



United Nations



# Democracy and Gender Equality:

The Role of the UN

**DiscussionPaper**

September 2013



*Experience has taught us that democratic ideals of inclusiveness, accountability, and transparency cannot be achieved without laws, policies, measures, and practices that address inequalities. Moreover, we must go beyond thinking about these issues mostly at the time of elections. Rather we must weave these ideals into the social, political, and economic fabric of a society, so that girls and women can reach their potential on an equal basis with men, whatever they choose to do.*



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## INTERNATIONAL IDEA AT A GLANCE

*Democracy remains a universal human aspiration and a powerful force of political mobilization for change, as witnessed by citizen-led movements which are demanding democratic reform.*

International IDEA's Strategy 2012–2017

### What is International IDEA?

The International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA) is an intergovernmental organization with a mission to support sustainable democracy worldwide.

The objectives of the Institute are to support stronger democratic institutions and processes, and more sustainable, effective and legitimate democracy.

International IDEA is the only global intergovernmental organization with the sole mandate of supporting democracy; its vision is to become the primary global actor in sharing comparative knowledge and experience in support of democracy.

### What does International IDEA do?

International IDEA produces comparative knowledge in its key areas of expertise: electoral processes, constitution building, political participation and representation, and democracy and development, as well as on democracy as it relates to gender, diversity, and conflict and security.

IDEA brings this knowledge to national and local actors who are working for democratic reform, and facilitates dialogue in support of democratic change.

In its work, IDEA aims for:

- Increased capacity, legitimacy and credibility of democracy
- More inclusive participation and accountable representation
- More effective and legitimate democracy cooperation

### How does International IDEA work?

Because democracy grows from within societies, it is constantly evolving. There is no single and universally applicable model of democracy; the critical choices are best made, and the quality of democracy best gauged, by the citizens themselves. IDEA's work reflects this; the Institute's work is organized at global, regional and country level, focusing on the citizen as the driver of change.

IDEA's work is non-prescriptive and IDEA takes an impartial and collaborative approach to democracy cooperation; emphasizing diversity in democracy, equal political participation, representation of women and men in politics and decision making, and helping to enhance the political will required for change.

The Institute brings together a wide range of political entities and opinion leaders. By convening seminars, conferences and capacity building workshops, IDEA facilitates the exchange of knowledge at global, regional and national levels.

### Where does International IDEA work?

International IDEA works worldwide. Based in Stockholm, Sweden, the Institute has offices in the Africa, Asia and the Pacific, Latin America and the Caribbean, and West Asia and North Africa regions.

International IDEA is a Permanent Observer to the United Nations.

### Member States

International IDEA's Member States are all democracies and provide both political and financial support to the work of the Institute. The Member States include Australia, Barbados, Belgium, Botswana, Canada, Cape Verde, Chile, Costa Rica, Denmark, the Dominican Republic, Finland, Germany, Ghana, India, Mauritius, Mexico, Mongolia, Namibia, the Netherlands, Norway, Peru, the Philippines, Portugal, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and Uruguay. Japan has observer status.

### Governance

International IDEA is governed by a Council composed of its Member States and assisted by a Board of Advisers. Mr Vidar Helgesen, Norway's former Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, is the Secretary-General.

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# **Democracy and Gender Equality:**

## The Role of the UN

Editor: Massimo Tommasoli

Rapporteurs: Andrea Cornwall and Andrea Lynch

Report from the International Round Table on Democracy and Gender Equality: The Role of the United Nations co-organized by International IDEA, UN Development Programme, UN Department of Political Affairs and the UN Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women

# Key Recommendations

Nine key recommendations on the UN's role in promoting democracy and gender equality emerged from the Round Table:

- 1 Continue to use temporary special measures (such as quotas), where appropriate, to increase women's political participation, but recognize that quotas are not in themselves sufficient to bring about gender equality. To be effective, quotas and other temporary special measures need to be coupled with support for women's leadership and voice to promote women's political participation, including in holding elected officials to account for commitments to gender equality. Temporary special measures to increase women's participation in office should also be accompanied by measures for both men and women officeholders so they understand their obligations to advance gender equality.
- 2 In order to build women's political leadership, invest in political apprenticeship and mentorship for women in civil society and political parties, and provide increased support and financing for women's organizations and women's movements to enable women to build political consciousness, develop practical organizing skills, and develop grassroots constituencies.
- 3 Strengthen capacity building support for elected women as this will empower them to have more impact on decision making processes. It is also crucial to work with men and women in all related areas, including in politics, to shift attitudes and perceptions and work towards greater gender equality.
- 4 Develop better indicators that measure attempts to deepen gender equality in democratic institutions more meaningfully, including those that measure the effectiveness of support to women's movements and organizations in strengthening women's political participation and providing a platform for women's rights and gender equality.
- 5 Challenge gender stereotypes and work on creating a culture of zero tolerance of both direct and indirect gender bias within political parties and the wider political culture, and ensure that women politicians who face harassment and violence have access to justice.
- 6 Work with the mainstream and new media to ensure that women are represented more fairly. Increase women's access to new media technologies as these can potentially provide inclusive and innovative platforms for shaping public debate and deepening democracy.
- 7 Strengthen the overall accountability of democratic institutions to women and gender equality by improving the transparency and accountability of public officials and institutions on their gender equality commitments. Ensure that women know their rights and are aware of the laws that protect them, and that they have access to effective channels for demanding accountability and claiming their rights both individually and collectively.
- 8 Ensure that democracy assistance—particularly in moments of post conflict transition—is gender responsive, and ensures that women's voices are heard and heeded at the negotiating table. Make sure that such assistance is available not only during elections, but as an ongoing resource to emerging and established democracies seeking to close the gap between theory and practice in their commitment to gender equality.
- 9 Recognize that women's ability to participate in public life may depend on their ability to enjoy autonomy in other areas of their lives, and the need to address the constraints women's obligations as carers may place on their political engagement.

# Executive Summary

**W**omen's participation is a central element of democracy, and the nature and degree of women's participation is a key indicator of the quality of democratic culture.

On 4 May 2011, the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women), the United Nations Department of Political Affairs (UN DPA), the UN Development Programme (UNDP) and the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA), convened a high level round table meeting in New York to examine the links between democracy and gender equality, and to explore the UN's role in promoting both. This document summarizes the key conclusions and recommendations developed by Round Table participants.

The *International Round Table on Democracy and Gender Equality: The Role of the United Nations* brought together more than 150 policymakers, practitioners, and academics working on various aspects of gender equality and democracy to review the UN's work at the critical juncture between promoting gender equality and strengthening democracy worldwide. Their conversations revealed both challenges and opportunities for the UN in this area, based on lessons drawn from both research and practice.

The Round Table was opened by UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon who emphasized the centrality of gender equality to the UN's efforts to build and strengthen democracy, and vice versa. The Secretary-General's remarks were followed by presentations from UNDP Administrator Helen Clark, UN Women Executive Director Michelle Bachelet, and International

IDEA Secretary-General Vidar Helgesen, each speaking of the pivotal relationship between gender equality and democracy assistance in each agency's work and affirming their agency's commitment to the political empowerment of women—within governments and public institutions, and as citizens. The opening session concluded with a presentation by Professor Mala Htun of the New School University in New York, which shared key research findings on the relationship between democracy, women's movements, and public policies affirming women's rights.

The opening presentations laid the groundwork for three thematic sessions, which featured panel presentations by keynote speakers, followed by discussion. Each session focused on a key dimension of the relationship between democracy and gender equality:

1. Political Participation, Representation and Gender Equality;
2. Impact of Traditional and New Social Media on Women's Engagement;
3. Strengthening Accountability to Women.

The panel discussions reviewed global trends and identified persistent obstacles as well as promising strategies for moving forward based on examples from Egypt, Tunisia, Nigeria, Cote d'Ivoire, Haiti, Iraq, South Africa, Cuba, Yemen, Afghanistan, and Cape Verde, among others. The Round Table concluded with a summary of the lessons emerging from the discussions by Massimo Tommasoli, International IDEA's Permanent Observer to the United Nations. The following day, representatives from the various UN entities present met to brainstorm ideas on how to best move forward.

From these discussions the Round Table produced nine key recommendations and

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a series of related conclusions and findings which are presented in this report.

## Recommendations

Nine key recommendations on the UN's role in promoting democracy and gender equality emerged from the Round Table:

1. Continue to use temporary special measures (such as quotas), where appropriate, to increase women's political participation, but recognize that quotas are not in themselves sufficient to bring about gender equality. To be effective, quotas and other temporary special measures need to be coupled with support for women's leadership and voice to promote women's political participation, including in holding elected officials to account for commitments to gender equality. Temporary special measures to increase women's participation in office should also be accompanied by measures for both men and women officeholders so they understand their obligations to advance gender equality.
2. In order to build women's political leadership, invest in political apprenticeship and mentorship for women in civil society and political parties, and provide increased support and financing for women's organizations and women's movements to enable women to build political consciousness, develop practical organizing skills, and develop grassroots constituencies.
3. Strengthen capacity building support for elected women as this will empower them to have more impact on decision making processes. It is also crucial to work with men and women in all related areas, including in politics, to shift attitudes and perceptions and work towards greater gender equality.
4. Develop better indicators that measure attempts to deepen gender equality in democratic institutions more meaningfully, including those that measure the effectiveness of support to women's movements and organizations in strengthening women's political participation and providing a platform for women's rights and gender equality.
5. Challenge gender stereotypes and work on creating a culture of zero tolerance of both direct and indirect gender bias within political parties and the wider political culture, and ensure that women politicians who face harassment and violence have access to justice.
6. Work with the mainstream and new media to ensure that women are represented more fairly. Increase women's access to new media technologies as these can potentially provide inclusive and innovative platforms for shaping public debate and deepening democracy.
7. Strengthen the overall accountability of democratic institutions to women and gender equality by improving the transparency and accountability of public officials and institutions on their gender equality commitments. Ensure that women know their rights and are aware of the laws that protect them, and that they have access to effective channels for demanding accountability and claiming their rights both individually and collectively.
8. Ensure that democracy assistance—particularly in moments of post conflict transition—is gender responsive, and ensures that women's voices are heard and heeded at the negotiating table. Make sure that such assistance is available not only during elections, but as an ongoing



resource to emerging and established democracies seeking to close the gap between theory and practice in their commitment to gender equality.

9. Recognize that women's ability to participate in public life may depend on their ability to enjoy autonomy in other areas of their lives, and the need to address the constraints women's obligations as carers may place on their political engagement.

More detailed conclusions and recommendations about how the UN can play a supportive role in strengthening the links between democracy and gender equality by providing gender responsive technical assistance are as follows:

### ***Engaging with Political Parties, Public Institutions, and Government Bodies***

Round Table panellists and participants shared the following strategies and priorities for strengthening the commitment to gender equality among political parties and in political systems:

- When delivering technical assistance, follow best practice (ie from UNDP, NDI, International IDEA and others) on strengthening political parties' commitments to gender equality and women's representation: assess the candidate selection process; conduct focus groups and interviews with members of political parties on women's issues; identify talented women and bring them to the attention of party leadership; develop a strong relationship with male leadership of political parties and make the case for women's participation; and document and share challenges and success stories.
- Pay attention to context and history when

introducing temporary special measures such as quotas and reserved seat systems—do not take a 'one-size-fits-all' approach.

