as a woman's job only but as work that should be equally shared between men and women.

The Speakers also discussed the need for universal and gender-responsive social protection schemes. Many of the participants argued that there was no bigger discrimination than exclusion from pension schemes and social security. Today, 60 per cent of women worldwide are not

covered by any type of social protection. Social protection is an integral part of the discussion on economic growth and gender equality which is why social protection policies must be amended to equally benefit men and women.

The second session *Women in the post-pandemic recovery: Preserving achievements, furthering progress* featured interactive debates on a COVID-19 recovery agenda with focus on achieving gender parity, advancing women's economic empowerment, and eradicating gender-based violence.

Gender parity in parliaments is a crucial step in advancing gender transformative societies post-pandemic. There must be more voices in parliament that reflect the everyday situation of women and girls in order to achieve inclusive policies that will respond to the derailment of gender equality in the pandemic as a result of, for example, the lack of economic protection of working women or the increase of gender-based violence.

The participants acknowledged that there could be no equality in the workplace if there was no equality in the home. The gender pay gap is a sum of different factors, one of which is the cultural expectations of caregiving. Even in situations where women and men both work full time, it is the woman who is more likely to spend more time on childcare or household activities. This affects a woman's likelihood of getting promoted and from there the woman's and man's earning potential diverges. Policies must therefore be put in place to incentivize both women and men to share the burden through, for example, paid parental leave and child support.

As daunting challenges related to violence against women and children arise in the COVID-19 pandemic, Speakers must strengthen their efforts to eradicate such violence. The Speakers agreed that without drastic cultural and economic change, women would continue to suffer. Violence against women and children is firmly rooted in political and social factors which is why policies must address its root causes, among others, by empowering girls and ensuring they have equal access to education.

The women parliamentary leaders agreed that a transformation of the economy and society through a feminist lens was needed. The COVID-19 crisis provided an opportunity for that kind of transformation and gave a clear message on what must be changed. It is the duty of parliamentarians to lead the feminist transformation of our global system, to ensure the just allocation of resources and equal opportunities. The outcome of the 13th Summit of Women Speakers of Parliament confirmed that women Speakers were eager to lead the way.

Opening session

Opening statements were delivered by the Chairperson of the Summit and Speaker of Parliament of Norway Ms. Tone Wilhelmsen Trøen, President of the Austrian National Council Mr. Wolfgang Sobotka, and IPU President Mr. Duarte Pacheco.¹

Ms. T. Wilhelmsen Trøen (Chairperson of the Summit and Speaker of the Parliament of Norway) opened the session by emphasizing that Speakers as leaders in parliament must strive to make their institutions gender-sensitive by creating an enabling environment for all. Measures must be legislated that level the playing field and open politics to women from diverse backgrounds and address the barriers that deter or limit gender equality, including gender-based discrimination, sexism and harassment. No recovery agenda would succeed without going hand in hand with the gender equality agenda. That was a precondition for properly addressing and reflecting on the demands of society during the current transformative time. More efficient, effective and legitimate political institutions that could withstand future crises would thus be created.

Mr. W. Sobotka (President of the National Council of Austria) pointed out that given that the pandemic was not yet over and that its impacts would be felt for a long time, the pandemic would remain on the agenda of parliaments well into the future. Parliaments had to deal not only with the pandemic's social and economic impacts but also its political impact. The lessons learned from the pandemic were both positive and negative but much remained to be learned yet. The fact that a vaccine was developed so quickly was certainly a positive experience. That, as well as its distribution, was achieved through global efforts. The global community had been able to pull together. That was how future problems should be tackled and that was why inter-parliamentary dialogue, dialogue between MPs, was indispensable.

Mr. D. Pacheco (IPU President) said that the time had come for parliaments to show they could make a difference. Speakers had the responsibility to mobilize parliaments towards concrete policies for lasting change. Laws that ensured the availability and universal accessibility of childcare must be enacted so that women could rejoin the labour force. The care economy must be invested in and laws that justly compensated domestic care work must be created. Universal social security, adequate safety nets and employment benefits to all workers and especially in the informal sector where women were the majority must be provided. He called on Speakers and parliamentarians to be bold and move political commitment to the next level by working towards gender equality in parliaments and stronger and more equitable post-pandemic societies.



