



International Gender Champions (IGC)

Written submission in view of a future CEDAW General Recommendation on Equal and Inclusive Representation of Women in Decision-Making Systems (GR 40) February 2023

1) Introduction

Ensuring equal and inclusive representation of women in decision-making systems, and dismantling roadblocks that continue to bar women from meaningful political participation, is core to the mission of the International Gender Champions (IGC). Understanding the pivotal role that senior leaders play in this, IGC was formed in 2015 as a leadership network to bring together decision-makers determined to break down barriers to gender equality and make gender equality a working reality within their sphere of influence.

What began as a common undertaking by a handful of leaders, accounts to date for over 320 active Champions and over 340 Alumni, who are the heads of international organizations, permanent diplomatic missions, and civil society organizations. Champions are based in or affiliated with one of the six IGC hubs in Geneva, New York, Nairobi, Vienna, Paris, and The Hague. With its tri-partite structure and global reach, IGC is ideally positioned to effect change in international settings and multilateral fora. By further connecting and engaging inclusive leaders within and between institutions, the network facilitates a deeper level of collaborative exchange, leverages institutional knowledge and generates transformative action to tackle systemic challenges to gender equality.

IGC views the proposed General Recommendation as an opportunity to highlight the importance of committed leadership, multilateral engagement and effective role-modeling around common standards in enabling gender-responsive, equitable and inclusive decision-making spaces.

2) Shifting paradigms by role-modeling gender-inclusiveness

Women, due to deeply rooted gendered inequities, have a particularly high stake in issues affecting society as a whole; yet their ability to act on it remains limited. Considering data on women's representation in policy-making systems highlights the dissonance between the continued under-representation of women – both quantitative and qualitative - and the vast evidence suggesting that the impact of global challenges is disproportionately borne by women.

To effectively advance progress towards the Sustainable Development Agenda, however, it is vital to

- ensure that decision-making bodies reflect the demographic diversity of the population they serve to effectively respond to differing needs;



- tap into the expertise of women actors in politics, civil society, academia and economy and leverage diversity for innovative and sustainable solution; and
- effect culture change and alter limiting norms and beliefs about gendered roles in politics by legitimizing women as political actors and having women role-models inspiring younger women and girls to become involved in politics.

High-profile leaders and international standard-setting institutions have a particular responsibility to acknowledge and address existing power asymmetries to ensure inclusive and safe decision-making spaces for all. IGC recognizes the role that decision-makers can play in tackling gendered inequities by effectively role-modeling gender-inclusive practices and using their voice and platform to elevate and amplify women's voices. By integrating aspects of both symbolic and substantive representation, IGC's activities are aimed at expanding scope and depth of leaders' gender-related engagement and support them in charting the way towards social transformation for gender equality.

3) Background

3.1) IGC model

To become a Champion, one must be the head of an organization, permanent mission, or institution and be based in or significantly contribute to the work of one of the six IGC hubs. All Champions have to adhere to two core pledges: a **Panel Parity Pledge**, committing the Champion to no longer take part in any single-sex panels and to promote equal participation of men and women in international debates, and a **Gender-based Violence (GBV) Pledge** to advocate for a zero-tolerance stance towards any form of GBV, sexist attitudes or behaviour, thus gradually shifting gender norms. Champions also have to make **two personal commitments per year**, tailored to their respective context, to advance gender equality in their organization or programmatic work

In addition to their individual commitments, Champions have the possibility to join one of the IGC Impact Groups. Led directly by Champions, these multi-stakeholder working groups that can break down silos between missions, international organisations, civil society, academic research and business, Impact Groups focus on a specific topic for systems change across a sector, such as climate, trade, justice or representation. Impact Groups identify gender blind spots and opportunities, develop strategic objectives to make policy, programs and practice more gender fluent, and create action plans to operationalize gender equality objectives.