- Encourage political parties to strengthen internal regulations and laws from a gender perspective; include language on gender equity in their platforms; set targets for women's participation at their conventions; adopt internal voluntary quotas in the absence of legal quotas; and ensure that women candidates can access financing and other supportive resources during their campaigns.
- Prioritize General Recommendations 23 and 25 of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).
- Conduct further research on the relationship between increasing women's participation in political office and increased public commitment to gender equality through progressive laws and policies.
- Continue to support in-country consultations between women's civil society organizations and political leaders to develop Women's Charters and gender responsive budgets.
- Ensure that the judiciary, parliamentary oversight processes, and public audit institutions follow procedures and standards that are designed to monitor women's rights violations and enable women to call for inquiries and reviews.
- Ensure that gender discrimination is addressed in the public education system.

### ***Strengthening Women's Voices, Leadership, and Participation***

Beyond emphasizing the key role of women's movements in strengthening the state's

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commitment to gender equality, Round Table panellists and participants also offered strategies to engage women as politicians, citizens, voters and consumers of media:

- Address participation obstacles women face in the electoral process and their ability to exercise a real choice in elections.
- Increase women's political literacy as citizens and voters: build their knowledge of national laws and policies, as well as international agreements and conventions on women's rights.
- Create spaces for women to give voice to policy preferences—within and beyond political parties.
- Increase women's media literacy and empower them to demand gender equitable representation as media consumers; address women's lack of voice by regulatory reform in the media (consider developing media codes of conduct on gender).
- Identify male champions and support their engagement in building policy networks for gender equality and advocacy partnerships.
- Ensure that civil society organizations led by women and committed to gender justice have access to funding and strategic political spaces.
- Encourage women politicians to use resources such as iKNOW Politics to exchange knowledge and strategies.
- Build women's technological literacy and access to new media and communication tools and seek to remove the obstacles to their visibility in mainstream television channels.
- Invest in leadership development and mentoring, especially for young women, and strive to make politics an accessible

arena for low income women and women from rural areas, whose representation has been constrained by the high cost of campaigning.

- Ensure that women have equal representation in public administration and ensure that advocacy measures also include the promotion of women's presence in executive and judicial appointments.
- Encourage the collection of sex disaggregated data on all related areas of the political and electoral process, including on voter registration, voter turnout and candidacy, as well as on successful candidates for elected and appointed posts.

### ***Supporting Peacebuilding, Post Conflict, and Reconstruction Processes***

Transitions to democracy and post-conflict reconstruction processes are both critical moments for ensuring that the commitment to gender equality is institutionalized. Round Table panellists and participants offered the following recommendations:

- Treat gender equality as a central, explicit goal of democracy building.
- Ensure that women play a leadership role in designing new systems of governance, policies and services.
- Build commitment and accountability to gender equality concurrent with, rather than subsequent to, the establishment of democratic institutions and development plans.
- Ensure that violations of women's human rights in conflict or crisis contexts are meaningfully addressed in the proceedings of commissions of inquiry or truth and reconciliation commissions, and in transitional justice legislation. ■

# Introduction

On 4 May 2011, the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women), the United Nations Department of Political Affairs (UN DPA), the UN Development Programme (UNDP) and the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA), convened a high level round table meeting in New York to examine the links between democracy and gender equality, and to explore the UN's role in promoting both. The May 2011 *International Round Table on Democracy and Gender Equality: The Role of the United Nations* set out to review key challenges and successes in efforts to secure the full participation and inclusion of women in democratic governance; to explore ways of better supporting gender responsiveness in democracy assistance programmes across the UN, and to affirm high level commitment to the political empowerment of women.

The Round Table brought together more than 150 policymakers, practitioners and academics working on various aspects of gender equality and democracy. It provided an opportunity to consolidate lessons learned from working at the intersection of gender equality and democratic governance, and to explore the challenges and opportunities for the UN's work in this area.

Gender equality must be a feature of democratic governance for the latter to be worthy of its name. By promoting both simultaneously we not only promote the equal human rights of women and men, we also accelerate development progress.  
Helen Clark, Administrator, UNDP

The Round Table was the third in a series of high level international meetings and workshops on the links between

democracy and the main pillars of UN work: development, peace and security, and human rights. It was preceded by a September 2008 meeting on democracy and development, and a March 2010 meeting on democracy, peace and security; and it was followed by a July 2011 meeting on democracy and human rights. Although the theme of gender equality ran throughout these discussions, the May 2011 round table on democracy and gender equality was organized in recognition of the central role that gender equality must play in the UN's efforts to build and deepen democracy.

This paper highlights the key insights and conclusions that emerged from the Round Table, backed up by case examples shared by the panellists or drawn from relevant literature and experience on the Round Table's priority themes.

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## Context Analysis and Problem Statement for the Round Table

The Round Table built upon recent UN statements; relevant international agreements, conventions, and instruments; and recommendations from previous meetings on women's role in democracy and peacebuilding. These included:

- Rights enshrined in the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and priorities in the Millennium Declaration, in particular the third Millennium Development Goal (MDG 3), which highlights the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women as an urgent development priority, and which identifies women's political participation as a key indicator;

- The strategic plan of UN Women, which centres on priorities identified in the Beijing Platform for Action; CEDAW; the Millennium Declaration; and relevant General Assembly, Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), and other applicable UN instruments, standards and legislation;
- The September 2009 *UN Secretary-General's Guidance Note on Democracy*, which sets out the normative and conceptual foundations for the UN's democracy work and the guiding principles for effective democracy assistance;
- Recommendations from the report on *Women Deepening Democracy: Transforming Politics for Gender Equality*, a workshop organized by UN Women, the UN Democracy Fund (UNDEF), and the UN DPA (New Delhi, 13-15 January 2010);
- The 10th anniversary of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (UN Security Council 2000) on women, peace and security, which recognized the impact of conflict on women and the central role they must play in establishing or rebuilding democracies in post-conflict states;
- CEDAW General Recommendations 23 (on political and public life) and 25 (temporary special measures).

If a democracy neglects women's participation, if it ignores women's voices, if it shirks accountability for women's rights, it is a democracy for only half its citizens.  
Michelle Bachelet, Executive Director, UN Women

The Round Table discussions also reflected contemporary policy debates on gender equality and democracy, most of which centre

on the use of temporary special measures, such as quotas, as a means to increase women's representation in politics. Largely as a result of the adoption of such measures, the last three decades have seen significant increases in women's level of political representation, with the most notable increases in countries where quotas have been put in place. Yet research has also revealed a number of challenges and dilemmas arising from the implementation of quota systems, raising new questions about how best to achieve—and to measure—gender equality in a democratic context. While much emphasis has been placed on institutional design, there is growing recognition that what works depends on a host of other contextual factors, including:

- A country's prevailing political culture and history.
- Women's access to media tools and their portrayal in the media.
- The strength of local women's movements and their relationship with the state.
- Women's access to opportunities for political apprenticeship and their ability to cultivate political constituencies.
- The overall accountability to women of political and state institutions.
- The capacity and desire of female politicians to promote a women's rights agenda.
- The degree of investment in women's participation and leadership in post-conflict democratic processes.

Round Table panellists explored each of these factors in depth, drawing on both global research and country level examples. Several panellists emphasized that although research and experience had exposed the limitations of contemporary approaches to increasing women's participation in democracy, such

processes had also uncovered new possibilities.

## Objectives and Structure of the Round Table

With the objective of sharing experiences, learning from research and generating lessons for policy and practice, the Round Table brought together the perspectives, expertise and experiences of UN staff, academics and practitioners from a range of national and institutional contexts.

Democracy cannot be fully realized unless there is equality between citizens and that includes equality between women and men. Vidar Helgesen, Secretary-General, International IDEA

The opening session was chaired by UN Assistant Secretary-General Oscar Fernandez-Taranco. It consisted of presentations by UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, UNDP Administrator Helen Clark, UN Women Executive Director Michelle Bachelet, International IDEA Secretary-General Vidar Helgesen, and Professor Mala Htun from the New School University in New York. This session was followed by three panel discussions, each featuring presentations from keynote speakers, followed by discussion.

### **Panel One: Political Participation, Representation and Gender Equality**

Chair: Ms Randi Davis, Practice Manager, Gender Team, Bureau for Development Policy, UNDP

- Dr Drude Dahlerup, Professor of Political Science, University of Stockholm, Sweden
- Ms Shari Bryan, Vice President, National Democratic Institute, USA

- Dr Joy Ezeilo, Director, Women's Aid Collective, Nigeria

### **Panel Two: Impact of Traditional and New Social Media on Women's Engagement with the Democratic Process**

Chair: Dr Massimo Tommasoli, Permanent Representative for International IDEA to the UN

- Ms Pat Mitchell, President and CEO, Paley Center for Media, USA
- Ms Emily Jacobi, Executive Director, Digital Democracy, USA
- Ms Colleen Lowe-Morna, Executive Director, Gender Links, South Africa
- Ms Shiulie Ghosh, Senior News Anchor, Al Jazeera English, Qatar

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### **Panel Three: Strengthening Accountability to Women**

Chair: Dr Anne Marie Goetz, Chief Advisor, Peace and Security Cluster, UN Women

- Dr Soukeina Bouraoui, Director, Center for Arab Women's Training and Research, Tunisia
- Ms Yasmin Sooka, Director, Foundation for Human Rights, South Africa
- Mr Vincent Warren, Director, Center for Constitutional Rights, USA

The Round Table concluded with a summary of the lessons emerging from the discussions by Massimo Tommasoli, International IDEA's Permanent Observer to the UN. The following day, representatives from the various UN entities present met to brainstorm ideas on how to best move forward. ■

# Key Themes in Democracy and Gender Equality

True democracy is about more than just participation—it is about the checks and balances and accountability institutions that allow women to seek redress when their rights are abused and their needs ignored. Michelle Bachelet, Executive Director, UN Women

The *International Round Table on Democracy and Gender Equality* was held during one of the most pivotal democratic moments in recent history: the Arab rebellions that took place during the first half of 2011. As many of the speakers noted in the opening session, across the Middle East and North Africa women poured into the streets and the squares — alongside men — demanding change. Dictatorships across the region began to cede to these popular movements one by one — movements that were born beyond the realm of formal politics. The waves of mobilization that wrought such dramatic changes across the Middle East and North Africa provide important lessons for international institutions seeking to support democratization and gender equality.

Although women's experiences in the aftermath of the 'Arab spring' vary, one lesson is clear: women's active engagement in popular movements for political change does not necessarily ensure a core commitment to gender equality in the resulting political system. Around the world and throughout recent history, women have built their political consciousness and practical organizing skills in popular movements for change, but the subsequent changes have often failed to take their interests and voices into account, since even the most revolutionary political movements often maintain conservative attitudes about gender. Within this context, the UN has a vital role to

play in strengthening emerging democracies' commitments to gender equality in both theory and practice—prior to, during and following pivotal moments of democratic transition.

