



Realizing Gender Equality in and by Parliaments

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Helsinki, Finland

Opening Remarks for OSCE PA President Pia Kauma

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Dear Members of the Parliaments from across the OSCE region,

Excellencies, esteemed guests, distinguished colleagues,

It is an honor to open today's important discussion on gender-sensitive parliaments and to discuss the pivotal role parliaments can play in advancing gender equality in our institutions.

I want to begin by expressing my appreciation to the Finnish Parliament, the 2025 OSCE Chairperson-in-Office of Finland, OSCE ODIHR and OSCE PA for putting together this event and for placing this topic—so crucial to democratic values—at the top of our political agenda.

As President of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, I come from an institution that deeply values equality, dialogue, and co-operation. Over the years, the OSCE PA has advocated for stronger gender mainstreaming in all aspects of our work.

The OSCE PA's Special Representative on Gender Issues is one of the more established roles in our Assembly, and has been pivotal in driving attention to gender equality across the Assembly's work and fostering dialogue on gender issues among our parliamentary delegations. The reports by the Special Representative have raised awareness, spotlighted persistent gaps, and offered practical guidance to advance gender equality.

The OSCE PA also regularly adopts resolutions that emphasize gender mainstreaming in all policy areas. We encourage balanced representation in delegations and gender balance is a key consideration in all senior appointments in the Assembly.

Through our Informal gender network we also promote inclusive legislative practices across the OSCE region. We have developed excellent cooperation with ODIHR to promote gender equality and to facilitate their support to parliaments in becoming more gender-sensitive.

I would like to underline that a gender-sensitive parliament does not only mean equal participation of women and men. It is much more than that. It reflects the diverse needs and experiences of all people in its work, structures, policies, and culture. That is why advocating for gender-sensitive parliaments does not mean favoring women. It simply benefits democracy, good governance, and peace and security.

Looking at our vast region, while we have overall made progress, we must also acknowledge that progress has been uneven and, in some cases, stagnant. Women remain underrepresented in political leadership positions, gender bias persists in parliamentary culture, and the legislative process too often overlooks gendered dimensions. In addition, women parliamentarians continue to face unacceptable levels of harassment and violence, both online and offline. These challenges demand a systemic response.

While the challenges are significant, we should not be pessimistic as we have already seen promising examples. There are some initiatives led by male MPs against gender-based violence, championing parental leave policies, and advocating for gender-responsive budgeting. These actions send a powerful message: that men must be involved and that equality strengthens us all. Nevertheless, they remain relatively uncommon.

We also need to reimagine our parliamentary procedures and environments. How we conduct debates, schedule votes, or design facilities—these are not neutral decisions. They either enable or inhibit participation. By conducting gender audits of parliaments, revising codes of conduct, and creating formal mechanisms for gender mainstreaming, we can make our institutions more inclusive. By doing so, we make our societies more democratic.

In closing, I thank all of you—parliamentarians, experts, and civil society partners—for your dedication and leadership. I hope this event leads to more than a dialogue. Let us not be content with symbolic gestures. Through the Helsinki Principles, which we will discuss in these two days, let us commit to structural change and make this event a call for action—action that creates parliaments that are representative and transformative.

Thank you.