3.2) The IGC Representation Impact Group

One of the first IGC Impact Groups created was the IGC Representation Impact Group, which seeks to mobilize around meaningful representation, participation and influence of women, youth and other marginalized groups in international fora and decision-making bodies. Looking beyond numeric representation, the group focuses on who gets to speak and who gets to be heard at international assemblies and conferences, aiming to shift deeply entrenched structures of power and influence.

A principal outcome of the group's work has been the [Gender Responsive Assemblies Toolkit](#), developed in 2018. The toolkit aims to accelerate progress towards gender equality by setting out common standards, effective short- and long-term mechanisms, and existing best practices for gender-responsive assemblies. With actionable recommendations and good practice examples divided into



“before”, “during” and “after”, it touches on the various aspects of an assembly’s life-cycle, including agenda-setting, participation, governance, working environment, decision-making and actions taken in the aftermath of an assembly. The toolkit can be used by all actors driving change, including Director-/Secretary-Generals, Secretariats, Member States, civil society and staff.

While continuing the work on the Gender Responsive Assemblies Toolkit, the Impact Group has also considered and promoted the usage of the [Gender Gap App](#) (G-App), an open-source software conceived by Women@TheTable, ideated with IPU, IUCN, WMO, WIPO, UNAIDS & UN Women. The G-App works by taking speaker demographics and session recordings and analysing who speaks on which topics, with how much time and with how much influence. It uses an explainable AI algorithm to draw out insights on who is speaking on the topics and pulls all the insights together to produce simple, yet powerful visualisations. These visualisations display the event’s diversity, measuring representation (how many attendees, from which regions, gender, age, institution), participation (speaking time in sessions) and influence (which level of authority, for example, using the head of delegation role as a proxy for powerful influence). It also provides crucial data on who gets to speak on which topic, providing data, for instance, on whether women predominantly get to speak on gender-related topics, or also have an equal voice when it comes to climate change, finance or food security.

4) Good practices

The development of the Gender Responsive Assemblies Toolkit is a milestone moment for the IGC and for the principles it advocates vis-à-vis gender parity, equal opportunities and feminist leadership. By engaging organizations and missions in a process of reflection on their internal processes, standards and culture, it provided the opportunity for a multilateral mapping of good practices, while questioning how these practices meet the requirements of a truly gender responsive assembly. Developed three years after IGC was launched, it represents an example of the potential and effectiveness of inclusive and collective leadership in driving change.

A range of IGC Champions’ organizations have established good practices to ensure gender-responsive assemblies, such as, but not limited to, the following:

- Before an Assembly, the International Labour Organization sends out personalized invitation letters to high-level meetings to the Organization Head encouraging gender-parity in all communications sent to Members during the pre-Assembly period.
- In invitations to delegations, the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) encourages gender balance. Following the registration period, IPU writes to delegations registering single-sex delegations asking them to rectify the list.
- In selecting a limited number of experts from developing and least developed countries to be funded to take part in their meetings, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) gives preference to women and underrepresented experts who meet all the criteria.
- During assemblies, open breast-feeding rooms near major conference rooms at the Palais des Nations encourage participation by women at the United Nations Office at Geneva (UNOG).



- The International Telecommunication Union (ITU) uses machine learning software to analyze recordings and determine the percentage of time of women spoke.
- The World Meteorological Organization (WMO) maintains a comprehensive Gender Database tracking the gender composition of all bodies and gender balance at meetings and makes data publicly available and present at governance meetings.
- The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) ensures that promotional material, audiovisual recordings, case studies and publications produced for the Assembly or Congress are consciously diverse and gender-aware.

By mapping existing good examples and developing a comprehensive set of standards, the IGC leads a high-level advocacy strategy based on evidence and strong commitment for change.