In the past several decades, UN processes and entities have yielded a range of strategies for deepening these commitments. Adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1979 and since ratified by 187 countries, CEDAW established a broad framework for enshrining a commitment to gender equality in democratic structures and processes: from recommending explicit mentions of equality between men and women in national constitutions; to eliminating discriminatory laws; to ensuring that legal systems offer women equal protection in both theory and practice; to focusing attention on women's rights to vote, to stand for and be elected to public office, to participate in the development and implementation of public policies, to participate in civil society, and to represent their governments internationally. This framework was deepened and extended in 1995 with the adoption of the Beijing Platform for Action, which set explicit goals for women's political participation and linked women's ability to participate in the political realm with their ability to achieve equality in all other areas of their lives.<sup>1</sup>

Women need to be at the negotiating table, playing their rightful role in conflict prevention and resolution, in peacekeeping and peacebuilding. Not only to ensure that women's needs and perspectives are reflected, but as a basic human right. Ban Ki-moon, UN Secretary-General

In 2000, the UN took further steps to increase women's participation in Member

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/text/econvention.htm>



State political systems, with attention paid to both long term development priorities and key moments of democratic transition and peacebuilding. MDG 3, which centres on the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women, focuses on eliminating discrimination in education, increasing the number of women in non-agricultural wage employment, and increasing the proportion of seats held by women in national parliaments.<sup>2</sup> UN Security Council Resolution 1325, also adopted in 2000, is concerned with women's right to equal participation in the prevention and resolution of conflicts, in peacebuilding, and in reconstruction processes. It also highlights the need for special measures aimed at protecting women and girls from gender based violence—particularly sexual violence—during periods of armed conflict.<sup>3</sup> In 2010 the UN created UN Women, a new entity focused exclusively on gender equality and women's empowerment, with a clear mandate to deepen women's participation in democracies worldwide.

Experience has taught us that democratic ideals of inclusiveness, accountability, and transparency cannot be achieved without laws, policies, measures, and practices that address inequalities. Moreover, we must go beyond thinking about these issues mostly at the time of elections. Rather we must weave these ideals into the social, political, and economic fabric of a society, so that girls and women can reach their potential on an equal basis with men, whatever they choose to do.

Ban Ki-moon, UN Secretary-General

Despite this intensification of international obligations for promoting gender equality, as UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon pointed out in his opening remarks at the Round Table, today fewer than 10 per cent of countries have female heads of state or government, and

only 33 countries have reached 30 per cent or greater representation of women in national parliaments. This under-representation of women in positions of political leadership, which can be seen in all parts of the world and in both developing and developed contexts, indicates more than just a lack of commitment to gender equality—it also signals a lack of commitment to democracy. Arguing that 'gender equality must be treated as an explicit goal of democracy-building, not as an 'add-on,' the Secretary-General emphasized the important role the UN can play in bringing about the kinds of changes in the political culture that will allow gender equality—and democracy—to flourish. 'Mindsets can change,' he pointed out. 'National actors have to lead the transformation. But it is our responsibility to assist them.'

Subsequent speakers echoed the Secretary-General's message, highlighting persistent challenges in strengthening the connection between democracy and gender equality, as well as promising pathways to change. A theme that ran throughout the remarks was the concept of gender equality as a litmus test for democracy: again and again, speakers emphasized that the nature and extent of women's participation—as citizens, voters, activists, administrators and elected officials—was a clear indication of the strength of a country's democratic institutions, and that low or poor political representation of women usually signalled deeper inequalities and challenges beyond just gender discrimination. Addressing those inequalities and challenges requires more than just getting women into public office: it means exposing and addressing flaws in the electoral system, reforming the political culture and building a commitment to gender equality among men and women in political parties and in society at large.

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/osagi/wps/>

Gender equality does not democracy make. And democracy does not gender equality make. But when both principles of popular control and equality between citizens are realized, then democracy and gender equality are both maximized—and society is on a much better path to development, security, and human rights.  
Vidar Helgesen, Secretary-General, International IDEA

UNDP Administrator Helen Clark argued that the UNDP's work in this area, which focuses on providing technical assistance during elections, strengthening governance mechanisms and reforming public administration systems, must be judged in terms of its ability to empower women and promote gender equality—in both moments of political transition, and in ongoing political and public life. And drawing on lessons learned from democratic transitions and efforts to deepen women's political participation around the world, Executive Director of UN Women Michele Bachelet highlighted three elements that must guide democracy assistance in order to ensure that gender equality remains front and centre:

- (1) Address obstacles women face in participation in the electoral process and their ability to exercise a real choice in elections, which requires freedom from coercion in both private and public life.
- (2) Create spaces in both political parties and civil society that allow women to articulate genuine policy preferences and advance their interests.
- (3) Ensure that democratic institutions are accountable to women and women's rights.

In order to achieve these goals, it is essential to invest in strengthening women's organizations and movements, to ensure that

political parties are receptive and responsive to women; and to establish a robust system of checks and balances within democratic institutions, rather than assuming that women's participation alone will ensure accountability to the concept of gender equality. In his opening remarks, UN Assistant Secretary-General Oscar Fernandez-Taranco also drew attention to this issue, noting that temporary special measures have played an important role in 'accelerating de facto equality between men and women,' but also pointing out that 'no one solution is enough.'

I am optimistic about the effects of democracy on gender equality, not because it produces changes in an automatic way, but due to the processes it makes possible.  
Professor Mala Htun, New School University

Speakers noted that a major focus for the UN and other international institutions has been the electoral process. Political quotas and other mechanisms for accelerating women's pathways into politics have been used, with some measure of success, to achieve higher numbers of women in political office than at any time in human history. Yet this experience shows that increasing the number of women in politics is necessary, but not enough, to produce governments that promote gender equality.

Democracy is an incubator for gender equality. It provides public space for discussion of human rights and women's empowerment. It enables women's groups to mobilize. It makes it easier for women to realize their political, civil, economic and social rights. But let us not allow the long-standing democracies to congratulate themselves too readily: even there, women still experience discrimination, inequality and high levels of violence.  
Ban Ki-moon, UN Secretary-General



Speakers also highlighted persistent challenges and obstacles, exploring how political architecture can hinder women's effective participation, and emphasizing the importance of contextual and historical factors. The structure of some electoral systems makes them not easily adaptable to measures that can lead to more political representation. Quota systems may be difficult to apply and less effective in some electoral systems, such as the 'first past the post' system. Participants pointed out that it is inevitably difficult to change the status quo where it has sustained a highly inequitable distribution of political power. And inequality may well extend beyond gender: women who take office may only be able to do so simply because they are well positioned and connected to the political elite, as members of powerful families or the wives and wards of powerful men. Parity in parliament does not necessarily translate into the adequate representation of the diversity of a country's citizens.

Despite the diversity of contexts and political systems, there is one constant: the vital role of women's movements. Analysis carried out by New School University Professor Mala Htun and colleagues shows that the presence of autonomous women's movements are the main factor associated with progressive gender equality policies across a range of governance contexts. Moreover, global and regional norms have the most powerful effect when promoted in countries with strong women's movements. These movements are in a position to build women's democratic participation from both the top down and the ground up: increasing women's political literacy at the grassroots, pushing for laws and policies that advance gender equality and addressing implementation gaps. ■

### Box 1: Women's Movements: Vital for Democracy

An analysis of the relationship between strong women's movements and progressive laws on gender carried out by Professor Mala Htun and colleagues at the New School University in New York showed that variations from country to country are primarily attributable to historical factors, in particular the institutionalized relations between the dominant religion and state, but also the legacy of colonialism, which often led to the institutionalization of religious and customary authority over laws of personal status. In all cases examined, autonomous feminist organizing was central to changes in favor of greater gender equality, building coalitions for reform and putting women's rights on political agendas. The authors argue that it is not the institutionalization of religion per se that is at issue, but the lack of democratic contestation and civil mobilization that often accompany it, due to a lack of internal democracy within religious institutions themselves. Their findings suggest that, 'on its own, electoral democracy is not sufficient for major gains in women's rights. State-religion relations, colonial legacies, global and regional norms and autonomous women's movements are also important.'

Source: Presentation by Professor Mala Htun at the Round Table

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We know that women's participation is good for democracy. The question is: will we make democracy work for women?  
Professor Mala Htun, New School University

# Panel One: Political Participation, Representation and Gender Equality

It is self-evident that democratic governance cannot be fully achieved without the full participation and inclusion of women.  
Helen Clark, Administrator, UNDP

Given the interdependence of democracy and gender equality, how can countries accelerate progress toward achieving greater political participation and representation of women? A range of temporary special measures aimed at increasing women's political representation is currently being applied around the world (see Box 2). As a result of these and other measures, the last two decades have seen an increase in women's political participation worldwide, but conditions are still far from equal, and progress toward goals set in the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action and the 2000 MDGs remains slow. According to the most recent MDG Report, by the end of January 2012 women accounted for nearly 20 per cent of parliamentarians worldwide—a 75 per cent increase since 1995 when women held only just over 11 per cent of seats worldwide, and a 44 per cent increase over 2000.<sup>4</sup> Despite these gains, progress is uneven, with Arab and Pacific states at the bottom, Scandinavian countries toward the top and significant discrepancies among African and Latin American/Caribbean states—ranging from over 56 per cent in Rwanda and over 45 per cent in Cuba, to 2 per cent in Egypt, less than 7 per cent in Nigeria and less than 4 per cent in Haiti (see boxes 3 & 4).

The experience shows that transition periods offer an opportunity to address inequalities of the past through the adoption and implementation of strategies conducive to a greater role for women in politics. More than a third of the countries with 30 per cent or more women MPs are those with transitional experience. In September 2012, in countries where the UN Security Council established a mandate related to elections some time since 1989, women made up 23.5 per cent of parliamentarians, which is higher than the global average.

4 Millennium Development Goals Report 2012, p. 24.

**Box 2: Gender Quota Policies Worldwide**

Source: Krook, Lovenduski and Squires (2009:784)

Quota Type	Key Features
<b>Reserved seats</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mandated by national parliaments</li> <li>• Revise mechanisms of election by establishing seats that only women are eligible to contest</li> <li>• May be implemented through direct elections by voters or indirect elections by parties or members of parliament</li> <li>• Ensure compliance</li> </ul>
<b>Party quotas</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adopted voluntarily by political parties</li> <li>• Set out new criteria for party candidate selection</li> <li>• Affect composition of party lists in PR electoral systems and candidates eligible for particular seats in majoritarian systems</li> <li>• May entail internal party sanctions for non-compliance</li> </ul>
<b>Legislative quotas</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mandated by national parliaments</li> <li>• Set out new criteria for party candidate selection</li> <li>• Affect composition of party lists in PR electoral systems and candidates eligible for particular seats in majoritarian systems</li> <li>• Usually entail sanctions for non-compliance</li> </ul>
<b>Soft quotas</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adopted voluntarily by political parties</li> <li>• Set out informal targets and recommendations in relation to party candidate selection</li> <li>• Set out new criteria for membership of internal party bodies</li> <li>• Rarely entail sanctions for non-compliance</li> </ul>

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**Box 3: Top 10 countries for women's representation in parliament as of December 2012**Source: International Parliamentary Union, <http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/classif.htm>

Rank	Country	% of women in the lower house or unicameral parliament
1	Rwanda	56.3%
2	Andorra	50.0%
3	Cuba	45.2%
4	Sweden	44.7%
5	Seychelles	43.8%

6	Finland	42.5%
7	South Africa	42.3%
8	Netherlands	40.7%
9	Nicaragua	40.2%
10	Iceland	39.7%

#### Box 4: Bottom 10 countries for women's representation in parliament as of December 2012

Source: International Parliamentary Union, <http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/classif.htm>

Rank	Country	% of women in lower or single parliamentary body
136	Vanuatu	1.9%
137	Oman	1.2%
138	Yemen	0.3%
139	Kuwait	0.0%
139	Micronesia (Federated States of)	0.0%
139	Nauru	0.0%
139	Palau	0.0%
139	Qatar	0.0%
139	Saudi Arabia	0.0%
139	Solomon Islands	0.0%

Much has been learned from successful experiences of different countries, as well as from failures and shortcomings in how special measures have been implemented or in the mechanisms themselves. The first panel at the Round Table brought together leading experts on political participation and representation to consider lessons learned from these experiences, and to identify strategies for moving forward. In particular, they examined the gender responsiveness of political parties and electoral management bodies and processes, the impact of quotas and other temporary special measures for increasing

women's representation in legislative bodies, and women's ability to access campaign finances.

