



2016

Report on  
ParlAmericas  
Inter-parliamentary Meeting on  
Gender-based Political Harassment:  
Building Awareness in Parliaments



**SAINT LUCIA**  
**26-27 JANUARY 2016**

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## Overview

During the period January 26 to 27 this year, legislators from more than ten (10) countries across the Caribbean and other Anglophone countries of the Americas assembled in Castries, Saint Lucia, to exchange experiences and strategies to overcome the issue of gender-based political harassment.

This inter-parliamentary meeting, titled Gender-based Political Harassment: Building Awareness in Parliaments, was organized by the Group of Women Parliamentarians of ParlAmericas and was hosted by the Government of Saint Lucia and presiding officers the Honourable Peter Foster, Speaker of the House of Assembly and the Honourable Claudius J. Francis, President of the Senate. The Honourable Alvina Reynolds, Minister responsible for Gender Relations, also participated in the meetings and gave remarks at the inauguration.

The Trinidad and Tobago delegates had the privilege of interacting and sharing experiences with fellow legislatures from Antigua and Barbuda, the Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Canada, Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, Jamaica, Saint Kitts and Nevis. The well organised meeting had a number of experts who were able to bring life to the topics and issues discussed. Presenters came from organisations such as UN Women, the InterAmerican Commission of Women of the Organization of American States, the Caribbean Institute of Women in Leadership, and the University of the West Indies.

Delegates learnt that political harassment denotes intimidation or violence targeting Women and men (*we had a small but very active group of male legislatures who wanted the discussions to expand to treat with political harassment against men*) active in public life, in ways which are both politically motivated and based on gender.

Applying this definition specifically to parliamentary politics and the experiences of women in parliament, we were able to demonstrate how political harassment could manifest in various ways such as sexist language, biased media coverage, pressure to renounce elected office, and other forms of aggression. Delegates had the unfortunate experience of being witness to the manifestation of political harassment in motion as our

colleagues from Antigua and Barbuda gave us daily updates on a situation in their country where a female opposition member was being bullied and berated for not choosing to abstain from parliament like her colleagues for the reading of the budget. It was shocking how easily her character and private life was called into question for doing what she thought was best for her constituents. Many agreed had it been a male representative, the action would not have generated the same level of public outcry and venom. This situation also brought to life the crucial role the media has to play in promoting gender equality/equity and ending political harassment against women.

The violation of women's political rights reinforces traditional gender roles and male-dominated decision making spaces. Parliaments have an important responsibility to raise awareness and to effectively address and prevent this problem through anti-harassment policies in addition to members adopting codes of conduct for their political parties. Political parties and indeed the parliament must appreciate and respect the various roles women undertake and gives each role the same level of respect and value. There must be an understanding and appreciation of the challenges faced by women parliamentarians and women in the parliament in general and system put in place to facilitate women's equal participation.

The need for parliaments to support and promote the establishment a women's parliamentary caucus was reiterated throughout the meeting as this was seen as one way for gender equality concerns to be addressed at the level of parliament. It was also agreed that inclusion of men in committees of the parliament established to review gender issues in legislation proposed would assist in fostering gender mainstreaming.

Parliamentarians must establish the foundation for a gender sensitive society and a society where women are free from political harassment. The parliament is a reflection of our society, once parliamentarians begin to change the tone of their contributions and promote legislation that takes into consideration gender issues we could affect positive change in society.

## Recommendations

It is proposed that the Parliament of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago adopt the following measures:

1. Establishment of Women's Parliamentary Caucus comprising of women from the Upper and Lower Houses of Parliament.
2. Draft and debate a gender equality policy and also have the same activity for a sitting of our youth parliament.
3. Host a series of Gender Sensitisation workshops targeting all members. This could be done collaboratively through the UN System in Trinidad and Tobago or any of the Civil Society Organisations that specialises in Gender Issues.
4. Parliament should consider adopting the Plan of Action for Gender Sensitive Parliaments published by the Inter-Parliamentary Union.





**Inter-parliamentary meeting**  
***Gender-based Political Harassment: Building Awareness in Parliaments***

**January 26-27, 2016 | Castries, Saint Lucia**

ParlAmericas is pleased to share the highlights of a high-level meeting organized by its Group of Women Parliamentarians and hosted by the Parliament of Saint Lucia, during which former and sitting parliamentarians from more than 10 countries across the Caribbean and Canada discussed experiences and strategies to overcome the problem of gender-based political harassment. Among the distinguished participants were the Hon. Dame Billie Miller of Barbados, the Hon. Jean Augustine of Canada, and a number of ministers and speakers of parliament. The delegates were joined by subject matter experts from regional and international organizations (UN Women, CIM/OAS, CIWIL, UWI).

Delegates exchanged perspectives on the challenges faced by women in parliaments, media portrayal of women's political leadership, best practices in developing anti-harassment policies and codes of conduct in political parties, as well as related legal frameworks. On the second day, each delegate developed a strategic work plan to empower women in the political sphere within their national context, building on gender-sensitive parliamentary projects.



See agenda [here](#)

Visit photo gallery [here](#)

**Delegate testimonies**

"I knew first hand of the political harassment since I have been a victim of it for more than two decades. I was astounded by the widespread aspect of [it] across the region and around the world. I am now more empowered about the numerous strategies which I can devise and implement in my quest to eradicate such a scourge. I am energized to share my experiences with other MPs...I shall use every opportunity to work with my constituents to minimize their acceptance of [political harassment]."

"This type of forum is an organized way of engaging women to stand up and participate in positive action to end political harassment and encourage more women to enter elective politics."

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ParlAmericas is an independent forum for parliamentarians of the Americas and the Caribbean that creates a supportive professional community through regional forums, training opportunities, year-round discussions, and follow-up actions. For further information about ParlAmericas' gender equality work, please contact the International Secretariat.