

**“Global Issues and Trends Affecting Women’s Political Participation”**

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## Good Morning,

1. It is a pleasure to be here to address you on this issue of global trends and issues affecting women's political participation. I would like to thank the Turkish International Cooperation and Development Agency and my UNDP colleagues, especially those at UNDP's representative office here in Turkey, for organizing this conference. Thank you also to all of you, for being here to participate in this event, I am looking forward to the discussions ahead.
2. The decision to hold this conference in Turkey is very topical, given that during the last elections women doubled their presence in national parliament, from 4.2 % in 2002 to 9.1% in this last election, or a total of 50 women parliamentarians. In a five year period therefore, actions and advocacy was carried out at a scale possible to achieve these results. As one of the objectives of this conference is to discuss good practices and lessons learnt on women and governance, it will be important for us all to better understand how women here in Turkey were able to achieve this result in such a short time.
3. While this was a major gain for women in Turkey, we must nevertheless recognize that there is still much to do if women are to achieve gender parity in political representation here, as elsewhere around the world. **In fact, the trends in women's political participation in Turkey to some degree reflect global trends. Right now, there are more women in government globally than ever before.** In 2008, women around the world occupy on average 18.4% of seats in national assemblies, which represents an increase of 8 % since 1998. This was a significant gain when we consider that women's numbers increased by only 1% in the two decades after 1975. **Yet, even with this rate of progress, developing countries, and many developing ones in fact, will not reach parity (where neither sex holds more than 60% of seats) until 2045.**<sup>1</sup> That is a long time to wait. We need to take some lessons from Turkey and other countries where women are making gains in politics and leadership in order to push for a faster closing of this gap.
4. I have been asked to outline the global trends and issues affecting women's political participation around the world, and to present some of the contributing factors that explain women's low presence in politics globally. But, I will also be going beyond the issue of numbers to discuss whether and why women leaders are having an impact on policy. Since its mention in the Beijing Platform for Action in 1995 to its inclusion as a target in MDG3, the goal of reaching a critical mass of women in national legislatures around the world, which would mean having women in 1/3 of seats, has been the center pin of global efforts to achieve gender equality. These international conventions acknowledge that women leaders are more likely to represent the interests of women citizens, and that they will therefore introduce women's perspectives into policymaking and be able to achieve greater gains for women as a result. **What this means, essentially, is that we are aiming for more than just equality of opportunity in national decision-making...we are aiming for equality in results from those decisions**<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> UNIFEM. 2008. *Progress of the World's Women 2008/9: Who Answers to Women? Gender and Accountability*. (executive summary booklet, p. 6).

<sup>2</sup> 2000. Dahlerup, Drude. "Using Quotas to Increase Women's Political Representation" in *Women in Parliament: Beyond Numbers*. International IDEA Women in Politics. <http://www.idea.int/women/parl/toc.htm>

5. What I will show is that women leaders are pushing for, and achieving results for women in many places around the globe. But, in other contexts, women leaders have not had this same impact. I will go into the existing barriers holding women back from both achieving critical mass and policy impact, because in many respects, they are interlinked.

### **Global and Regional Trends**

1. I have already mentioned that women's numbers in national parliaments are at a high of 18%. In 2008, 20 countries, half of them in developing countries, met the 30 per cent target set in Beijing, as opposed to 5 countries in 1997, all of which were European. The majority of the developing countries to reach the target are in Latin America and Africa.
2. In fact, when looking at regional averages, we see that women have made the fastest gains in Sub-Saharan Africa, where women currently occupy, on average, 17.3% of seats, which also places the region very close to the global average. More to the point though, it is Rwanda, a developing country, which is leading the world now in terms of women's political participation. Rwandan women currently make up 56 % of seats in the national assembly, and a woman holds the speaker's chair. Women in Rwanda also hold a third of all cabinet positions, including foreign minister, education minister, Supreme Court chief and police commissioner general.
3. In Asia, women hold 16.9% of seats, while in Oceania, gains are slow and women lawmakers are absent altogether in some countries. In the Arab States women hold 9.6% of seats in the lower house. There have been pockets of success in the Arab States though. For example, in 2006, the first woman representative was elected to Bahrain's lower house of parliament<sup>1</sup>.
4. In the EE and CIS region, as of 2008, women occupy an average of 16.4% of seats in national assemblies.<sup>3</sup> This figure however, masks considerable regional variation. Like in Turkey, women in Armenia and Romania currently hold approximately 9% of seats, while in Georgia and Albania, they hold less; around 6-7% of seats, and in Macedonia and Belarus they hold just below 30% of national seats. I will not go further into regional trends. I wanted to just mention these few figures to place the region within the global picture and to point out the diversity within the region because such diversity will mean that we need to tailor efforts to increase women's numbers to individual countries' needs.