The effectiveness of temporary special measures depends on various factors, including the nature of the measures themselves (for example, whether they are voluntary or mandatory), how they are implemented (for example, whether they are accompanied by sanctions or other means of enforcement), and the political/electoral system in which they are applied. Quotas and other affirmative action measures can

rapidly increase the number of women in politics—and indeed, few countries that have seen sharp increases in women’s political representation over the last few decades have been able to achieve this without the introduction of quotas. However, as the Round Table indicated: quotas are just the beginning. There is no automatic relationship between increasing numbers of women in political office and improving the accountability of democratic institutions to women’s rights, or strengthening the State’s commitment to promoting gender equality and addressing discrimination against women. Particularly in situations where quotas have been manipulated to achieve ulterior political motives, or where there are deeper issues with diversity and representation within the prevailing political culture, women who lack strong constituencies and well defined political agendas around gender equality might be more attractive to those looking to fill seats for a particular party. And in some cases, the rise of quotas and other temporary special measures aimed at easing women’s paths into politics might bring about a corresponding depoliticization of women’s movements, or might propel women into power who actively undermine those movements’ agendas.<sup>5</sup>

We need to help women to survive and navigate the systems that place them in power. Also women need help to navigate the notion of the numbers game. We need to find ways to support women so that they can be functional in addition to the formal measures. There are no short cuts to power. Yasmin Sooka, Executive Director, Foundation for Human Rights, South Africa

Women face formidable obstacles to political participation. These can include restrictions on mobility for women attempting to exercise their right to vote; low political literacy among women

seeking to identify and support candidates who seek to advance their rights and interests; and regular discrimination and harassment of women politicians within political parties and governance structures. Even if quotas help to propel women into the political sphere, female candidates often have restricted opportunities for mentorship, networking, constituency building and political apprenticeship. And they struggle to run for election in winnable seats. Addressing these obstacles means more than just encouraging women to stand for public office: it means fundamentally shifting the culture of political parties; building support among male politicians for gender equality and women’s right to participate politically; and building broad based coalitions for gender equality. Effective training and advocacy in this area also requires a solid practical knowledge of context: including internal party regulations and laws, candidate recruitment and nomination processes, and campaign financing procedures. Another emerging lesson is the need for support over the longer term: building women’s political capabilities and providing them with opportunities for political apprenticeship long before electoral campaigns begin and once they are over.

They say that behind every great man there is usually a great woman.

However, behind each politically effective woman, not just a co-operative husband is required, but an extremely supportive and resourceful extended family and in addition a strong movement-based organization ready to engage women in public life.

Madhu Kishwar, Senior Fellow, Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, India<sup>6</sup>

Finally, it is evident that not enough is being done to support women’s organizing. There were calls for direct support to be given to civil society for women’s organizing in times of peace as well as periods of conflict,

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5 See Andrea Cornwall and Anne Marie Goetz, “Democratizing Democracy: Feminist Perspectives,” in *Democratization* Vol. 12 No. 5, December 2005, pp. 783-800; and Mariz Tadros, “Women Engaging Politically: Beyond Magic Bullets and Motorways,” Pathways Policy Paper, October 2011, Brighton: Pathways of Women’s Empowerment RPC.

6 Madhu Kishwar (2003) *Off the Beaten Track: Rethinking Gender Justice for Indian Women*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, p. 144.

since nongovernmental organizations and social movements often provide the best spaces for women to familiarize themselves with relevant legal frameworks, develop their political consciousness, hone their organizing skills and build their support networks. Particularly in moments of political transition, the links between civil society and public institutions are usually high, and a democratized civil society with a robust culture of women's organizing and leadership can bring about a smoother transition to gender equitable governance.

And women's organizations have a key role to play in educating female voters, addressing the obstacles to participation they face in various areas of their lives, and in some cases, using international and regional conventions and agreements to educate them about their rights in contexts where national laws fail to recognize gender equality.

Support is needed on both sides of the equation: not only strengthening the political capabilities of women who enter politics, but also building constituencies for gender

#### **Box 5: Using CEDAW to promote democracy at the grassroots:**

CRADIF's advocacy with traditional leaders in Cameroon

Women living in rural, agricultural communities in Cameroon have little awareness of their rights according to national laws or international human rights standards, and are thus highly vulnerable to rights violations. Customary law is generally hostile to women's rights, in part because traditional leaders are unaware of national and international laws that protect women. And since it is generally considered taboo for women to speak in the presence of traditional authorities, women rarely use customary justice mechanisms to denounce violence or other rights violations.

Amidst these challenges, a local women's organization called CRADIF (Centre Régional d'Appui et de Développement des Initiatives Féminines) works to shift power imbalances between men and women, particularly within traditional governance systems. Most notably, CRADIF has succeeded in using international instruments—such as CEDAW, which Cameroon ratified in 1994—to make traditional leaders accountable to women's human rights. In 2011, following a meeting between CRADIF staff, women trained by CRADIF, administrative authorities and traditional chiefs, 15 chiefs from eastern Cameroon signed a public declaration that they would respect women's land and inheritance rights. This declaration reflected the chiefs' belief that CEDAW represented an authority that superseded their own—a victory of enormous significance in a context where most individuals consider a traditional authority's word to be law.

CRADIF accomplished this victory first by organizing and training local women to build the knowledge, skills and courage to speak in front of traditional authorities—even though such speech is considered taboo. During the meeting, CRADIF shared key provisions of CEDAW (including articles that affirm equality between girls and boys and guarantee women the same right to access resources as men), explaining that the Convention superseded national and customary laws. Administrative authorities present conceded that women had rights, but argued that it was their own responsibility to claim them. In response, CRADIF and the women they had trained explained the various obstacles that women confront in claiming their rights—including illiteracy, low self-esteem, ignorance of their own rights, lack of female leadership, fear of being accused of witchcraft and policymakers' own ignorance of the law. As a result of their testimony, the Head Chief of the East—a man notorious for his belief in women's subservience, who had already admonished the women present to behave more obediently in his presence—took CRADIF's program coordinator aside to apologize for his attitude and promise to change his behavior. He acknowledged that women and traditional authorities shared a common challenge: ignorance of the law as a result of the State's tendency to create policies without implementing them.

Source: Interview with Elisabeth Ngo Njock, Coordinator, CRADIF, conducted as part of research for a report on reframing and ending violence for the international women's fund Mama Cash

equitable governance. This goes beyond persuading voters to vote for women. It is about ensuring that accountability to women ends up being hardwired into the political system as a whole, rather than being regarded as the task of women politicians to ensure—and, as Round Table participants pointed out, blaming them for their shortcomings when they fail. ■

## Panel Two: Impact of Traditional and New Social Media on Women's Engagement with Democratic Processes

Close your eyes. What images flow into your mind when you hear the word "politics"? How many of those images involve women? Who created those images? There is a silent form of exclusion when half the population is denied a voice. We need to have zero tolerance for no women in decision making so when we close our eyes, we see women. Colleen Lowe-Morna, Gender Links, South Africa

The media play a growing role in facilitating women's engagement with democratic processes. The second panel at the Round Table examined how both representations of women in traditional media and the opportunities and challenges afforded by social media shape women's participation in democratic processes and institutions.

The media plays a vital role in accountability and transparency in democratic societies. Journalists, bloggers and reporters uncover stories that have been hidden from public view, amplify and proliferate voices, perspectives and visions that might otherwise remain unseen and unheard, and keep citizens engaged and informed about key political decisions and events. New media technologies offer an even more democratic media platform, and women across the world are becoming particularly active contributors in this revolution, engaging in public debate and generating momentum for change by blogging and using new digital and social media tools such as Twitter and Facebook. Yet women still face formidable obstacles to accessing and using communication

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tools. One barrier is simply not being able to imagine themselves taking ownership of these tools as a means of articulating their thoughts, aspirations and demands. Another is the comparative lack of female voices and leadership in this sector: across the West, women own less than 1 per cent of media companies.

Like the formal political arena, the traditional print and broadcast media may be difficult for women to enter or influence. Women tend to be found in jobs like presenters; it is much rarer to find them occupying positions where they can select news stories and shape public opinion. Traditional media remains male dominated, characterized by masculine work culture, the reinforcement of gender stereotypes and marginalization of women's voices and priorities. This has an obvious influence on how and how often women are featured in the media: a mere 17 per cent of world stories, news and information sources are about women, and many of these focus on female celebrities and athletes. In political cultures where favourable media coverage is essential to political success and legitimacy, female politicians are often held to a double standard: criticized or questioned if they are unmarried, judged more for how they look and what they wear than what they say. Much more needs to be done to enable women who advance social justice agendas to gain visibility in mainstream television and radio.

Information and communication rights are essential preconditions for women to fully exercise their civil and political rights—to organise, network, make their knowledge and ideas visible and advocate for gender justice. Communication rights include the right to information, expression, privacy, democratic governance, participation in culture, language, creativity, education, peaceful assembly and self-determination. Take Back the Tech!<sup>7</sup>

The proliferation of new media has ushered in diverse opportunities for women to shape their own content and cultivate their own audiences. Women politicians are able to make use of new media to communicate with constituencies and the general public. The more media-savvy establish their own blogs, using them to showcase their activities and put issues on the agenda for public debate. By using social media women politicians and activists can counteract the negative representations of women politicians in the mainstream media. Yet there is growing concern that the vastness of the Internet is creating gender enclaves that restrict debate and deliberation to small, similar minded communities. This may prevent the potential influence of online discussion and information exchange from reaching a broader audience. Thus, mainstream media remains a vital avenue for women seeking to raise their political profiles, increase coverage of issues that disproportionately affect or concern them and challenge gender stereotypes.

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.takebackthetech.net/know-more>



**Box 6: Taking Back the Tech**

Take Back the Tech! is a collaborative online campaign that takes place during the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-based Violence from 25 November to 10 December every year. It encourages the public at large—and especially women and girls—to take control of technology to end violence against women. A web based forum provides organizations and individuals with inspiration to put together their own digital postcards, stories and blogs, and to use digital reporting technologies to raise awareness and stimulate action to end gender based violence.

