

International IDEA, 2002, Women in Parliament, Stockholm (<http://www.idea.int>). This is an English translation of Chusnul Mar'iyah, "Pengantar untuk Edisi Bahasa Indonesia," in International IDEA, 2002, *Perempuan di Parlemen: Bukan Sekedar Jumlah*, Stockholm: International IDEA, pp. 1-4. (This translation may vary slightly from the original text. If there are discrepancies in the meaning, the original Bahasa-Indonesia version is the definitive text).

## Foreword to the Indonesian Language Edition

Chusnul Mar'iyah

Political concepts such as democracy, citizenship, and nationalism are often considered neutral. In practice, however, these concepts are extremely gender biased. Political rights for women are basic human rights, and human rights are an integral part of democracy. The involvement of both women and men in the decision-making process is a *sine qua non* in democracy. In recent years, the issue of women's political representation and participation has become increasingly significant. Despite increased mobilization and advocacy, it is clear that many politicians have a poor understanding of the importance of this issue. It remains to be seen how the demands of women activists in political parties, non-governmental organisations and in academic circles to raise the level of women's representation in the political process, as a fundamental human rights issue, will be addressed.

Today, there are calls from activists around the world to implement special measures to increase women's political representation. Over the last decade, a number of nations have achieved significant increases in the proportion of women in national representative institutions. This has been supported by the activities of the NGO and international communities in Beijing in 1995 and the Inter-Parliamentary Union in New Delhi in 1997. A UN Progress Report in 1995, which analyzed gender and development in 174 countries, stated:

*«While it is true that there is no direct connection between the level of participation of women in political institutions and their contribution to the advance of women, a level of representation of 30 percent in political institutions can be considered critical to ensuring women have meaningful influence in the political process.»<sup>1</sup> »*

The quota has become one important mechanism for achieving a significant increase in the level of representation of women in the political process and a means to ensure that women's political interests are represented. The imposition of quota or affirmative action strategies are an integral part of the debate regarding the development of a democratic political system built on the principal of gender equality. The demands for a quota are an integral part of the demands for women's rights in the political sphere. Why are political issues important for women? Because women form the majority of the citizens of this country, yet their rights as citizens are given insufficient consideration, and they are continually marginalized in the decision making-process.

In Indonesia and in the South East Asia region as a whole, many problems continue to impede the access of women to political power. Firstly, there are a host of social problems including corruption, collusion and nepotism that have destroyed the economic system and social capital (meaning the mutual trust between the people and the government as a fundamental basis for the development of democracy) of our nation. The crisis of mistrust between members of the community and the state has resulted in the outbreak of communal violence. I am convinced that state violence and communal violence, even domestic violence, is a common occurrence in our country. We must ask whether the majority of women citizens of Indonesia are truly regarded as citizens, or stakeholders in this nation. The participation of women is therefore required to resolve national problems.

Secondly, in the political sphere, the number of women in decision-making positions in the region is nowhere close to achieving a critical mass of 30 percent. In Indonesia, 9 percent of members of the DPR (the national legislature), and an even lower percentage in the DPRD I (provincial assembly) and DPRD II (district assembly) are women. The percentage of Echelon I civil servants in Indonesia is only 4.3 percent, while only two members of cabinet are women, in addition to the President. According to an official government report, there are no women religious teachers (*ulama*) in Indonesia. This is because the concept of the *ulama* is identified with men, despite the fact that there are many women who are religious scholars and experts on religion. Not one single chairperson of a Religious Affairs Office (KUA) is a woman in

Indonesia, despite the fact that there are 6,000 such positions. No woman holds the position of provincial governor, and only six women are regents/mayors (1.5 percent).

Thirdly, the economic crisis that began in 1997 had different effects on men and women. Women's health conditions have declined, and the government has not paid attention to the establishment of policies targeting women. Indonesian women working overseas form a significant force in the economy these days, but are often subjected to exploitative practices by employers overseas. At the same time, macro economic policy has not addressed domestic economics and unemployment, or improved conditions for women.

Thus, if we are addressing the issue of the standing of women, we should first examine the existing political and social context. Let us examine the means by which the position of women can be improved through the democratic process. Let us learn from the examples of countries that have successfully raised women's political participation by implementing affirmative action through the imposition of a quota, to determine the strengths and weaknesses of these systems. We also need to undertake studies of gender in politics. A male-dominated theory of politics is still dominant in Indonesia and in South and South East Asia. The development of a new political theory that engages the issue of gender is not yet popular in Indonesia. The gender blindness in political science in Indonesia and the male domination of the political process has prevented the achievement of gender justice in the realm of politics. Thus, the demands for increased representation by women's activists in political parties, NGOs and in academia are extremely relevant in this context.

This handbook is a tool that seeks to provide suggestions and strategies for reform relating to the problems outlined above. It does not prescribe one best solution, but accepts that there are different ways of increasing the representation of women taking into account the regional variations that exist. The use of affirmative action and quotas is one such tool, and has been used to great effect in many countries around the world. In many countries it has proved an effective way to include women in decision-making processes, and its potential in Indonesia and the region needs serious consideration. The handbook also identifies areas in which women can make a difference. Despite the many obstacles that hinder the advancement of women in politics, the handbook suggests ways and means through which women have been successful in reforming the political agenda.

Finally this handbook presents the arguments both for and against the use of quotas and presents the experiences of other nations. The handbook has great relevance not only to decision makers but also to women and men in this country and in other countries in South East Asia.

CHUSNUL MAR' IYAH

JULY 2002

### ***Endnotes***

- 
1. International Foundation for Election Systems. 2001. *Women's Political Representation in the Coming 2004 Election*. Jakarta: IFES.