



Africa: 1st Women in Parliament Global Forum Hosted By European Parliament in Brussels

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PRESS RELEASE

The Opening session of the first ever Women in Parliament Global Forum kicked off in Brussels on 27 November 2013, with women Members of Parliament from all regions of the world attending.

Held under the theme, "The Spirit of Women in Parliament: Advancing society," the session was addressed by the President of Liberia, H.E. Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, the Prime Minister of Jamaica, H.E. Portia Simpson-Miller and Chairperson of the African Union Commission, H.E. Dr. Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma.

The Keynote speakers congratulated New Zealand on the 120 anniversary of the women's suffrage, with this country being the first to grant women the right to vote in a national election. President Sirleaf and Dr. Dlamini Zuma both hailed this as a celebration for women everywhere.

The first day of the Global Forum heard testimonies from women MPs and leaders about progress in increasing the number of women in their parliaments from across the world: Bolivia and Uganda, from the United Arab Emirates, Mongolia, Ireland and Croatia, from Poland, Rwanda and Afghanistan.

In a very moving statement, the representative from the Philippines spoke about the impact of natural disasters linked to climate change, and specifically the recent tragedy in her country. Philippine women doctors, nurses and other medical personnel, she reported, were at the forefront of rushing to the assistance of millions of people affected by the tragedy.

The inputs and discussions during the first day drew attention to strategies to increase women representation in parliament and governments and the impact that women are expected to make.

Dr. Dlamini Zuma, during her statement, quoted Emmeline Parkhurst, an early women suffragist, who stated in 1913 that "... we are women fighting for a great idea; that we wish the betterment of the human race, and that we believe this betterment is coming through the emancipation and uplifting of women." This betterment of society through the emancipation and uplifting of women was a central theme of all sessions.

Speakers from across the world hailed the progress made by Africa in addressing gender equality in the political sphere, with Rwanda leading the world with nearly 64% representation of women in Parliament, and fourteen (14) out of the forty six country that have more than 25% representation of women in Parliament being African.

The first day concluded with an Award ceremony to different countries, for progress in 'Bridging the Gender Gap'. The regional award for South and South East Asia went to the Philippines; the winner of the African award was Lesotho and Iceland won the award in Europe and Central Asia.

Rwanda was the overall award winner in the category of Political Empowerment, with Jamaica and Ireland receiving the Award for Women in Government.

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Africa

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