Source: <http://www.takebackthetech.net/>

Multi-platform communications such as Al Jazeera's *The Stream*, which combine user-generated content (via platforms such as Twitter) and video vox pop with links to video news content and reportage, offer exciting new avenues for showcasing women's political participation and amplifying their voices. There is much that can be done to engage journalists, and women journalists in particular, to broaden public awareness and debate on gender equality—building support for the legitimacy of women candidates for public office, challenging the electorate to reflect critically on gender norms and stereotypes, exposing both direct and indirect gender biases and advancing positive, complex portrayals of women leaders. Initiatives such as *New Narratives* work with African women journalists in difficult environments to strengthen their capacity for news reporting on gender equality issues, changing what gets on the news and how women are represented.<sup>8</sup>

**Box 7: SJS builds digital and media democracy in the DRC**

Founded by a group of young Congolese feminists in 2005, Si Jeunesse Savait (SJS) works at the intersection of gender, violence, generational politics, sexuality, technology and democracy in the Democratic Republic of Congo, using information and communication technologies (ICT) to address diverse forms of gender-based violence. SJS's trainings have built the ICT capacity of a wide range of women's organizations, convincing them of the importance of using new technologies to disseminate their messages and create safe online spaces for organizing and community-building, and expanding their awareness of and attention to addressing ICT-related violence.

SJS recognizes that the role emerging and established information and communication technologies play in women's lives is complex. The organization's trainings and campaigns approach ICT as both an asset and a liability when it comes to gender-based violence: emerging ICT tools offer new strategies for engagement, awareness-raising, organising, movement-building and advocacy, but they also render women and girls vulnerable to new and insidious forms of violence.

A key constituency in SJS's work is female journalists and communicators, many of whom are subject to violence, harassment and threats from the State, particularly when they speak out on the pressing issue of sexual crimes against women in the DRC and denounce the government's lack of attention to this issue. SJS works to build community and solidarity among female journalists, connecting them with local women's organizations and encouraging them to organise their own networks and campaigns. SJS also works to place the issue of violence against female journalists on the agendas of broader movements concerned with the human rights of journalists, encouraging them to rally support and solidarity behind female journalists who have been publicly or privately threatened by public officials by signing petitions, organizing protests and agreeing to deny perpetrators air time until they apologize and take responsibility.

Source: Interview with Stephanie Mwamba, SJS, conducted as part of research for a report on reframing and ending violence for the international women's fund Mama Cash.

8 <http://www.newnarratives.org>

### **Box 8: Promoting Digital Democracy in Haiti**

KOFAVIV (the Commission of Women Victims for Victims) is a grassroots women's organization started by poor women in Port-Au-Prince, Haiti that has collaborated with the New York based organization Digital Democracy to find new ways to use technology to foster accountability. KOFAVIV's 24-hour call centre serves as the only emergency response system for sexual violence in Haiti, and access to IT training has enabled KOFAVIV to build a database of survivors of sexual violence, as well as track cases, identify trends and connect survivors with medical, legal and psychosocial care services. A photography project put cameras in the hands of women who have never taken pictures of themselves before, allowing them to tell stories in powerful ways. 'As a small grassroots group, we are not supposed to have access to these kinds of systems,' comments Jocie Philistin, KOFAVIV's Program Coordinator. 'Now, tech is at the core of our organization and allows us to be better at all parts of our work.'

Source: Round Table presentation by Emily Jacobi, with additional material from Digital Democracy ([www.digitaldemocracy.org](http://www.digitaldemocracy.org))

# Panel Three: Strengthening Accountability to Women

Those without voice are so easily ignored by those who have it. Without the full participation of women in decision-making processes and debates about policy priorities and options, issues of great importance to women will either be neglected or the way in which they are addressed will be sub-optimal and uninformed by women's perspectives.

Helen Clark, UNDP Administrator

What does it take to make democracies more accountable to women? What are the most promising ways to ensure that institutions promoting gender equality in their policies can deliver it in practice? How can civil society hold the state accountable to its commitments to advancing gender equality? And which accountability systems are most accessible and empowering for women? The Round Table's third session reviewed definitions, mechanisms and strategies for enhancing accountability for gender equality in democratic institutions.

Participants' discussion of the avenues that already exist for strengthening accountability to women addressed both vertical and horizontal accountability mechanisms. The former, such as voting and the media representation of citizens' voices, provide women with a means to articulate priorities and make demands. The latter include parliament, auditors, ombudspeople, gender equality commissions and human rights commissions, all of which can be used by *women* and *gender equality* advocates to hold government accountable.

An important distinction was drawn between accountability to women and accountability for gender equality. Women politicians and women's organizations do not always promote gender equality, and may make use of available opportunities to influence government to adopt agendas informed by other interests—whether to preserve the privileges of a particular class or political party or to further entrench gender inequality as part of a conservative religious agenda. International legal instruments such as conventions, protocols and other agreements are invaluable tools in pressing for accountability on women's rights, and can be a useful point of reference in addressing these issues. These instruments may be used at various levels, from CEDAW committee monitoring to the use of key articles of the Convention to hold governments to account and as a basis for educating women about their rights in contexts where civil or customary laws fail to take gender into account (see Box 5).

Several examples shared by Round Table participants underscored the importance of investing in accountability mechanisms. In Cape Verde, for example, post-independence education policies laid the foundations for contemporary gender equality in government, where senior leadership is equally divided between women and men, and women currently lead the ministries of defence, justice, economy, and finance. As with the 'numbers game' in political representation, achieving these results required more than just getting more girls into school: they required

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ensuring that girls and boys were treated as equals in the classroom, making it a goal of the education system to address both direct and indirect gender biases and dismantle patriarchy, and ensuring that women who experience violence or harassment within public institutions have access to justice. Another experience was shared from the Kenyan Truth, Justice and Reconciliation Commission, where key elements of extending accountability to women included not only ensuring that a third of the

Commission's members were female, but also creating an environment where women Commission members were empowered to speak up during hearings. By contrast, participants noted that in Tunisia, despite women's relatively high level of representation in the national parliament (26.7 per cent), women parliamentarians struggled to be politically effective, in part because legacy of dictatorship weakened the media, and in part because ambivalent attitudes toward gender equality persist in the political culture.

#### **Box 9: Accountability to Women: The South African Conundrum**

Transition contexts can provide promising political entry points for women, but South Africa's recent history provides a curious case example. Until the last decade of the 20th century, South African society was characterized by a system of racial apartheid, which codified inequality and oppression on the basis of race in the country's laws. When that system fell, the resulting Truth and Reconciliation Commission made no reference to gender issues, but women asked the Commission to make a women's rights agenda central to the new democratic order. The resulting constitution placed equality on the basis of race—and gender—at the forefront, and the period between 1994 and 2000 ushered in numerous laws, public policies, and state institutions aimed at promoting gender equality, such as the Joint Monitoring Committee on the Improvement of Quality of Life and Status of Women.

Notwithstanding this progress, South Africa remains at the top of the list of the most unequal countries in the world, and violence against women remains exceptionally pervasive. There are many women in parliament; there is a Gender Commission; there is a progressive constitution backed up by strong public policies. Why then is there still inequality? One issue that emerges is that a neglect of the underlying structural causes of conflict means they will resurface if not dealt with at the start. In South Africa the loss of thousands of jobs reinforced a culture of masculinity and made machismo even stronger. The feminist movement has lost its connection with grassroots women's movements. Ultimately, the wins and gains that came with constitutional reform were not fully realized, in part because South African social movements have been unable to sustain momentum.

Source: Round Table Presentation, Yasmin Sooka

In South Africa, despite comprehensive legislation and the institutionalization of a commitment to gender equality in the formal architecture of governance, structural inequities with roots in the apartheid era continue to hamper progress towards societal

change. The South African experience points to the need to go beyond putting laws and policies in place, supplementing legislative advocacy with working directly with women to ensure that they know their rights and are equipped to claim them individually and collectively.

### Box 10: Women's Charters

Women's charters are a method of aggregating and articulating the needs and demands of national women's movements and advocates for gender equality. They can be a useful tool for conveying women's demands and advocating rights.

In order to carry legitimacy and authority as the voice of half the population, a charter should be agreed on by consensus through wide ranging national grassroots consultations. The typical process of creating a women's charter involves preparing a draft framework through a steering committee of several key national stakeholders (feminist academics, experts on gender equality and grassroots women's movement leaders, for example). The draft framework is then disseminated to grassroots women's groups for discussion prior to a facilitated national consultative workshop or convention involving a wide range of national women's representatives, where the draft is finalized prior to its official launch and dissemination to all political parties and negotiating interests.

Lessons learned point to the need to ensure that charters are connected with other efforts to promote gender equality at the national level, and are owned by a broad constituency of women, are nonpartisan and are focused broadly on national issues, policies and the political system.

Examples of Women's Charters created in different contexts of transitional politics, electoral instability or electoral violence include:

- Botswana Women's Manifesto, 1993-2010
- Women's Charter for Effective Equality, South Africa, 1994
- Women's Political Manifesto, India, 1996 (updated 2009)
- Afghan Women's Bill of Rights, 2003
- The Women's Manifesto for Ghana, 2004
- Kenya Women's Manifesto, 2005
- Women's Common Agenda, Southern Sudan, 2009
- Equal by Right, Uganda, 2010
- Women's Charter for the Zimbabwe Constitutional Review, 2011

Source: UN Women briefing on Women's Charters in Transitional Elections and/or Constitutional Review Processes, 2012.

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There is much that the UN can do to support women and strengthen women's organizations that promote gender equality and justice. Stronger connections are needed between those engaged in advocating for women's rights at the national level and at the grassroots, as well as between women's and feminist movements and women parliamentarians. These connections can not only hold those representing women's interests in politics to account, but also develop

effective strategies for bringing about changes in laws and policies. The development of women's charters, support for caucuses of women parliamentarians and politicians, cross-party networks and voters' manifestos are all valuable tools in these efforts.

Civil society organizations have made critical contributions to strengthening accountability to women. Women's organizations in many parts of the world

have developed strategies for monitoring the shortcomings in statutory provisions or the protection of women, as well as holding government accountable for the effective implementation of laws that seek to ensure such provision or protection. In Brazil, for example, a regional network of feminist and women's organizations established an Observatory to track the application of the 2006 domestic violence law, monitoring police stations and courts. Regular contact

between the network and the national women's ministry meant that shortcomings could be highlighted, and accountability sought from different parties involved.<sup>9</sup>

Women's civil society organizations have made imaginative use of new media in efforts to hold to account those who violate women's rights. In Egypt, the HarassWeb initiative uses a live Twitter feed to collate reported incidents of sexual harassment, raise awareness of the incidence and impact of sexual harassment,

#### Box 11: HarassMap: Using Twitter for Public Engagement in Addressing Sexual Harassment in Egypt

Sexual harassment is rampant in Egypt. In response, Egyptian activists decided to develop a digital media map of sexual harassment, as a means to focus public attention on the issues and spark debate in the formal political arena on how it affected women's ability to participate in public life. Women were asked to send SMS messages registering incidents of harassment, which were used to create a HarassMap of Cairo. The map provides a public, visual account of women's experiences, with a live Twitter feed where women can share stories of harassment. Many men have joined the debate, calling on other men to end their harassment of women. Thus, through use of these new media tools, Egyptian activists have been able to generate a powerful call for accountability and to take action in ending sexual harassment of women. Similar technology is being used in India to map sexual violence against women and girls.