### **Women in Other Areas of Governance**

1. Before I delve into the policy impact that women politicians are having, I want to briefly outline the trends in women's numbers in other areas of political leadership, including in local government and in the cabinet. Women and men in these roles have equally, and sometimes, more influence over forming policies and laws that will ultimately impact on women's lives and the achievement of gender equality because in many countries, most legislation is made by the government, not the legislature. However, we tend to not discuss and report on progress towards gender parity in these areas, largely because they are

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<sup>3</sup> Data from IDEA Table. Marcella Veneziani quoted in Wendy Harcourt's Emerging Themes and Issues report for the UNDP project "Women and Governance: women and political participation in EE and CIS regions." (commissioned by UNDP)

not mentioned specifically in the major international monitoring and accountability mechanisms we have for gender equality, such as CEDAW and the MDGs, as is women's numbers in national legislatures.

2. There is no clear positive trend in the number of women in the **highest positions of state or government**. Globally, 16 women are currently heads of state or heads of government, compared to 9 in 2000 and 12 in 1995. A record number of women took up these top positions in 2006.
3. We see no examples of majorities of **women in party leadership**; when we know that it is from the highest ranks of party leadership that the leaders of parliament or government are drawn. We do see significant numbers of women in the party **membership**, performing campaigning and fund-raising work, or in parties' 'women's wings'. Even so, in most countries, women are still not able to influence parties to commit to gender equality goals.
4. At the global level, **16 per cent of all ministerial portfolios are currently held by women**, an overall increase of two percentage points on the proportion for 2005, but progress is slow. The regional picture for women ministers shows the most progress for the Americas and the Nordic States in the past few years. Meanwhile, the Arab States have seen a one percentage point increase to 8 per cent, and Asia remains around the 8 per cent mark as well.
5. In terms of the sorts of **ministerial portfolios women hold, and therefore the sorts of policy decisions they are likely to most influence**, most women ministers continue to hold portfolios related to social affairs, family, children, youth, women's affairs, education and the environment. On a positive note, this year there are more women heading ministries for trade, employment, foreign affairs, and justice<sup>ii</sup>.
6. Looking at these trends, **it seems that there is a strong link between women's numbers in parliaments and in cabinets**: Women continue to be underrepresented in both and the regional distribution is very similar. However, women are making faster progress in some regions towards parity in legislatures than parity in cabinets.
7. There are few sources of comparable data on the numbers of women in **local government**. In Asia and the Pacific a study from 2000 on women representation at the local level showed great variation between countries with India, Bangladesh, Pakistan and New Zealand showing over 30% women councilors, while in other countries like Sri Lanka, Thailand, Malaysia and Japan, there are less than 10% women represented on local governments<sup>iii</sup>. In some localities, women are making gains in numbers at the local level, such as **in India** where over one million women hold seats in village councils at any given moment since the passing of the 1992 Constitutional Amendment that gave women 1/3 of seats on local councils.

### **Women in Politics and their Policy Impact on Gender Equality**

1. In fact, there is evidence to suggest that decentralisation might be a particularly efficient way of enhancing women's political participation and effectiveness in government.
2. The reasons given for this are that: **(1) direct participation is easier for women at the local than at the national level, and (2) because women have a particular and direct stake in the kinds of services deemed most appropriately managed at the local level**, such as employment generation schemes, primary schools and clinics, housing, and sanitation.