From left to right:
Ms. T. Wilhelmsen Trøen,
Mr. W. Sobotka,
Mr. M. Chungong (IPU
Secretary General) and
Mr. D. Pacheco (IPU President).
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¹ The full texts of the opening statements are available at: [13th Summit of Women Speakers of Parliament 2021 | Inter-Parliamentary Union \(ipu.org\)](https://www.ipu.org/13th-summit-of-women-speakers-of-parliament-2021).

Keynote address

In her keynote address, **Ms. G. Fathy Ismail Waly** (Executive Director of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and Director-General of the United Nations Office at Vienna) stressed the importance of coming together to talk about gender equality.² She noted that while women’s representation in parliament had reached historic highs, there was still more that needed to be done for women to access leadership roles in all spaces.



From left to right: Ms. G. Fathy Ismail Waly, Mr. D. Pacheco, Ms. T. Wilhelmsen Trøen, Mr. M. Chungong and Mr. W. Sobotka standing in front of the lectern. © IPU

Progress towards Sustainable Development Goal 5 on gender equality had stalled as a result of the pandemic. Women, who composed most of the informal sector and did not have social protection, were more excluded and vulnerable to exploitation or unemployment. The COVID-19 pandemic had widened inequality, especially the gender and poverty gaps. That was evident in the global access to vaccines and the increasing violence against women and children.

Ms. Waly called on Speakers to act on four fronts. First, in advancing girls’ education and empowerment to increase the number of women leaders globally. Education was difficult to access in many countries and more so because of the pandemic. Eleven million girls might not return to education after the disruption caused by the crisis.

Second, Speakers of parliament must tackle gender-based violence. By advancing laws that protected and empowered women in the workplace, parliaments were able to create better economies and societies. Partnerships within the international community must be strengthened to that effect.

Third, parliamentarians were instrumental in combatting corruption to improve the delivery of equitable laws and services. And lastly, women were a bigger strength when they worked together. The success of every woman should be an inspiration to all. There was a strong need for more women helping women in parliaments, and an even stronger need for more women helping women between parliaments.

In conclusion, Ms. Waly reiterated that gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls belonged on the agenda of all parliaments. While the past two years had brought unspeakable tragedy, the pandemic had also shown women’s capacity to lead. She called on the women Speakers of Parliament to take the reins in changing their societies for the better by saying: “We need you women Speakers and parliamentarians, we need you”.

² The full text of Ms. Waly’s address is available at: [13th Summit of Women Speakers of Parliament 2021 | Inter-Parliamentary Union \(ipu.org\)](https://www.ipu.org/13th-summit-women-speakers-parliament-2021).

Interactive panel debates

The two interactive panel debate sessions followed an innovative format inspired by the Doha Debates as a way of stimulating lively exchanges among the women Speakers and Presidents of Parliaments. The Doha Debate format involved focusing on controversial motions, three for each session, with some participants speaking in favour and others against the motions.

The list of the motions that were debated had been provided in advance and Speakers indicated the motions which they would like to contribute to prior to the Summit. Before the debates, introductory remarks were given by special guests who helped in setting the stage of the discussion. The sessions were moderated by **Ms. Christine Muttonen**, international expert and Managing Partner of Central East Connect.

Session 1: Women in the pandemic: A tribute to everyday heroes

The aim of the first session was to take stock of, recognize and pay tribute to women from all walks of life who had been

instrumental in confronting the COVID-19 pandemic.

Introductory remarks by Ms. Hedy Fry, Canadian MP and Special Representative on Gender Issues at the Parliamentary Assembly of OSCE (video message)

Ms. H. Fry (Canada) discussed how women, who composed 70 per cent of the health care sector working as professional caregivers, doctors, nurses and therapists, kept societies running during the pandemic while at the same time risking their health. She invited the participants to pay tribute to those unsung heroes but also to point out that they remained unrecognized in decision-making positions in the sector. Women bore the brunt of unpaid care work which had increased and were also less likely than men to bounce back from service sectors affected by the pandemic.

Tribute must also be paid to women decision-makers, both in and out of parliament. Women in positions of power as well as

women journalists increased the diversity of perspectives in society. Yet those positions had become precarious work due to the amount of hate and violence thrown in the way of women. It was important that Speakers understood the important role women in positions of power had and how to best support them.

