

International IDEA, 2002, Women in Parliament, Stockholm (<http://www.idea.int>). This is an English translation of Grace d'Almeida, 2002. "Avant-propos de l'édition française" in *Les Femmes au parlement : Au-Delà du Nombre*, International IDEA, Stockholm, Sweden 2002. (This translation may vary slightly from the original text. If there are discrepancies in the meaning, the original French version is the definitive text).

## **Foreword to the French Edition**

### **Women in Parliament: Beyond Numbers**

At the outset of the 21st century, we must protect the few gains made in gender equality, and strengthen and improve democratic systems by ensuring increasingly equal participation of men and women in all areas of politics, especially in national legislatures. Indeed, the campaigns for individual freedoms, for basic rights (civil and political rights, as well as economic, social and cultural rights) must continue. Downgrading in human rights resulting from, among other things, terrorism and civil wars, requires concerted efforts, expanded campaigns and multifaceted strategies to redress these tendencies.

The effort to protect these rights is legitimate, for they are based on universal principles acknowledging the equality of individuals and the sexes, as stipulated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and based on the principles of democracy and the rule of law. These rights are fundamental in all societies and pose a genuine challenge to all humankind. In all regions of the globe, the fight for gender equality continues, especially in decision-making structures, where the number of women is still exceedingly low. Women continue to be under-represented in national legislatures, and francophone countries are no exception.

In producing this Handbook, *Les Femmes au parlement : Au-Delà du Nombre* (Women in Parliament: Beyond Numbers), the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA) is providing a basis for comparing women's participation in national legislatures. It offers options and strategies for increasing the numbers of women parliamentarians, and also suggests how women can move beyond numbers to bring about qualitative political change in parliaments.

Many relevant issues are suggested by this study. The most important have to do with women gaining political rights and representation in all spheres of democracy, such as national legislatures and local councils, as well as political parties. It is instructive to find out about the various approaches that have been taken with regard to political choices and the legal framework for furthering women's participation and representation, such as the adoption of quotas or election reform.

The different points of view on democracy, the law and the distinct types of discrimination have fuelled several controversies. Amid the differences, however, most international and regional organizations and most states recognize the right of all citizens, without distinctions of any kind, to vote and stand for election for the political organs; and many, while declaring the equality of all citizens, have also instituted measures to fight discrimination between the sexes.

These universal principles should no longer be merely a pious hope. They should be implemented in political life, for it has been seen that women's participation in the conduct of public affairs has become the most just immediate action to be embraced in the realm of human rights, and is essential as a matter of policy in any state that claims to be democratic.

This regional version of the Handbook describes the experiences of women in the legislatures of francophone countries, while also providing examples of women's political participation in other countries of the world. The country case studies present the experiences of women in the legislatures of francophone countries, including Burkina Faso, France and Senegal, of the Scandinavian countries, Denmark, Norway and Sweden, and others, including South Africa and India, and contribute to a broader analysis of women's participation in the legislative process.

Women's participation in an area as essential as legislating on all key issues of social, cultural, political and economic life is easily justified, merely by looking at women's responsibilities in their daily and professional lives.

I hope that this Handbook provides each reader a new political perspective, better adapted to the universal requirements of law and equality, as globalization extends its reach into law and politics.

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