Sources: <http://harassmap.org/> and <http://www.maps4aid.com/>

and mobilize citizens for change. Women have also been able to use social networking sites such as Facebook and online campaigns to broaden their bases and advance their agendas.

Democracy is a continuous project. It is never perfect. It requires continuous vigilance.  
Anne Marie Goetz, UN Women

At its core, strengthening accountability to women means investing in the checks and balances that make democratic

governance work for everyone—creating a stronger, fairer and more democratic media, strengthening connections between political representatives and their constituencies, ensuring that citizens and lawmakers and public officials understand the country's laws, and encouraging the development of a strong, vibrant civil society that can play a part in encouraging governments to deliver on their commitments. Other means too can play a role in extending this accountability. UN conventions, protocols and covenants provide vital roadmaps for countries in democratic transition, and can fill gaps for activists working to defend women's rights in

<sup>9</sup> Cecilia Sardenberg, "Monitoring the Implementation of the Brazilian Domestic Violence Law," Pathways Policy Paper 2011. See also <http://www.observatoriodegenero.gov.br/menu/areas-tematicas/violencia>.

adverse contexts. Women's charters and voters' manifestos are also valuable mechanisms for keeping gender equality on the agenda of electoral debates, and holding governments, parties and politicians to account for their commitments. Finally, strengthening accountability means strengthening capacity throughout the political system: training officials to respect, listen to and seek out the voices of women (particularly in post-conflict settings), ensuring the representation of women in key institutional forums, and making sure that when women claim or are invited into political spaces, they are equipped with the skills and knowledge to make use of them. ■

# Conclusions and Recommendations

The Round Table affirmed the UN's commitment to ensuring that democracy assistance is gender responsive, and emphasized the value of initiatives and institutionalized mechanisms that are aimed at deepening gender equality in established and emerging democracies. Discussions highlighted both successes and challenges, universally stressing the centrality of gender equality to democracy, peacebuilding and human rights.

Our responsibility is to ensure that our democracy assistance is gender responsive. Let us do our utmost to promote women's democratic participation—and to ensure that democracies are accountable to women.

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon

Women's participation is a central element of democracy, and the nature and degree of women's participation is a key indicator of the quality of democratic culture. Despite some progress in the past two decades, the presence of women in appointed and elected positions remains low, and progress is uneven throughout the world. More needs to be done, both in developing and developed countries, to improve the situation.

In light of the history of discrimination and political exclusion faced by women around the world, temporary special measures are still necessary to achieve gender equality in political representation and UN Member States may be required to keep such measures in place if they are to continue down the path toward parity in political office. However, as several participants in the Round Table noted, temporary special measures alone are not sufficient to deliver a political culture and a set of democratic institutions that advance gender equality and effectively respond to women's demands. Even if special measures propel women into public office, women still need opportunities for political apprenticeship and mentoring, receptive and collaborative party structures, powerful constituencies and strong connections with women's organizations and movements in order to be politically effective.

Another theme throughout the Round Table was the vital role of women's movements in deepening democracy, holding the state accountable to gender equality and ensuring that laws and policies on women's rights translate into real changes in women's lives. In countries with weak women's movements, the scope for deepening democracy is limited, yet there is much that the UN can do to support women's political participation and strengthen women's



organizing in civil society. Changes in aid architecture have led to a decrease in financial support for women's organizations. Yet in the past few years, women's organizations in the very countries undergoing transition — and that most need a vibrant, articulate and well organized women's movement — have struggled to access long term institutional support. UN Women research shows that in 2011, Multi-Donor Trust Funds on average allocated only 7.1 per cent of their budgets on programmes designed specifically to benefit women. While this is an increase from 5.7 per cent in 2010, it still constitutes a rather feeble allocation.<sup>10</sup> Driven to compete against each other for development funds, women's movements have become attenuated and fragmented, and in many cases their capacity to stimulate women's political participation has been reduced. The Round Table discussions affirmed the value and importance of financing women's organizing as the single most important factor in driving positive change for women.

Financing is an important issue not only for women's civil society organizations but also for women in politics. More resources are needed for women politicians to launch campaigns; and for initiatives that work with women in politics to build constituencies and capacity, and that ensure structures are in place to support cross party platforms which create stronger connections between political representatives and women's organizations and movements. Beyond financial resources, women in politics need human resources in terms of campaign staff, strong social networks on which they can draw for support, partnerships with mentors and male champions and allies within the parties. The media is a critical resource for women politicians, women civil society and gender equality advocates. More investment is needed in amplifying their voices in the media and building women's

capacity to participate in both traditional and emerging forms of media. The media is a vital channel for women's voices, providing a means for them to demand accountability, frame demands, exchange experiences and develop strategies for change. Social media and digital communications technologies offer women new avenues for political participation. Yet much remains to be done to realize the promise of new media for women's empowerment and gender equality. Significant support is essential if women are to be able to 'Take Back the Tech' and use these new communication opportunities to deepen democracy and hold governments to account.

Connectivity is changing the landscape for political mobilization, because of the new tools provided by social media, but also for the creation of public space that is less mediated. Connectivity is also creating vulnerability. The UN could understand and build capacities in this new area of mobilization.

Massimo Tommasoli, International IDEA

## Recommendations

Nine key recommendations on the UN's role in promoting democracy and gender equality emerged from the Round Table:

10. Continue to use temporary special measures (such as quotas), where appropriate, to increase women's political participation, but recognize that quotas are not in themselves sufficient to bring about gender equality. To be effective, quotas and other temporary special measures need to be coupled with support for women's leadership and voice to promote women's political participation, including in holding elected officials

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.unwomen.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/05A-Planning-and-Financing.pdf>



to account for commitments to gender equality. Temporary special measures to increase women's participation in office should also be accompanied by measures for both men and women officeholders so they understand their obligations to advance gender equality.

11. In order to build women's political leadership, invest in political apprenticeship and mentorship for women in civil society and political parties, and provide increased support and financing for women's organizations and women's movements to enable women to build political consciousness, develop practical organizing skills, and develop grassroots constituencies.
12. Strengthen capacity building support for elected women as this will empower them to have more impact on decision making processes. It is also crucial to work with men and women in all related areas, including in politics, to shift attitudes and perceptions and work towards greater gender equality.
13. Develop better indicators that measure attempts to deepen gender equality in democratic institutions more meaningfully, including those that measure the effectiveness of support to women's movements and organizations in strengthening women's political participation and providing a platform for women's rights and gender equality.
14. Challenge gender stereotypes and work on creating a culture of zero tolerance of both direct and indirect gender bias within political parties and the wider political culture, and ensure that women politicians who face harassment and violence have access to justice.
15. Work with the mainstream and new

media to ensure that women are represented more fairly. Increase women's access to new media technologies as these can potentially provide inclusive and innovative platforms for shaping public debate and deepening democracy.

16. Strengthen the overall accountability of democratic institutions to women and gender equality by improving the transparency and accountability of public officials and institutions on their gender equality commitments. Ensure that women know their rights and are aware of the laws that protect them, and that they have access to effective channels for demanding accountability and claiming their rights both individually and collectively.
17. Ensure that democracy assistance—particularly in moments of post conflict transition—is gender responsive, and ensures that women's voices are heard and heeded at the negotiating table. Make sure that such assistance is available not only during elections, but as an ongoing resource to emerging and established democracies seeking to close the gap between theory and practice in their commitment to gender equality.
18. Recognize that women's ability to participate in public life may depend on their ability to enjoy autonomy in other areas of their lives, and the need to address the constraints women's obligations as carers may place on their political engagement.

More detailed conclusions and recommendations about how the UN can play a supportive role in strengthening the links between democracy and gender equality by providing gender responsive technical assistance are as follows:

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### ***Engaging with Political Parties, Public Institutions, and Government Bodies***

Round Table panellists and participants shared the following strategies and priorities for strengthening the commitment to gender equality among political parties and in political systems:

- When delivering technical assistance, follow best practice (ie from UNDP, NDI, International IDEA and others) on strengthening political parties' commitments to gender equality and women's representation: assess the candidate selection process; conduct focus groups and interviews with members of political parties on women's issues; identify talented women and bring them to the attention of party leadership; develop a strong relationship with male leadership of political parties and make the case for women's participation; and document and share challenges and success stories.
- Pay attention to context and history when introducing temporary special measures such as quotas and reserved seat systems—do not take a 'one-size-fits-all' approach.
- Encourage political parties to strengthen internal regulations and laws from a gender perspective; include language on gender equity in their platforms; set targets for women's participation at their conventions; adopt internal voluntary quotas in the absence of legal quotas; and ensure that women candidates can access financing and other supportive resources during their campaigns.
- Prioritize General Recommendations 23 and 25 of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).
- Conduct further research on the

relationship between increasing women's participation in political office and increased public commitment to gender equality through progressive laws and policies.

- Continue to support in-country consultations between women's civil society organizations and political leaders to develop Women's Charters and gender responsive budgets.
- Ensure that the judiciary, parliamentary oversight processes, and public audit institutions follow procedures and standards that are designed to monitor women's rights violations and enable women to call for inquiries and reviews.
- Ensure that gender discrimination is addressed in the public education system.

### ***Strengthening Women's Voices, Leadership, and Participation***

Beyond emphasizing the key role of women's movements in strengthening the state's commitment to gender equality, Round Table panellists and participants also offered strategies to engage women as politicians, citizens, voters and consumers of media:

- Address participation obstacles women face in the electoral process and their ability to exercise a real choice in elections.
- Increase women's political literacy as citizens and voters: build their knowledge of national laws and policies, as well as international agreements and conventions on women's rights.
- Create spaces for women to give voice to policy preferences—within and beyond political parties.
- Increase women's media literacy and empower them to demand gender equitable representation as media consumers; address

women's lack of voice by regulatory reform in the media (consider developing media codes of conduct on gender).

- Identify male champions and support their engagement in building policy networks for gender equality and advocacy partnerships.
- Ensure that civil society organizations led by women and committed to gender justice have access to funding and strategic political spaces.
- Encourage women politicians to use resources such as iKNOW Politics to exchange knowledge and strategies.
- Build women's technological literacy and access to new media and communication tools and seek to remove the obstacles to their visibility in mainstream television channels.
- Invest in leadership development and mentoring, especially for young women, and strive to make politics an accessible arena for low income women and women from rural areas, whose representation has been constrained by the high cost of campaigning.
- Ensure that women have equal representation in public administration and ensure that advocacy measures also include the promotion of women's presence in executive and judicial appointments.
- Encourage the collection of sex disaggregated data on all related areas of the political and electoral process, including on voter registration, voter turnout and candidacy, as well as on successful candidates for elected and appointed posts.