Ms. Fry called on the women Speakers of Parliament to acknowledge in their decision-making the voices of all women, including that of senior citizens and refugees, and the intersectionality of women who faced different burdens and struggles. It was necessary that governments collected gender-sensitive and gender-disaggregated data that reflected how those different groups were impacted by the pandemic.

Debate on Motion 1: “Women working on the front lines during the COVID-19 pandemic are more effective in providing care and services than men in the same field”

The panel featured Ms. Claudia Ledesma Abdala de Zamora (Provisional President of the Senate of Argentina), Ms. Fawzia Zainal (Speaker of the Council of Representatives of Bahrain), Ms. Puan Maharani (Speaker of the House of Representatives of Indonesia), and Ms. Stephanie D’Hose (President of the Senate of Belgium).

Interventions from the floor were made by: Ms. Claudia Roth (Vice-President of the German Bundestag), Ms. Lesia Vasylenko (Member of Parliament of Ukraine and President of the IPU Bureau of Women Parliamentarians), Ms. Annita Demetriou (President of the House of Representatives of Cyprus), Ms. Christine Razanamahasoa (President of the National Assembly of Madagascar), and Ms. Margareta Cederfelt (President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE)).

Against the backdrop of the pandemic response, we see that 70 per cent of healthcare personnel are women. Women are in the frontlines of the COVID-19 pandemic, which shows their crucial responsibility in providing solutions to alleviate the effects of the pandemic. There are women scientists, doctors and nurses providing care services during the pandemic. Nevertheless, it is men who dominate in the professional health care jobs as a result of which there is a great divide in gender roles and leadership. In the health care sector, women mainly work in lower paid positions such as in nursing and pharmacies.



Ms. F. Zainal, Speaker of the Council of Representatives of Bahrain. © IPU

Speakers who were in favour of this motion – like **Ms. C. Ledesma Abdala de Zamora** (Argentina) and **Ms. F. Zainal** (Bahrain) – pushed for furthering representation of women in all leadership positions, including those in the health care sector. There was also a strong need to seriously consider the representation of women in leadership positions both in the national and international level.

Speakers called for new laws to mitigate the increased discrimination between specific genders, groups and countries due to the pandemic. Moreover, they argued for the need to transform spaces to provide an enabling environment for women and girls to be able to thrive and strive for higher positions in society. Ensuring that women and men were equally positioned in leadership was an important component of the recovery efforts.

On the other hand, some Speakers shared a different view to the proposed motion. **Ms. P. Maharani** (Indonesia) emphasized that fighting the pandemic must be a task carried out equally. There was no need for competition between men and women in the medical field; instead there was a need to stay united and work together based on collaboration and solidarity.

Ms. S. D'Hose (Belgium) warned about perpetuating the cliché of the female nurse and female crisis manager. The discussion should not be whether men and women are better at certain jobs, but how best to achieve gender equality.



From left to right: Ms. S. D'Hose, President of the Senate of Belgium and Ms. E. Tillieux, President of the House of Representatives of Belgium. © IPU

Ms. A. Demetriou (Cyprus) and **Ms. L. Vasylenko** (Ukraine) highlighted that women were indeed true heroes of the fight against the pandemic but, unfortunately, were also the biggest victims. The fact that there were more women in the frontlines of the pandemic did not necessarily mean that they were suited to do so. Instead of asking whether men or women were better at providing care services, parliamentarians should ask why women were in these low paid and precarious positions.



Ms. L. Vasylenko, President of the IPU Bureau of women parliamentarians and member of parliament of Ukraine. © IPU

Both sides in the debate agreed that to have women in decision-making positions, Speakers should focus on strengthening education. Speakers must also be vigilant, since in some cases the pandemic had resulted in girls being taken out of school to provide extra household care, and these girls had yet to go back to school.

Beyond equal opportunities, there was a consensus that equal pay for equal work must be ensured not only in the health care sector but in all sectors of society. Another point of agreement was that women must have equal access to vaccines and health care especially in developing countries where that was not always the case even though women composed a large proportion of the health care workforce.

Debate on Motion 2: “Women’s care work at home should be paid an hourly wage based on the national minimum wage”

The panel featured Ms. Inara Murniece (Speaker of Parliament of Latvia).

Interventions from the floor were made by: Ms. Meritxell Batet (President of the Congress of Deputies of Spain), Ms. Tone Wilhelmsen Trøen (Chairperson of the Summit and Speaker of the Parliament of Norway), and Ms. Lady Mercedes Camones Soriano (First Vice President of the Congress of the Republic of Peru).