3. In India, women's high numbers in local government have led to positive policy changes for women at the village level, such as collective action by both men and women to increase fuel, water and fodder in households<sup>iv</sup>.
4. Women on local councils often perform **a watchdog function with respect to local spending** and this is strongest where women are major contributors to local taxes, service fees and business licenses, as is the case in **South Africa**. Women local councilors also often are **role models to other aspiring women candidates**. In **Uganda**, women councilors also address cases of gender-based violence and women in need, far more than their male counterparts, largely because men and women felt more comfortable bringing these private or domestic issues to their local women representative than to their men representative.
5. This is not to say that women representatives and bureaucrats at the national level are not making gains for women in national policy and legislation. They are. For example, **Rwandan women leaders drafted the only substantive bill to emerge from the legislative rather than the executive branch**, which was a far-reaching law to combat gender-based violence. They also spearheaded efforts to eliminate discrimination and enhance human rights protections. They achieved much of this by fostering cross-party collaboration through the Forum of Rwandan Women Parliamentarians and by involving men in efforts to craft legislation.
6. Therefore, we need women at both national and local levels of government to make it possible for women to claim their rights.

### **What has driven these numbers and these results?**

1. **Candidate quotas** and other temporary special affirmative measures, such as reserved seats, are a proven means to increase women's presence in parliament. Affirmative measures level the playing field to remove the impediments that have prevented women from accessing office. Women have not been able to enter into and exceed in politics in most modern polities as easily as men. Affirmative measures provide them with the means to achieve equality in numbers with men. At the moment, affirmative measures seem to be the best way to bring about a drastic increase in numbers.
2. **Affirmative measures are currently used as national and subnational levels in 95 countries**. In elections held in 2007, the average representation of women was 19.3% in countries with some type of electoral quota in place for women candidates, as opposed to 14.7% for those countries without such measures, regardless of the electoral system in place. 18 of the 22 countries that boast 30% or more women in national assemblies applied quotas in some form.<sup>4</sup>
3. **While recognizing the impact of quotas for women, we must also accept their limitations**. The figures I just mentioned of 14.7% women elected to parliament in non-quota countries in 2007, compared to 19.3% women in countries with quotas means that, so far, quotas are boosting women's numbers, but not dramatically.

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<sup>4</sup> UNIFEM. 2008. *Progress of the World's Women 2008/9: Who Answers to Women? Gender and Accountability*. (executive summary booklet, p. 6).

4. **This is because candidate quotas do not always result in an increase in numbers of women actually elected.** Studies show that the effectiveness of quotas is influenced by a number of factors including the electoral system in place, the sort of quota introduced, the political history of the country in question and party ideology as it relates to gender equality.
5. It is only with **reserved seats** for women or **executive appointments** of women candidates to parliaments that we can **guarantee** women are actually elected to office. **Rwanda, for example, where there are the most women in any national parliament, does not use candidate quotas.** As of 2002, they **reserve** 24 of their 80 seats in the Chamber of Deputies for women. These women are elected by women's councils in each district. In the 2003 elections, 15 women won seats in the general election, and in addition to the 24 reserved seats, this brought women's numbers to near parity, with 39 women deputies. As I have mentioned, these Rwandan women parliamentarians used a variety of techniques, including cross-party women's caucuses and coalitions of men and women legislators, to draft the only legislation that had originated in parliament as of 2006. This legislation was a great achievement for women's rights and gender equitable results, because it was a bill on violence against women.
6. **However, despite the fact that reserved seats provide more of a guarantee in election results, voters often view women elected via reserved seats as less accountable to constituents than women that are directly elected by their constituents.** Women elected by reservations are believed to be more loyal to their political parties than to the people they are supposed to serve and this undermines their legitimacy in the eyes of many voters. Without the support of women voters behind them, many of these women in reserved seats often find it difficult to find their voice in local and national assemblies.
7. **In addition, many women voted in through reserved seats often rely on the reservation to be re-elected, and do not compete directly for seats against men in their second terms.** Many men and women voters assume that women elected through reserved seats will use their experience in politics to contend seats directly in the next election. When these women do not compete directly, they further reduce their legitimacy in the eyes of these voters.
8. It is clear that even where affirmative measures have increased women's numbers in many parliaments, but there are a number of contributing factors that have determined their effectiveness, and their impact. These factors have included the availability of campaign finance, the support of the media and of women's organizations, women's ability to establish cross-party coalitions with other women and to gain the support of men parliamentarians. In large part it has also come down to their party's and the legislature's internal culture and adherence to gender equitable norms. **We therefore need to work on multiple fronts to ensure that women get to office and that they are sustained there.**
9. UNDP has focused a lot in recent years on working with **women themselves to build their capacity to organize and succeed as politicians.** Our efforts, and those of other organizations have also tended to focus on **raising parliaments' and political parties' awareness of gender equality and their ability to promote gender equality principles through their work.** This has been an important strategy to remove **institutional barriers** that stand in the way of increasing the numbers of women in politics and their ability to have a real voice in decision-making.

