

PACE President: ‘Pushing back against the pushback’ on gender equality

14.03.2019, New York – Taking part in the 63rd Session of the Commission on the Status of Women at the UN in New York, PACE President Liliane Maury Pasquier has joined UN Secretary General António Guterres in calling for a “pushback against the pushback” on gender equality.

“With 9,000 participants and 2,000 delegates registered at the conference, it was an opportunity to promote the UN Sustainable Development Goals and in particular Goal 5, achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls,” said Ms Maury Pasquier. “Many of the participants highlighted the symptoms of inequality, including those shown through sexism, harassment and violence against women.”

The Council of Europe, the Inter-Parliamentary Union and Finland, as part of the Finnish presidency, organised a workshop on this issue demonstrating how sexism, harassment and violence impacts on women parliamentarians. “The statistics are extremely worrying,” the President said. “A recent joint study by the Parliamentary Assembly and the Inter-Parliamentary Union revealed that over 85 per cent of respondents had experienced psychological violence, 47 per cent had received threats of death, rape or beating during their parliamentary term, and 68 per cent had been subjected to sexist remarks.”

“This should no longer be treated as ‘business as usual’. One would expect parliaments to be a ‘safe place for women’, but they are not. Sexism, harassment and violence against women is prevalent in all sectors of life, and parliaments are unfortunately a microcosm of society. One particularly odious example, which I was called upon to condemn while I was in New York, concerned a Greek newspaper *‘Makelieo’* which published pictures of female members of the Greek Government and the Prime Ministers’ wife under the title ‘The whores of the traitor’.”

“The conference and the many side-events were an occasion to send a loud and clear message that sexism, harassment and violence against women is unacceptable. There is a strong willingness to react and raise awareness with clear messages such as the repeated refrain during the conference ‘pushback against the pushback’, or the call to recognise unequal pay between women and men as ‘the biggest robbery the world has ever seen’.”

“There are also steps that can be taken to promote the further ratification and implementation of the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (the Istanbul Convention) and to support my own initiative, #NotInMyParliament, which is mobilising parliaments to take immediate action to stamp out sexism and violence. This hash-tag initiative can however be adapted for almost any setting: #NotInMyOffice, #NotInMyCity, etc.”

“During my visit to New York I was able to discuss these matters, not only with many participants but also with the UN Secretary General, António Guterres, and representatives of many international organisation. Importantly I was also able to discuss a range of other human rights issues with Ambassadors or their representatives, thereby situating the backlash against women’s rights in the context of a backlash against both human rights and multilateralism.”

During her participation in the CSW63, Ms Maury Pasquier met with UN Secretary General António Guterres and had other high-level bilateral meetings, including with Gabriela Cuevas Barrón, President of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU); Purna Sen, UN Spokesperson on Sexual Harassment; Jane Connors, UN Victims' Rights Advocate; Andrew Gilmour, Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights and Head of the OHCHR Office in New York; Ninette Kelley, Director of the UNHCR Liaison Office in New York; Dr Natalia Kanem, UN Under Secretary General and Executive Director of UNFPA; Omar Abdi, UNICEF Deputy Executive Director; representatives of Human Rights Watch; and a number of UN Ambassadors of Council of Europe member States.