Domestic care work was and still is considered to be a women’s task and is largely unpaid. The second motion considered whether that should be changed. In some countries there is an understanding that everyone is responsible for care work but there is a generational gap in this understanding between older and younger couples who are more aware of this. Also, some women still have a sense of guilt for being a professional and a mother at the same time.

While women health care workers risk their lives to save lives and women teachers adapt to teaching digitally, more has to be done to support women’s inclusivity and acceptance in professional fields. Women parliamentarians must focus on families with children, especially during the pandemic. In this context, **Ms. I. Murniece** (Latvia) said that in her country, Parliament had decided to raise all benefits related to childcare in 2022 and to provide a one-off allowance benefit in 2021 for each child per family.

In opening this motion to the floor, **Ms. M. Batet** (Spain) identified two levels of discussion: on one level care work at home had to be considered as a “real” job and be compensated. Another equally important level was the furthering of equality in domestic work. Men should take care of work carried out at home as much as women did.

Ms. T. Wilhelmsen Trøen (Norway) expressed some concern

that affirming the motion would force even more women to stay at home. Although domestic care work is important, it is equally important to promote women’s inclusion in the workforce. While there should be financial support towards care work, it was a job that men should be encouraged to do as well. The discussion led back to the question of having more women parliamentarians and decision-makers who understood that position. Gender parity in leadership will ensure more public policies that value work at home and recognize women’s rights.



Ms. M. Batet, President of the Congress of Deputies of Spain.
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Debate on Motion 3: “Today, 60 per cent of women are not covered by any type of social protection. By 2030, universal and gender responsive social protection systems will be available for everyone”

The panel featured Ms. Meritxell Batet (President of the Congress of Deputies of Spain), Ms. Lesia Vasylenko (Member of Parliament of Ukraine and President of the IPU Bureau of Women Parliamentarians), and Ms. Borjana Krišto (Speaker of the House of Representatives of Bosnia and Herzegovina).

Interventions from the floor were made by: Ms. Sahar Albazar (Member of Parliament of Egypt and President of the IPU Board of the Forum of Young Parliamentarians), Ms. Fanny Carolina Salinas Fernández (President of the Central American Parliament (PARLACEN)), and Ms. Claudia Ledesma Abdala de Zamora (Provisional President of the Senate of Argentina).

Social protection is an integral aspect of the discussion on economic growth and gender equality. In this context, **Ms. M. Batet** (Spain) opened the debate by arguing that there was no bigger discrimination than the exclusion of women from pension and social security schemes. That impacted in particular vulnerable groups such as immigrants and older women, and must be changed through countries' political and legal frameworks. **Ms. B. Krišto** (Bosnia and Herzegovina) added that social protection systems had shortcomings and could be discriminatory against women. The shortcomings reflected the fact that women took on lower paid jobs and were largely underrepresented in the workforce leadership due to a lack of equal opportunities. Change needed to come through a more equitable access to education and the labour market, and through actions that increased social protection for all through legislative solutions to social security and labour rights.

Ms. L. Vasylenko (Ukraine) agreed that women were adversely affected when it came to access to social security. However, she believed that social policies that aimed to elevate the economic status of women without aiming for a cultural transformation would not be sustainable. What was needed instead was a gender equality model that could be achieved through universal gender-responsive social protection policies. It was important to take a closer look at the expectations our societies had on the roles of men and women and how that impacted the gender pay gap for

instance. The gender pay gap was a sum of different factors; one of which was the cultural expectations of caregiving. Women were obliged to become housewives. Research showed that even in situations where women and men were both working full time, a woman was more likely to spend more time on childcare or household activities. That affected a woman's likelihood of getting promoted and from there the women's and men's earning potential diverged. It was not possible to achieve women's equality in the workplace without having men's equality at home.



Ms. J. Nunu Kumba, Speaker of the Transitional National Legislative Assembly of South Sudan. © IPU

Session 2: Women in the post-pandemic recovery: Preserving achievements, furthering progress

The second session aimed at identifying ways and means of preserving and consolidating women's achievements and

furthering progress through a post-pandemic gender-responsive recovery agenda, leaving no woman and no girl behind.