## What more can we do?

### Remaining Challenges to Women's Political Participation (numbers and policy impact)

1. Firstly, it is time to put the torch on **political parties** and to focus on political party reforms. Women's participation in political parties is often limited to technical duties and rarely leadership roles. This means that they do not have the same political apprenticeships as their male peers do, and that they also often lack a female mentor in their party leadership to guide them and provide them with the inspiration to run for office.
2. Considering that in liberal democracies, the political party is central in the competition for political power, if women cannot rise to lead political parties, they will not lead governments. UNDP is partnering with others, such as NDI to work with political parties so that they promote the gender equality agenda and create spaces for women to rise to leadership roles within their structures. Quotas in party leadership positions have been one way of breaking down party resistance to women at top levels, including heads of party and cabinet positions. However, they have been harder to introduce than quotas for women on party lists. An equally important target in this respect is to get more women on party lists by advocating for gender parity on candidate selection committees in parties.
3. Political party decision-making, financing, cadre development and other internal norms and procedures affect women's political opportunity. Efforts need to be focused on helping women candidates' access public and private sources of electoral financing early on in their campaigns and on providing them with the skills to launch and maintain an effective campaign with available finances. In addition, more work could be done with governments to reform electoral systems so that they reduce campaign costs and bolster inclusiveness. As a further measure to level the playing field, UNDP is committed to providing more support to electoral commissions to improve their oversight of electoral finance laws to reduce bribery in elections.
4. Campaign intimidation is also a disincentive to political engagement for women. We need to do more in this area to ensure the security of women candidates and voters. Related to this is the role of the media in shaping voters' image of women. We see, even in the US, that despite women candidates' achievements and credentials, such as Hillary Rodham Clinton, patriarchal prejudices linger in the media and in public commentary. This reflects the fact that, in many contexts, women are still not perceived as real players on the political field, and are sometimes seen as political threats to male political leadership. The media often fuels and heightens these stereotypes and effectively undermines women's campaigns. Younger women interested in politics are often discouraged from running for office because of this treatment.
5. The legacy of a male-dominated governing space means that the institutional and procedural traditions in the legislature favour men, reducing women's ability to effectively participate. For example, sessions of parliament are often scheduled late in the afternoon or evening, when women with families have to take care of other responsibilities. As one black woman in the South African parliament, Thenjiwe Mtintso, said, the parliament is "a male domain...from its facilities (gym, toilets, absence of childcare centers etc),

to its language, rules, sitting times, and attitudes<sup>5</sup>. In South Africa, as elsewhere, reserved seats and quotas for women have meant an influx of women into a previously men-only sphere. Women are told to play along with the old rules for the most part, because it is comfortable for men to continue to promote the *status quo*. However, new players requires changes to the rules. Without this change, even with affirmative actions, women will continue to find it hard to assert their interests in our governing structures.