### ***Supporting Peacebuilding, Post Conflict, and Reconstruction Processes***

Transitions to democracy and post-conflict reconstruction processes are both critical moments for ensuring that the commitment to gender equality is institutionalized. Round Table panellists and participants offered the following recommendations:

- Treat gender equality as a central, explicit goal of democracy building.
- Ensure that women play a leadership role in designing new systems of governance, policies and services.
- Build commitment and accountability to gender equality concurrent with, rather than subsequent to, the establishment of democratic institutions and development plans.
- Ensure that violations of women's human rights in conflict or crisis contexts are meaningfully addressed in the proceedings of commissions of inquiry or truth and reconciliation commissions, and in transitional justice legislation. ■

Democracy and Gender Equality: The Role of the UN



Introduction: Mr Oscar Fernandez-Taranco, Assistant Secretary-General, UN



Opening Remarks: Mr Vidar Helgesen, Secretary-General, International IDEA (left), Ms Helen Clark, Administrator, UNDP (centre-left), Mr Ban Ki-moon, Secretary-General, UN (centre-right), Ms Michelle Bachelet, Executive Director, UN Women (right)



Mr Ban Ki-moon, Secretary-General, UN



Ms Helen Clark, Administrator, UNDP



Ms Michelle Bachelet, Executive Director, UN Women



Mr Vidar Helgesen, Secretary-General, International IDEA



Background: Prof Mala Htun, President, Global Institute for Gender Research



Panel 1: Dr Drude Dahlerup, Professor Political Science, University of Stockholm, Sweden (left), Ms Shari Bryan, Vice President, National Democratic Institute, United States of America (centre-left), Dr Joy Ezeilo, Director, Women Aid Collective, Nigeria (centre-right), Ms Randi Davis, Practice Manager, Gender Team, UNDP (right)



Ms Randi Davis, Practice Manager, Gender Team, UNDP



Dr Drude Dahlerup, Professor Political Science, University of Stockholm, Sweden



Ms Shari Bryan, Vice President, National Democratic Institute, United States of America



Dr Joy Ezeilo, Director, Women Aid Collective, Nigeria





Panel 2: Ms Emily Jacobi, Executive Director, Digital Democracy, United States of America (left), Ms Colleen Lowe-Morna, Executive director, Gender Links, South Africa (centre-left), Ms Shiulie Ghosh, Senior News Anchor, Al Jazeera English, Qatar (centre), Ms Pat Mitchell, President and CEO, The Paley Centre for Media, United States of America (centre-right), Dr Massimo Tommasoli, Permanent Representative for International IDEA to the UN (right)



Dr Massimo Tommasoli, Permanent Observer for International IDEA to the UN



Ms Pat Mitchell, President and CEO, The Paley Centre for Media, United States of America



Ms Emily Jacobi, Executive Director, Digital Democracy, United States of America



Ms Colleen Lowe-Morna, Executive director, Gender Links, South Africa



Ms Shiulie Ghosh, Senior News Anchor, Al Jazeera English, Qatar



Panel 3: Ms Yasmin Sooka, Director, Foundation for Human Rights, South Africa (left), Mr Vincent Warren, Director, Center for Constitutional Rights, United States of America (centre-left), Prof Mala Htun, President, Global Institute for Gender Research (centre-right), Dr Soukeina Bouraoui, Director, Center for Arab Women's Training and Research, Tunisia (right)



Dr Anne-Marie Goetz, Chief Advisor Peace and Security Cluster, UN Women



Ms Yasmin Sooka, Director, Foundation for Human Rights, South Africa



Mr Vincent Warren, Director, Center for Constitutional Rights, United States of America



Dr Soukeina Bouraoui, Director, Center for Arab Women's Training and Research, Tunisia

# Annexes

## **ANNEX 1**

### **Concept Note and Annotated Agenda for the International Round Table on “Democracy and Gender Equality: The Role of the United Nations”**

New York, 4 May 2011

### **Concept Note**

#### ***Introduction***

Since the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, the number of new and restored democracies has been on the rise and political systems across Eastern Europe, Latin America, Africa and Asia have transitioned to democratic models. Democratization has brought benefits to citizens in terms of realizing basic human rights and the protection of the rule of law through increased inclusiveness, participation, representation, accountability and transparency. While it is frequently stated that democracy benefits from women’s political participation we must also recognize the reverse: that gender equality increases where there are democratic institutions and processes. Democratic systems have benefited women citizens in particular by opening public spaces to a discussion of gender equality and empowerment of women: the “*deeper*” the democracy, the easier it is for women to realize political, civil, economic and social rights. The *gender responsiveness* of democratic institutions refers to the extent that they render equal opportunities to men and women to enjoy anticipated benefits. A fundamental example is the opportunity to run for democratically elected office.

Democratic principles and ideals are continually reinforced through international instruments, norms and standards; however,

their implementation remains a daunting challenge around the globe. The benefits of democracy are still unevenly distributed according to class, race, gender, ethnicity and regional power imbalances. Given this unequal distribution, ideals of democratic fairness and inclusion cannot be achieved without laws, policies, measures and practices that address inequalities in power relations between women and men. Obstacles to women’s access to the benefits of democracy include male and elite biases in the leadership of political parties; high costs of running for public office that exclude non-elites in general and often women candidates in particular; insufficient engagement by democratic accountability institutions to advance women’s rights; traditional attitudes and practices that inhibit women’s participation in political, social and economic life; limited media interest in the politics of women’s rights; and a weak gender constituency/civil society to demand accountability for gender equality. International mechanisms such as CEDAW, the Beijing Platform for Action and UNSCR 1325 support structural changes that would assist women to overcome the above obstacles such as Temporary Special Measures for political representation.

The Secretary-General’s Guidance Note on Democracy acknowledges that: “the benefits of democratic engagement remain out of reach for many women”. Prior to this, at the 2005 World Summit Member States of the UN had reaffirmed “that democracy is a universal value based on the freely expressed will of people to determine their own political, economic, social and cultural systems”<sup>11</sup>. Member States at the World Summit also concluded that “democracy, development and respect for all human rights and fundamental freedoms are interdependent and mutually reinforcing”<sup>12</sup>. Ultimately this statement by UN Member States is a step in the direction of recognizing that democracy,

<sup>11</sup> A/RES/60/1, para 135

<sup>12</sup> A/RES/60/1, para 135

the rule of law, good governance and gender equality are all interlinked and mutually reinforcing. At the same time, there is a clear acknowledgement in many quarters that despite this increased recognition women continue to face serious obstacles to participate in and shape democratic institutions and that special measures are sometimes needed to ensure women's effective engagement in democratic political competition and public decision making. President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf articulated this challenge very directly in a statement in 2008 for Progress of the World's Women:

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights states: 'The will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of government' (Article 21(3)). Half, even more than half, of 'the people' are women. Yet for far too long, women's will, women's voices, women's interests, priorities, and needs have not been heard, have not determined who governs, have not guided how they govern, and to what ends. Since women are often amongst the least powerful of citizens, with the fewest social and economic resources on which to build political power, special efforts are often needed to elicit and amplify their voice.

The Democracy and Gender Equality Roundtable, to be held in May 2011 at UN HQ will serve as a forum to gather key stakeholders and discuss the relationship between gender equality and democracy. Part of this discussion will look at the UN's performance (successes, lessons learned, obstacles and challenges) in implementing gender responsive democracy building and to formulate joint inputs on the topic for advocacy use within UN policy making structures.

### **Objectives and Outputs**

The key objective of the roundtable is to discuss the reinforcing relationship between democracy and gender equality, and to support gender responsiveness in UN agencies' democracy assistance programmes.

Specific objectives include:

- Strengthen the understanding among key stakeholders of the intersection of democracy and gender equality;
- Explore good practices for targeted and integrated measures to enhance the gender responsiveness of democracy assistance programming.

The expected outputs of the roundtable are:

1. A report compiling lessons-learned, challenges and obstacles of gender responsive democracy assistance programming.
2. Joint inputs to feed into the UN policymaking process by key UN democracy assistance actors on gender equality and democracy. ■

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## **Agenda**

### **Democracy and Gender Equality Round Table**

4 May 2011

### **Conference Room 6 (Morning), Conference Room A (Afternoon), NLB, UNHQ**

#### **08:30 REGISTRATION AND BREAKFAST**

#### **09:25 INTRODUCTION**

UN Assistant Secretary-General Mr Oscar  
Fernandez-Taranco

#### **09:30 WELCOME**

UN Secretary-General Mr Ban Ki-moon

#### **09:45 OPENING REMARKS**

UNDP Administrator Ms Helen Clark

UN Women Executive Director Ms Michelle  
Bachelet

International IDEA Secretary-General Mr  
Vidar Helgesen

#### **10:15 BACKGROUND:**

Professor Mala Htun, President, Global  
Institute for Gender Research

Gender and Democracy – Critical issues

#### **10:40 COFFEE**

#### **11:00 – 12:30 PANEL 1: POLITICAL PARTICIPATION, REPRESENTATION AND GENDER EQUALITY**

This session will examine the gender  
responsiveness of political parties; the impact  
of quotas and other temporary special  
measures for increasing the representation  
of women in democracy; issues of access  
to campaign finances; and the gender

responsiveness of electoral management  
bodies and processes.

Facilitator: Ms Randi Davis, Practice  
Manager, Gender Team, UNDP

Panellists:

Dr Drude Dahlerup, Professor Political  
Science, University of Stockholm, Sweden

Ms Shari Bryan, Vice President, National  
Democratic Institute, United States of  
America

Dr Joy Ezeilo, Director, Women Aid  
Collective, Nigeria

#### **12:30 – 13:30 LUNCH**

Move to Conference Room A, 2nd floor,  
NLB

#### **13:30 – 15:00 PANEL 2: IMPACT OF TRADITIONAL AND NEW SOCIAL MEDIA ON WOMEN'S ENGAGEMENT WITH DEMOCRATIC PROCESSES**

This session will examine how the treatment  
of women in media impacts women's entry,  
acceptance and performance in participatory  
democratic governance. How can the media  
influence gender-sensitive political agenda  
setting and framing of issues?

Facilitator: Dr Massimo Tommasoli,  
Permanent Representative for International  
IDEA to the UN

Panellists:

Ms Pat Mitchell, President and CEO, The  
Paley Centre for Media, United States of  
America

Ms Emily Jacobi, Executive Director, Digital  
Democracy, United States of America

Ms Colleen Lowe-Morna, Executive director,  
Gender Links, South Africa

Ms Shiulie Ghosh, Senior News Anchor, Al  
Jazeera English, Qatar



**15:00 COFFEE****15:15 – 16:45 PANEL 3: GENDER-RESPONSIVE ACCOUNTABILITY SYSTEMS AND DEMOCRACY**

This session will examine the ways in which accountability systems can better reflect women's concerns, both through reforms in formal accountability systems (judicial and other national oversight mechanisms, constitutional right to information) and mechanisms generated from civil society (citizen report cards, public audits). The connection between democratic deepening and efforts to ensure that these systems advance women's rights will be explored. Facilitator: Dr Anne-Marie Goetz, Chief Advisor Peace and Security Cluster, UN Women

**Panellists:**

Dr Soukeina Bouraoui, Director, Center for Arab Women's Training and Research, Tunisia

Ms Yasmin Sooka, Director, Foundation for Human Rights, South Africa

Mr Vincent Warren, Director, Center for Constitutional Rights, United States of America

**16:45 - 17:30 SUMMARY AND CLOSING**

Mr Oscar Fernandez-Taranco, UN Assistant Secretary-General, DPA

Ms Randi Davis, UNDP

Dr Massimo Tommasoli, International IDEA

Dr Anne-Marie Goetz, UN Women ■

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**ANNEX 2****Introduction by Mr Oscar Fernandez-Taranco, UN Assistant Secretary-General**

Secretary-General, Ms Clark, Ms Bachelet, Mr Helgesen, Ladies and gentlemen,

It gives me great pleasure to welcome you on behalf of DPA, UNDP, UN Women and International IDEA to today's Round Table on Democracy and Gender Equality.