Address by Mr. Abdulla Shahid, President elect of the 76th session of the United Nations General Assembly

Commending the Summit's theme, Mr. A. Shahid emphasized that during the darkest days of the pandemic, it was women, both in the medical field and in politics, that had helped navigate the pandemic. Society, however, had continued to deny women their inherent rights but the time had come for women to have a seat at the head of the table. Change must start now as society had a long way to go if parity was to be achieved.

Mr. Shahid stressed that even at the United Nations, out of 76 Presidents of the United Nations General Assembly only four were women. Society must do better in fulfilling the promises of the Beijing Platform for Action. Parliamentarians in particular must use their power to enact policy amendments to eliminate barriers to the empowerment of women.

Within the United Nations, gender equality was of paramount importance and was in his mandate as President of the United Nations General Assembly. In mainstreaming work in that area, the Advisory Group on Gender Equality, created by his predecessor, Mr. Volkan Bozkir of Turkey, was key. Mr. Shahid pledged that he would only attend panels where parity was assured.

In closing, Mr. Shahid called on men, like himself, who had benefitted from patriarchal systems, to take the necessary steps to empower women as the bigger picture of gender equality must be prioritized.

Introductory remarks by Ms. Pramila Patten, United Nations Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict and Acting Executive Director of UN Women

Referring to the theme of the Summit, Ms. P. Patten stressed that the COVID-19 pandemic gave rise to a number of gender-specific security concerns. Conflict-related sexual violence had not decreased during the pandemic. As the pandemic had caused an overall decline in humanitarian reach, displaced populations were exposed to a heightened risk of sexual violence and trafficking, as well as child marriage and survival sex. Moreover,

sexual harassment of women and healthcare workers had been documented during the pandemic.

Thus, in a post-pandemic era, Ms. Patten called on the participants to redouble efforts in tackling the root causes of gender-based violence. Women parliamentarians must play a central role in the response. She had three recommendations for lawmakers: to enact comprehensive legislation that criminalized all forms of sexual violence, to enact survivor-centered witness protection laws and legal protection for children born of conflict-induced rape, and to protect witnesses and human rights defenders through the law.

In addressing the root causes of gender inequality, countries must cooperate with each other and the international community to design gender-responsive pandemic recovery strategies. In June 2020, the IPU and Office of the United Nations Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict came up with a [Framework of Cooperation Agreement](#) to raise awareness among national parliaments about sexual violence in situations of armed conflict, in particular against women and girls but also against men and boys, and to provide support on the prevention and response to conflict-related sexual violence. She invited all members of the IPU to take part in the fulfillment of the framework.



Ms. P. Patten, United Nations Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict. © IPU

Debate on Motion 1: “Political will can make parity in parliament a reality globally by 2030”

The panel featured Ms. Esperança Laurinda Francisco Nhiuane Bias (Speaker of the Assembly of the Republic of Mozambique), Ms. Beatriz Argimón (President of the General Assembly and of the Senate of Uruguay), and Ms. Eliane Tillieux (President of the House of Representatives of Belgium).

Interventions from the floor were made by: Ms. Claudia Roth (Vice-President of the German Bundestag), Ms. Mukaddes Nalbant (Fourth Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly of Bulgaria), and Ms. Fawzia Zainal (Speaker of the Council of Representatives of Bahrain).

Political parity is a necessary component of achieving gender equality. **Ms. E. Bias** (Mozambique) stated that ensuring women and girls had the right to access education and healthcare started with providing platforms of access to power and decision-making. Indeed, the perspective on politics changed when women were in decision-making positions. The quality of legislation improved with women’s contribution. More women in parliament translated into more legislation addressing equal employment, equal property and ownership rights, stronger gender-budgeting mechanisms, and combatting violence against women and girls. It was also a central aspect

of democracy. Democracy implied advancing women’s position on the legislative level, something close to the heart of the women politicians present.

Ms. B. Argimón (Uruguay) discussed how quota laws had allowed many countries to reach the number of women parliamentarians they currently had in their chambers. However, progress was slow. The question was whether in the twenty-first century another tool, that was centered on the quality of democracy, could be used to advance political parity. In some cases, legislation was more focused on getting rid of stereotypes

of women in leadership. In others, it required carrying out internal changes that created an environment where women's full participation as leaders flourished, where there were no obstacles to women taking on their functions as leaders.

Ms. E. Tillieux (Belgium) added that that included awareness raising campaigns to eliminate sexist stereotypes, as well as education policies that targeted violence against women.

