



**Commission on the Status of Women  
Fifty-ninth session**

**National mechanisms for gender equality: advocates for action and  
accountability, catalysts for change**

**PANEL DISCUSSION**

**LEGISLATIVE CHANGE AND ACCOUNTABILITY**

**by**

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Member of the National Parliament of the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste**

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15.00 - 18.00 pm**

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\*The views expressed in this paper are those of the author and do not necessarily represent those of the United Nations.

I am honored and inspired to be part of this historical Commission on the Status of Women celebrating Beijing 20 years on. And it is a privilege to be invited to the Roundtable on “National mechanisms for gender equality: advocates for action and accountability, catalysts for change”.

As a Member of Parliament of the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste I am delighted to share our experience in advancing gender equality and women’s rights in Timor-Leste, challenges faced and lessons learned.

Timor-Leste gained independence in 2002 after 24 years of conflict which displaced almost 75% of the population and destroyed 70% of the infrastructure. In this post-conflict context, Timor-Leste has made considerable achievements in promoting gender equality and women’s empowerment in the country through legislative reform. Gender equality is guaranteed in Timor-Leste’s Constitution. TL ratified CEDAW the same year it gained independence. The Strategic Development Plan (2011-2030) clearly sets out the Government’s gender equality priorities. The vision is that, by 2030, Timor-Leste will be a “gender-fair society where human dignity and women’s rights are valued, protected and promoted”. The Government signed the Dili Komprimisu, a public declaration that acknowledges the importance of gender equality and investing in women and girls, to achieve sustainable development, address poverty and strengthen society.

We have put in place key policy and legislation reforms, including adoption of the Government Resolution on Gender-Responsive Budgets (2009), Law on Domestic Violence (2010) and the National Action Plan on Gender-based Violence (2012-2014). Timor-Leste has also initiated the development of the National Action Plan on implementation of the Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security (SCR1325).

CEDAW has been increasingly used as a framework for legislative reform. UN Women has been providing technical assistance in strengthening capacity of multi-stakeholder group, including the Ministry of Justice, the Office of the Ombudsman, legal actors and civil society organizations on legislation and women’s human rights. A national expert group engaged in legislative reform has been established to draft and review laws from a women’s human rights perspective. This group provides inputs into draft legislations, ensuring WHR is integrated into draft laws. A recent court judgement saw CEDAW being invoked by a judge in a domestic violence case!

The National Parliament has 38% representation of women, the highest in the Asia Pacific region, which I have the honor to represent. , Advocacy from the women’s movement and the women’s machinery made this change possible through introduction of the temporary special measures in ensuring 30% representation of women in the Law on Election of the National Parliament (2010). To ensure accountability on commitments made on gender equality and women’s empowerment in legislative change, the National Parliament has established the Women’s Caucus, Grupo das Mulheres Parlamentares de Timor-Leste - GMPTL. With overall goals of advocating for gender equality and women’s human rights in the promotion of legislation and policies as well as budgets, GMPTL is supported by the Center for Capacity Building and Information about Gender Equality (CEGEN that provides knowledge management and trainings on gender equality for parliamentarians. There is also a specific Parliamentary Committee on Health, Education, Culture, Veterans and Gender Equality with an overall oversight and legislature mandate in respective areas. The Women’s Caucus, made up of women Parliamentarians are also members of Parliamentary Committees. Advocacy for engendering laws and budgets are organized through the Committees.

The Parliamentary Women's Caucus coordinates advocacy with the Secretary of State for the Support and Socio-Economical Promotion of Women (SEM), the Government's principal entity responsible for planning, executing, coordinating and evaluating policies in the field of the promotion of gender equality. SEM's main functions are to support Government efforts in mainstreaming gender equality in the policies, programs, plans and budgets as well as to coordinate and monitor implementation of gender equality commitments. As a part of the Government Budget Review Committee SEM provides recommendations to the government institutions for integration of the gender equality actions and allocation of resources in their annual plans and budgets. A gender architecture of Gender Working Groups at Ministerial and District Levels has been set up to facilitate gender mainstreaming in the ministries and districts, including through annual work planning and budgeting, sectoral policies development and implementation. The Inter-Ministerial Coordination Commission comprised of six state institutions was established specifically for monitoring implementation of the National Action Plan on Gender-Based Violence. This Commission is also tasked to provide an annual report on NAP implementation to the Parliament.

