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David Cameron Lauds Gender Ratio in Parliament

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NEWS

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The British Conservative leader has praised the "50:50" ratio in numbers of members in the Rwandan Parliament saying even the developed world needs to learn from such a development, RNA reports.

"This is a better record on gender equality than the British House of Commons, the US Senate, the European parliament and even the central committee of the Chinese Communist party," Mr. Cameron told lawmakers in his address Tuesday.

The Tory leader has said increasing the proportion of women Tory MPs - at present a dismal 9% - would be one of the first priorities of his leadership.

Rwanda now holds the "world record" with 48.8 percent of women in its Lower House, compared only to Mozambique that comes in number two in Africa, although somewhat behind the Nordic countries, the 2005 World Map of Women in Politics published by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) said. 34.6 percent of the seats in the Rwanda Senate are covered by women as well.

A total of 7 developing countries, with Rwanda and Mozambique in the lead, rank among the 17 top performers with more than 30 percent of women parliamentarians (MPs).

The Lower Chamber has 80 members but the 2003 Constitution prescribes that a quota of 24 seats are reserved for women in the National Assembly. In addition, 15 women were elected to non-reserved seats, making a total of 39 women elected to the Lower House. As for the Senate, the constitution quota of 30% making it 8 women Senators elected out of 20 members.

Reading from an 18-page speech seated, Mr. Cameron also lauded Rwanda describing it as an "incredible African success story" for the way it has developed following the carnage of 1994. He also backed the country's application to join the Commonwealth.

David Cameron called on the developed nations to scrap their trade barriers, and give developing countries in Africa and the rest of the world the "opportunity" to build their economies.

The Conservative Leader criticised the way richer states seek concessions in return for trade deals, and declared: "Forget the endless tortuous negotiations about getting something in return. Just do it. We can afford it. Africa needs it. And we will all benefit from it."

On Doha trade negotiation process, he said: "In the long run, we must restart Doha and reach a comprehensive agreement that will ensure full access to developed markets for poorer countries. But we can't wait for that. We need action now to open up markets and remove barriers that put poor countries at such an unfair disadvantage."

Mr. Cameron hailed proposals just published by the Conservative Globalisation and Global Poverty Policy Group, which calls for the EU and other rich countries to unilaterally drop their trade barriers for poorer countries by 2013 at the latest.

He said: "The demand is simple: get rid of all the barriers that stop poorer nations from trading fairly, and open markets to goods from the developing world."

However as he spoke in the Parliamentary chambers, lights went off briefly as he struggled to continue until they returned. The Tory leader also met with President Paul Kagame. His address was meant to be yesterday but was moved.

Meanwhile, Mr. Cameron has also welcomed the suggestion of Policy Group, for a new campaign called Real Trade, to "put pressure on politicians in all developed countries to drop their trade barriers, unilaterally, and immediately".

"I hope this campaign combines the energy and excitement of Make Poverty History with the moral force of the Anti-Apartheid Movement. I hope it reaches into the churches, the trade unions, the schools and every corner of society in every rich nation, and mobilises millions to knock on the doors and bang on the walls of those with the power to make change happen. The current trade rules are unfair. They are damaging. They are immoral. It's time for real change - for Real Trade," he said.

Responding to criticism of his visit to Rwanda as his constituents battled with floods, Mr. Cameron said "In this world today, we are all in it together. The rich cannot escape the consequences of poverty and instability. What happens in one place affects many others".

"Gas from a factory in Beijing can contribute to floods in Britain. Civil war in Somalia can bring thousands of migrants to Stockholm. A cartoon in Denmark can create riots in Damascus. Right now we're seeing climate change bring floods in Britain while at the same time depleting water for your hydro-electric programme here. Our futures are linked as never before." he said.

In a related development, RNA has also established that the Conservative Party has invited President Paul Kagame to join Arnold Schwarzenegger, the governor of California, as a special guest speaker at the party's annual conference in Blackpool in October.

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