5) Recommendations towards Ensuring Equal and Inclusive Representation of Women in Decision-Making Spaces

5.1) Underlying principles

Drawing from the best practices within its network and building on the gains for gender equality achieved via its leadership engagement, IGC has articulated the following underlying principles to successfully promote women's equitable representation in decision-making spaces for consideration by the CEDAW committee:

- Going beyond numeric representation and promoting equal influence by creating a **safe, inclusive and enabling environment** for women representatives;
- Applying an **intersectional lens** that does justice to the complex nature of social inequity and compounding experiences of discrimination by centering those who have traditionally been marginalized;
- Normalizing women's participation in decision-making systems by focusing on their **agency as experts and drivers of change** instead of defaulting to a mono-dimensional approach that considers women only as victims who require help;
- Recognizing that men in many instances continue to serve as gatekeepers to gender reform and promoting transformative masculinities by effectively **engaging men**, particularly male leaders, as allies and role models for gender equality;
- Institutionalizing **diverse avenues** for women's participation in decision-making that reach beyond formal policy-making institutions and actively seek to integrate **local actors and civil society**; and
- Adopting a **holistic approach** to ensuring gender equality in spheres of power, influence and decision-making that looks at the institutional environment, decision-making processes and the rules of the game.



5.2) Specific actions

IGC specifically calls on the CEDAW Committee to consider recommending the following actions to its constituents, as articulated in its Gender Responsive Assemblies Toolkit and its general IGC guidelines.

4.2.1) Before an assembly

- **Create an enabling and inclusive environment for meaningful and substantive participation by women and the advancement of gender equality by**
 - Demonstrating strong political will to promote gender equality from the top (at political and executive level)
 - Ensuring Secretariats have an institutional mandate and resources to advance gender equality
 - Creating a dedicated gender equality body
 - Building internal gender mainstreaming mechanisms
 - Setting dedicated policies to tackle harassment and sexism
 - Designing a communication strategy that is gender-responsive
- **Promote gender equality in participation and governance by**
 - Setting specific targets on women's representation and increasing the targets until parity is reached
 - Providing financial and capacity-building support to women delegates
 - Communicating early and consistently with membership on targets and gaps
 - Institutionalizing gender balance on panels and among participants, for instance via a panel parity pledge or policy
- **Advance gender equality in deliberations and decisions by**
 - Institutionalizing gender equality as a standing item on official agenda-setting
 - Creating a dedicated body to discuss gender equality issues
 - Designating experts tasked with mainstreaming gender into programming
 - Recruiting high-level members to serve as gender focal points
 - Engaging an even wider range of influencer champions from within membership

4.2.2) During an assembly

- **Create an enabling and inclusive environment for meaningful and substantive participation by women and the advancement of gender equality by**
 - Opening with a strong statement regarding anti-harassment and zero tolerance for any form of prohibited conduct
 - Ensuring that women and men members of a Secretariat are equally represented in interaction with Member States
 - Instituting gender-responsive / family- friendly arrangements, for instance refraining from late-night conference sessions or providing on-site childcare
 - Ensuring gender-responsive communications throughout the event
- **Promote gender equality in participation and governance by**
 - Conveying the importance of gender equality in representation to Members



- Systematically tracking sex-disaggregated data on participation by numbers, speaking time, role, topic etc. in delegations, governing bodies, panels and other; and highlighting the data in plenary
 - Adopting resolutions that encourage higher participation of women
 - Raising awareness around the underrepresentation of women in assemblies
 - Engaging in dialogue with delegations that have no or few women
 - Providing prominent spaces for women delegates and speakers, and considering priority speaking rights for women and representatives of traditionally marginalized communities
- **Advance gender equality in deliberations and decisions**
- Assigning mandates for integrating a gender perspective
 - Institutionalizing participatory approaches via formal and informal consultations with women stakeholders and feminist civil society.

4.2.3) After an assembly

- **Promote gender equality in participation and governance by**
- Reaching out to Members that have not reached minimum target of female participation in delegations
 - Publishing sex-disaggregated data and statistics on gender balance in delegations, bodies, and panels
- **Advance gender equality in deliberations and decisions by**
- Giving visibility to the Assembly's gender equality related outcomes
 - Creating clear roadmaps to implement resolutions and decisions with a feedback loop to the next Assembly
 - Beginning drafting new resolutions if necessary