Debate on Motion 2: “Laws, policies and resource allocations that aim to empower women economically will help achieve a global economic recovery post-pandemic”

The panel featured Ms. Akiko Santo (President of the House of Councillors of Japan), Ms. Galina Karelova (Deputy Speaker of the Council of the Russian Federation), Ms. Sahiba Gafarova (Chairwoman of the National Assembly of Azerbaijan), Ms. Fanny Carolina Salinas Fernández (President of the Central American Parliament (PARLACEN)), Ms. Anita Demetriou (President of the House of Representatives of Cyprus), and Ms. Claudia Roth (Vice President of the German Bundestag).

In many countries during the pandemic, sectors with women employees were badly affected by the economic downturn. **Ms. A. Santo** (Japan) pointed out that in Japan more women than men had been laid off especially in the food and beverage sector, the hotel and restaurant sector, and the management sector. Policies had been introduced to enhance occupational training for single parents through digital literacy courses and the like. **Ms. G. Karelova** (Russia) added that women entrepreneurs and owners of small businesses in her country received special help during the pandemic as well. **Ms. S. Gafarova** (Azerbaijan) pointed out that special emphasis must be given to displaced women and their economic recovery post-pandemic. Similarly, **Ms. A. Demetriou** (Cyprus) stressed that in Afghanistan, in addition to the threat of economic impacts of the pandemic, women and girls were at risk of being deprived their rights and freedoms. As legislators, it was important to act now and exercise influence to make women's economic empowerment a key to national



Ms. A. Demetriou, President of the House of Representatives of Cyprus. © IPU

Ms. C. Roth (Germany) closed the motion by recognizing how important and how rare it was for women Speakers to be in that position. They must therefore use their position to give hope to women and girls, and to inspire people that a different type of leadership was possible. Moreover, they must use their position to enact strong policies and legislation that elevated gender equality in their countries.

recovery plans. Moreover, women were experiencing more threats to their safety during the pandemic which may cause an increase in poverty rates.



Ms. A. Santo, President of the House of Councillors of Japan. © IPU

Ms. F.C. Salinas Fernández (PARLACEN) agreed that there was a need to incorporate gender into macro-economic policies. Education and entrepreneurship were equally important. However, **Ms. C. Roth** (Germany) said that aiming for minor changes while maintaining an unjust pre-covid economic system was not enough. What was needed was a transformation of the economy through a feminist lens. The COVID-19 crisis provided an opportunity for transformation and gave a clear message of what must be changed. It was the duty of female parliamentarians to lead the feminist transformation of the global system, to ensure the just allocation of resources and equal opportunities in the economy.

Debate on Motion 3: “By 2030, violence against women and girls and harmful practices such as child marriage and female genital mutilation will have disappeared”

The panel featured Ms. Shirin Sharmin Chaudhury (Speaker of Parliament of the Parliament of Bangladesh), Ms. Mabel M. Chinomona (President of the Senate of Zimbabwe), and Ms. Margareta Cederfelt (President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE)).



Ms. S. Sharmin Chaudhury, Speaker of Parliament of Bangladesh.
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The goal of ending violence against women and girls (VAWG) and harmful practices such as child marriage and female genital mutilation, although pressing and important, may not be achievable by 2030. **Ms. S. Sharmin Chaudhury** (Bangladesh) argued that to achieve significant changes in that area at a global level, women’s representation in all spheres, public and private, must increase. Women’s political empowerment was strongly linked to the eradication of violence and harmful practices against women which was why both must be eradicated. To achieve that, girls must be empowered at a young age and have access to quality education.

As daunting challenges related to violence against women and children in the COVID-19 pandemic arose, Speakers must strengthen their efforts to eradicate VAWG. In many cases, without drastic cultural and economic change, women will continue to suffer. Violence against women and children is firmly rooted in political and social factors. Child marriage is also related to deep seated cultural and economic factors. **Ms. M. Cederfelt** (OSCE) argued that to end early marriage globally the economic advancement of women must be focused on. Lack of income was strongly related to the incidence of early marriage.

Ms. M.M. Chinomona (Zimbabwe) discussed three main barriers to the eradication of violence against women: the lack of funding, illiteracy, and the burden of unpaid household

chores. As political parties remained largely patriarchal, finding funding to eradicate VAWG was difficult. Moreover, the lack of economic advancement due to illiteracy and the burden of unpaid household chores was linked to the issue of early marriage. Women Speakers of parliament must lead in sparking both cultural and economic changes that would lead to significant changes in the area of VAWG.