In the swearing in of the VI Constitutional Government recently, H.E the Prime Minister in his inaugural speech committed himself and the Government to addressing gender inequality and violence against women in our homes, our institutions and our nation.

While there have been significant legislative change to advance gender equality and women's empowerment as well as establishment of accountability mechanisms, challenges remain.

Traditional power structures that have existed for hundreds of years continue shaping the governance, influence and decision-making systems that exist today. Women tend to be left out of these power structures at the highest levels.

It would take time and concerted effort to translate the high representation of women in Parliament to meaningful change for women on the ground. Quotas for women, an important step in ensuring this long term change is but an initial stage of the process of transformation.

The extent to which the Women's Caucus is able to influence and promote the women's human rights agenda in the review of legislation and State budget depends on effectiveness of members of Parliament, both women and men in advocating a collective agenda. Given the political party agenda, lack of consensus, contestation on legitimacy and limited coordination, among others, it cannot be assumed that numbers would automatically translate to gender equality and women's empowerment outcomes.

To exemplify my point, let us look at the State Budget review process. The tedious process of reviewing annual budgets of line Ministries assigned to SEM, the women's machinery has opened up possibilities of integrating gender into sectoral budgets. SEM sits in the Budget Review Committee that provides inputs to line Ministries on their budgets. However, oversight is not provided to ensure that these inputs are integrated before budgets are approved. Additionally, coordination between SEM and the Parliament needs further strengthening in order to ensure that accountability gaps are closed. A crucial element in closing accountability gaps is technical capacity to apply gender equality principles into legislation and budgets as well as better understanding of mechanisms and processes in order to influence these.

The GMPTL and SEM have been working with UN Women to close some of these gaps. Development of gender checklists for sectoral annual planning and budgeting process conducted as part of capacity

building of the inter-Ministerial Gender Working Group has been initiated. The same checklist is then used for the review of budgets prior to submission to the Ministry of Finance as well as during the review by the Budget Review Committee. Questions are posed by relevant Parliamentary Committees based on the same checklist to line Ministries where gender gaps remain in allocation of budget.

The role of civil society organizations in monitoring allocation and expenditure of budgets from a gender equality perspective has been no less important. Through partnership with a transparency organization, Lao Hamutuk, women's groups have formed a gender budget working group and have raised women's issues and concerns in the annual budget review process. In addition, social accountability tools are currently being developed by Luta Hamutuk, an NGO working on economic justice in collaboration with Fokupers, a women's organization working on elimination of violence against women to monitor expenditure of State Budget at community level. While still very nascent, this initiative builds on gender responsive budgeting from below and calls to account Government commitment on gender equality and women's empowerment.

Implementation of the Law on Domestic Violence and the National Action Plan on Gender-Based Violence is yet another case in point. From advocacy on the Law on Domestic Violence to establishment of mechanisms for implementation of the NAP on GBV, collaboration between the executive and legislative arms of the Government, as well as that between the Government and CSOs/women's groups have resulted in joint work on preventing and responding to violence against women. The Parliament reviews the report on implementation of the National Action Plan on Gender-based Violence annually submitted by the Government. The report examines actions completed but not look at impact these have on the lives of women and girls. It also does not sufficiently provide a critical analysis of the gaps nor does it track financial allocations by line ministries for implementation of the Plan.

Establishment of the first Government women's crisis center sees joint work between the Ministry of Social Solidarity and Fokupers, subcontracted to run the center. The referral networks initiated by CSOs have been adopted by the Government to be set up in all districts and focal points in the districts work with CSOs in providing services to survivors of violence. Nation-wide campaigns conducted annually during 16 days of activism is also seeing improved sharing of information and coordination.

To conclude, I wish to say, that Timor-Leste has laid good foundations by adopting policies and legislation as well as setting structures and mechanisms, which are necessary to deliver the gender equality commitments. Setting these formal accountability systems and mechanisms for gender equality is a tremendously important step for our country. Yet, making them work and deliver concrete outcomes for women and girls is a task requiring long-term investment in capacity building as well as alliance building and partnerships of all branches of power, civil society organizations and women's groups and development partners. And for advocacy on gender equality and women's empowerment to be effective, the Beijing agenda of gender mainstreaming requires commitment of Government at the highest level with allocation of adequate budgets and improved accountability on use of State Budget.

Thank you for the opportunity for sharing Timor-Leste's experience and I look forward to learning the experiences of other countries. Obrigado barack!