



**Presentation by Mr. Mahmood Ayub
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**INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON WOMEN AND
GOVERNANCE**

Istanbul, 2 December 2008

Honourable Ministers

Distinguished Vice-President of TİKA

Madam Vice-President of Directorate General of Women's Status

Distinguished UNDP Colleagues

TİKA and Government Representatives

Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen

It is a great honour for me to address you all today at the opening of this very important International Conference on Women and Governance. As you know, this conference has been organized jointly by the Turkish International Cooperation Agency (TİKA) and the UNDP.

I am particularly pleased to see such high participation from government agencies, international organisations, civil society organisations and academic circles from our region, the Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). It indicates to me the strong interest in the subject of gender equality. It is also a pleasure to see so many UNDP colleagues joining us here today both from our Headquarters as well as from our country offices in the region.

Gender equality is a fundamental value for all democratic societies that are committed to, and work towards the achievement of Human Development. One central theme for the achievement of Gender Equality is the promotion of women's rights and the participation of women in governance.

However, Gender equality is also an area in which all of the countries in our Region face similar challenges. During the past years, many countries in the region have undergone profound governance transformations towards the achievement of democracy. Despite the modernization of public institutions and the establishment of market economies, a key governance challenge remains across the whole region: the weak, and in many countries decreasing, political participation of women in public and political life.

Thanks to the pioneering efforts of the founding father of the Turkish Republic - Mustafa Kemal Atatürk—all political and social rights of women were recognized about 75 years ago. Women in Turkey obtained the right to vote and to be elected to municipal councils in 1930 and in parliamentary elections in 1934. Indeed we are happy to celebrate this week the 74th anniversary of Turkish women's electoral empowerment.

In 1986 the Government of Turkey ratified the CEDAW Convention. And in 2000 the country became a signatory of the Millennium Development Goals, under which gender equality and women's empowerment were reaffirmed both as development goals in themselves (MDG3) and as a means to achieving all the other MDGs¹.

Turkey has achieved commendable progress in terms of developing the legal framework that supports the advancement of women, such as the new civil code and the reform undertaken under the penal code. But we all know that legislative action alone does not create change. What is also needed is a strong commitment to implement the laws. Despite positive developments, Turkish women should expect better success in terms of women's participation in education, domestic violence, low labor market participation,

¹ From the UNDP Mission Statement on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment

and low political representation. It is clear that the establishment of gender equality is a challenging process that requires social transformation. Political will is the main pre-condition for the success of gender equality, which as already stated, is a key component of effective, equal and inclusive good democratic governance.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

As many of you already know, after the 2007 General Elections, the number of women in Turkey's Parliament doubled from 24 to 50 women, reaching about 9% of the 550 seats in Parliament. This is undoubtedly an impressive achievement. However it is still short of the 17% target that the country has committed itself in its 2005 MDG Report. And unfortunately the challenge at the municipal level is even more daunting, with a female representation in elected offices of only 2%.

This provides the context why the Government of Turkey and the UNDP are working at the local level for women's participation in politics and decision making. We hope that the recent achievements at the national level will also be replicated in the upcoming local elections, scheduled for March 2009.

At UNDP, we place a very high priority on the empowerment of women. We do this through facilitating increased participation in decision-making processes, including in politics. And we do this by helping equip women with the voice and capability to create alternatives for their own lives. This empowerment of women is, according to the Nobel laureate, Amartya Sen, at the very heart of human development.

But more so, equal opportunity to participate in politics is a human right and should therefore be promoted and protected by all democratic governments. Increasing the number of women political leaders and women fully engaged in political processes will assist us in achieving gender equality faster, and therefore improving the quality of democratic governance.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

This Regional Conference is intended as a platform for exchange of views among women and men from the region. It is an opportunity to identify the issues related to women and governance. And it is an opportunity to explore ways to address them while taking into account best practices and lessons learned from other countries.

In conclusion, please accept my sincere appreciation for your participation and active and productive contribution to our joint efforts to advance gender equality and governance in the Region.

My heartfelt thanks to all distinguished members of TĪKA for hosting this conference as part of the South-South Cooperation Project implemented with the UNDP.

Thank you all.