Ms. M.M. Chinomona, President of the Senate of Zimbabwe.
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In terms of solutions that allow women to achieve equality in the home and in the workplace, **Ms. C. Ledesma Abdala de Zamora** (Argentina) said that a law in her country allowed women to finish work and retire early depending on the number of children they had. They could also retire earlier if their children had disabilities.

Ms. S. Albazar (Egypt) pointed out that in addition to social protection, mental health also must be prioritized not just for women but for children and adolescents as they had to deal with the impacts of the pandemic. That was something that governments and private institutions must work towards.

If participants in the debate concluded that while women needed strong social support in the labour market, they also needed strong support at home. Equitable solutions to work performed at home were crucial.

Closing session

The session opened with a video message by **Ms. T. Narbaeva**, Chairwoman of the Senate of Uzbekistan, who invited the women Speakers to the 14th Summit of Women Speakers of Parliament to be held in 2022 in Uzbekistan.

Closing statements were delivered by the Chairperson of the Summit and Speaker of the Parliament of Norway Ms. Tone Wilhelmsen Trøen, the Secretary General of the Austrian Parliament Mr. Harald Dossi, and the IPU Secretary General Mr. Martin Chungong.³



Video message of
Ms. T. Narbaeva, Chairwoman
of the Senate of Uzbekistan.
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Ms. T. Wilhelmsen Trøen (Summit Chairperson and Speaker of the Parliament of Norway) reiterated that the pandemic had brought with it new challenges, such as global inequities in vaccines and access to medical support. However, it also opened up new opportunities. The debate had shown that women in power were showing the way on so many fronts. It had also reinforced the view that having gender-responsive legal reforms and economic policies that recognized women's unique work should not be separate from the COVID-19 recovery but must be integral to it. To build back better meant "to build back more equal".

Mr. H. Dossi (Secretary General of the National Council of Austria) said that the role of women and girls was of great importance that went beyond but was also an integral part of the challenges posed by the pandemic. If gender was not taken into consideration, current inequalities would worsen and new ones would be created. Women were an essential part of a sustainable security structure. Women in the highest offices in parliament must have a voice in the parliamentary agenda if gender-responsive solutions to the economic and social problems the world was facing were to be found.

³ The full texts of the closing statements are available at: [13th Summit of Women Speakers of Parliament 2021 | Inter-Parliamentary Union \(ipu.org\)](https://www.ipu.org/13th-summit-women-speakers-parliament-2021).

Mr. M. Chungong (IPU Secretary General) underlined the main issues discussed at the 13SWSP. Those included efforts to ensure a gender-responsive economic recovery, fair compensation and equal division of domestic work between men and women, the need to have universal social protection systems that catered equitably to men and women. From a policy level, examples of the progress made in many countries had been given, such as the provision of financial support to families for childcare based on the number of children, early retirement for women who had children with disabilities, mental health hotlines that supported children and adolescents as they bounced back from the pandemic, and of course policies that increased women's participation in decision-making which ultimately improved the quality of legislation. He concluded that there could be no doubt that when women were involved effectively in decision-making and in fashioning legislation, more effective outcomes were achieved.

Annex

The following documents are available on the event webpage:

<https://www.ipu.org/event/13th-summit-women-speakers-parliament-2021>

Opening statements

Ms. Tone Wilhelmsen Trøen,
Speaker of Parliament (Norway) and Chairperson of the Summit

Mr. Wolfgang Sobotka,
President of the National Council (Austria)

Mr. Duarte Pacheco,
President of the Inter-Parliamentary Union

Closing statements

Special remarks on the 14th Summit of Women Speakers of Parliament by
Ms. Tanzila Narbaeva, Chairwoman of the Senate (Uzbekistan)

Ms. Tone Wilhelmsen Trøen,
Speaker of Parliament (Norway) and Chairperson of the Summit

Mr. Harald Dossi,
Secretary General of the Austrian Parliament

Mr. Martin Chungong,
Secretary General of the Inter-Parliamentary Union

List of Members of the Preparatory Committee

List of Participants

The recorded livestream of the Summit is also available [here](#) (in English) and [here](#) (in its original language).



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Summit of Women Speakers of Parliament

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