6. Finally, the continuous support of women's movements and organizations is necessary to help women access and sustain themselves in office. Women's movements have played an important role in championing women's rights all over the world, in building peace in Sierra Leone, Liberia, Timor Leste and the Balkans, and they have often been the platform from which many women candidates have launched their campaigns.
7. The ability of women in politics to work across party lines to counter their lack of numbers in any one party, or to establish broad-based organizations outside traditional parties to lobby all parties, have both been successful strategies to impact decision-making. So too has creating women's wings of larger political parties. For example, in Croatia, where a group of women founded a parallel forum (Social Democratic Women's Forum of Croatia) for women party members, activists and civil society that operated in parallel to the Today' Social Democratic Party (SDP) of Croatia. They had a program to increase women's representation and provided training to women candidates, including women in the SDP. When SDP formed government in 2000, the forum was in a position to influence the party's policies and was responsible for the 34% women's representation in parliament that resulted.<sup>6</sup>

## Summarize

1. To summarize my presentation then, what we see in the world today is an increase in women's numbers in parliament in the past few years, including in the CIS and EE region, largely due to the introduction of affirmative action measures, but also in response to a number of other intervening factors such as political party culture, women's increased education, voter and media awareness, training of women candidates, and international and national women's movements.
2. Affirmative measures have not brought women parity in political participation as yet, and they are hampered by continuing prejudices and limitations that prevent women getting on candidate lists, including lack of political party support to women candidates, the electoral system in place and media bias. They also have experienced backlash to a degree and, in the case of reserved seats, often undermine women candidates' legitimacy in the eyes of voters.
3. What is certain is that women need to increase their numbers to achieve the sort of critical mass they need to pressure legislatures and governments to make policy changes that will benefit women. Quotas in the cabinet and in the judiciary should also be considered. We definitely need to be looking beyond just our representative institutions, as in many developing and developed countries much of our legislation

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<sup>5</sup> Mtintso, Thenjiwe. 1995 "From Prison Cell to Parliament" in Alida Brill *A Rising Pulic Voice*. NY: Feminist Press. (quoted in Irene Tinker's article "Quotas for Women in Elected Legislatures: Do they Really Empower Women?" 2004. *Women Studies International Forum* 27:4)

<sup>6</sup> Wendy Harcourt's Emerging Themes and Issues report for the UNDP project "Women and Governance: women and political participation in EE and CIS regions." (commissioned by UNDP) p. 12

originates from government, not the legislature. If we want to ensure gender equitable public policies, we also need more women in senior levels of government.

4. Women have been working around the fact that they often lack the critical mass within their own parties to impact policy for women in legislatures and government. They have been forming cross-party caucuses and partnerships between the government and the legislature around specific issues. And, they have been effectively drawing upon their networks with the women's movement and civil society, all to deliver significant results for women. Considering the odds they are up against, including the institutional biases, these women's achievements are all the more laudable.

I want us to all walk away with one idea in our heads about how we, on a professional and personal level, are going to address one of the key biases and constraints to women's participation I have outlined here; whether it is getting involved with an NGO, a political party, or a specific lobby or campaign on one of the issues I have raised, such as campaign finance reform. We must remember that we are also in a position to raise up women and help them to succeed in office. Voters also are in a position to hold governments accountable to them for delivering gender equitable results and prepared with the right approach, can be a major force behind women candidates' success.

Thank you.

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<sup>i</sup> She was one of two women that went to the second round in 2002. She set a historical precedent as the first female member (see the Primer on electoral financing and gender (UNDP) page. 21)

<sup>ii</sup> IPU statistics, (Women in Politics, 2008) poster map, as of 1 January 2008

<sup>iii</sup> Stokes, W. (2005). Women in Contemporary Politics. Cambridge Polity Press; and UN. (2005). "Country Reports on State of Women in Urban Local Governments."

<sup>iv</sup> Dollar, D., R. Fisman, and R. Gatti. 2001. "Are Women Really the 'Fairer' Sex? Corruption and Women in the Government." World Bank Gender and Development Working Paper Series 1. Washington, D.C.