Today's discussions could not be more timely: we are currently witnessing an enormous mobilisation for change in the Middle East and North Africa, what people from the region refer to as the "Arab Spring".

In Egypt, Tunisia and across the region, women have marched alongside men and called for their place in shaping change.

It is a call for freedom and the full respect of human rights. It is a call for economic opportunity and prosperity. And it is a call for participation and having a say in your own future.

It will take hard work and concerted efforts to transform the aspirations and dreams of the courageous men and women who fought for change into sustainable and inclusive democratic governance.

Citizens from the region want to be in the driver's seat of their own destiny. But they also need our assistance where they consider it beneficial. It is our duty to listen to them, not to prescribe our own "best practices".

But the United Nations has supported many successful democratic transitions over the years. We are ready to make our expertise, best practices and lessons learned available.

An inclusive democratic transition has to address fundamental rights and freedoms,

political participation, and socio-economic development. All three are essential for good governance.

When women participate fully and on an equal footing with men in political life, this is a measure of true democracy – where power vested by the people is exercised by both men and women alike.

Let me briefly address two of DPA's areas of work related to democratic governance which are relevant to today's discussions:

First, our work in political monitoring and analysis. The first phase of UN engagement with countries in crisis sets the stage for all subsequent action, i.e. a sound and holistic political and institutional assessment is essential for developing appropriate approaches to assist the concerned member states. It is also critical for overall coordination within the UN system. This is where DPA's political analysis and support to the Secretary-General in this regard is of critical importance. The gender-sensitivity of this work needs to receive more attention and be enhanced.

Second, DPA's work related to elections: In the past 25 years, the UN has assisted over 100 of its member states to conduct elections. It has a standing practice of advocating measures to encourage meaningful participation on an equal basis of women and men in elections, and in politics more broadly.

We have been successful over the years in arguing for the use of temporary special measures aimed at accelerating de facto equality between men and women. This has often included, but has not been limited, to quotas. We regularly advocate for

targeted recruitment of women in electoral commissions and their administrations; gender sensitive election procedures and security arrangements; special programmes and resources for women candidates--the list goes on.

But the successes come against a general backdrop of continued inequalities; the UN must continue to acknowledge and address this challenge. We must be clear that no one solution will fit all circumstances. As the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women says, the choice of a particular "measure" – or indeed measures – will depend on the individual context, and on the specific goal it aims to achieve. A quota may be a good practice in one circumstance but be unsuitable in another.

These are vibrant times in democracy assistance. We have a responsibility to assist those who request our support. In doing so, we have to be efficient and well-coordinated across the UN system.

It is now my great honour to introduce someone to you, who actually does not need any introduction. The Secretary-General of the United Nations, Mr Ban Ki-Moon, has been driving gender equality within the UN system and beyond ever since he assumed office. He has called for an inclusive and sustainable democratisation process in the Middle East, North Africa, Cote d'Ivoire and elsewhere. He has led UN-wide efforts to make UN Security Resolution 1325 a reality in all peace processes. He is a true champion of democracy and of gender equality.

Sir, the floor is yours. ■

## ANNEX 3

### Welcoming Address by H.E. Mr Ban Ki-moon UN Secretary-General

I am pleased to be here today to launch this rich debate and how timely that today we are marking World Press Freedom Day with a press conference I am moving to immediately following my remarks to you. This is a day to remember the critical role that the free media plays in democracy building. And recent events have taught us a great deal about the importance of media freedom to women's participation in democracy, and indeed today's meeting has an entire session devoted to this in view of its evident importance as an accountability and mobilizing tool. The UN has a great responsibility to ensuring its democracy assistance programming is gender responsive and to reiterate the strong relationship between democracy and gender equality. The UN system has a commitment, reaffirmed by Member States at the 2005 World Summit, to the protection and promotion of democracy, human rights, and fundamental freedoms. The events of the past few months in North Africa have shown us that these principles are yearned for by women and men alike the world over and that women play critical roles in democratic transitions and democracy building. Women's rights are human rights and democracy is incomplete if it is only for the benefit of half the population. As President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf said:

*Half, even more than half, of 'the people' are women. Yet for far too long, women's will, women's voices, women's interests, priorities, and needs have not been heard, have not determined who governs, have not guided how they govern, and to what ends. Since women are often amongst the least powerful of citizens, with the*

*fewest social and economic resources on which to build political power, special efforts are often needed to elicit and amplify their voice.*

For a government to be sustainably democratic, providers of democracy assistance programming are recognizing that in addition to the pre-conditions of free elections other essential conditions include representation, rule of law, pluralism and respect for human rights. And while women's political participation improves the quality of a democracy, we must also recognize the reverse is true. Democracy is an incubator for gender equality. It provides women with public spaces for discussion of rights and empowerment of women. It creates incentives to mobilize broad social constituencies in support of gender equality. The broader the constituencies, the more sustainable are gender equality gains. The "deeper" the democracy, the easier it is for women to realize their political, civil, economic and social rights. This is why it is critical that we in the UN system do more to ensure that our programming supports women to find space to participate in democratic politics, articulate their needs, and reaffirm their rights. This makes democracy real. It makes democracy sustainable.

As my 2009 UN guidance note on democracy acknowledges, the benefits of democratic engagement remain out of reach for many women around the world – even in countries that are proud democracies. And despite many positive steps such as the creation of the UN Democracy Fund in 2005, and the expansion in democracy programming by many UN departments, including UNDP and DPA, funds and programmes, all these efforts would benefit from a stronger gender equality perspective. The creation of UN Women, a UN entity advocating for gender equality and women's empowerment, has given the UN system

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a strong actor to coordinate and partner with on gender responsive democracy programming and to ensure that we are doing our best to promote women's democratic participation and to make democracies accountable to women. Experience has taught us that democratic ideals of inclusiveness, participation, representation, accountability and transparency cannot be achieved without laws, policies, measures and practices that address inequalities in power relations, especially inequalities between women and men. International legal instruments such as CEDAW and the Beijing Platform have also recognized this and called for the implementation of temporary special measures such as electoral quotas to increase women's participation, leadership and voice. Yet we know that less than 30 countries have reached the implicit MDG 3 target of 30%

women in national parliaments. And in many democratic countries women still experience discrimination, inequality and high levels of violence. This roundtable provides us with the chance to discuss what obstacles still remain in democracies to women's meaningful engagement and how to overcome them. It will identify what entry points and special opportunities democracies provide to achieve gender equality. I am delighted to see this collaboration between international IDEA, the Department of Political Affairs, the United Nations Development Programme and UN Women. I wish you a fruitful debate and look forward to hearing your recommendations for how the UN system can improve its democracy assistance programming.

Thank you. ■

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## **ANNEX 4**

### **Statement by Ms Helen Clark** Administrator, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)

I am pleased to join Michelle Bachelet, Executive Director of UN Women, Vidar Helgesen, Secretary General of International IDEA, and Oscar Fernandez-Taranco, UN Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs, in co-sponsoring today's roundtable on democracy and gender equality.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights and a rich body of international human rights law and treaties promote equal rights for people everywhere to freedom, inclusion, and representation. The challenge is to realize these rights for all in practice.

To me, it is self-evident that democratic governance cannot be fully achieved without the full participation and inclusion of women. Those without voice are so easily ignored by those who have it. Without the full participation of women in decision-making processes and debates about policy priorities and options, issues of great importance to women will either be neglected, or the way in which they are addressed will be sub-optimal and uninformed by women's perspectives.

Around the world, UNDP helps countries to build the inclusive economies, societies, and governance which will lift human development. Human development is about enabling people to expand their freedoms and choices to live lives which they value. Democratic governance helps deliver that, and also contributes to the social cohesion and peace which is required for sustained development.

The democratic governance portfolio is a very important part of UNDP's work. Our programmes in this area reach 132 countries, and account for more than one third of our resources. We support countries' efforts to strengthen their democratic institutions through free and fair elections, and to establish environments in which political parties, vibrant civil society, and free and ethical media can flourish.

UNDP is the UN system's lead provider of technical assistance to elections. From 2008 to 2010 alone, we provided electoral assistance to 64 countries and territories. We are currently working with more than 120 countries on reform of public administration and/or strengthening governance.

To be judged successful, all this work must contribute to empowering women and pursuing gender equality. We need to see more women elected, voting, involved in participatory processes generally, and well represented in public administrations.

There is evidence to suggest that where women have a strong presence on local councils, they are likely to use their weight to support investments in areas like water and sanitation which are so critical to human health and development. In my own experience, priority for policies like paid parental leave, child care, family friendly workplaces, and much more only materializes when women are active participants in policy debate and prominent in decision-making processes.

It is very important then for women's political participation at all levels and representation in public administrations to be strengthened so that they can have a strong voice in the setting of development policy and priorities.

Yet achieving that can be a long struggle.

National political office, for example, remains one of the most difficult places for women to reach in significant numbers in many societies. Women still comprise only nineteen per cent of the world's parliamentarians – far from the thirty per cent target set in Beijing in 1995.

As well, women continue to be under-represented overall in public administrations, particularly at the middle and senior levels.

There are a number of proven ways to increase women's voice and participation in decision-making. They include implementing quotas or reserved seats systems; ensuring that women know how election processes work and about campaign methods and financing; and requiring attention to be given to gender balance in public administrative structures.

Some 50 countries have now legislated for quotas in electoral and political party laws, and hundreds of political parties have adopted quotas as a voluntary measure. Quotas are the single, most effective, and quickest measure for increasing the numbers of women in elected office. I understand that we will hear more about them from Drude Dahlerup in the first panel today.

To make progress on gender equality in political systems, it is critical to engage political parties. They provide structures for political participation, formulate policies, and select candidates for political office. They can be key enablers for women's participation, but so often they have been the key bottlenecks.

With partners like the National Democratic Institute (NDI), UNDP helps to establish global best practice in political parties promoting stronger women's involvement. I understand that you will also hear more about this from our NDI colleagues later today.

Efforts to achieve gender equality in

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elected office need to be matched in public administrations too. UNDP has recently launched an initiative to promote greater gender equality in public administrations.

A lot of attention across the United Nations system is being given to the inclusion of women in reconciliation and peace-building processes in post-conflict countries. For peace and recovery to be sustainable, women must be part of designing the new systems of governance, policies, and services. Democratic governance, fully inclusive of women, can help ensure that past discrimination is dealt to as new institutions are built, laws are rewritten, and development priorities are decided.

Promoting gender equality and democratic governance benefit from strong partnerships. The International Network of Women in Politics – iKNOW Politics, a collaborative

effort of NDI, IDEA, IPU, UN Women, and UNDP, is one such example. This global on-line forum provides relevant knowledge in support of efforts to increase women's political participation. It is currently facilitating the sharing of stories and testimony of women within the Arab States region and with other regions and countries.

### **Conclusion**

Today's roundtable invites us to address the issues of gender equality and democracy together. Gender equality must be a feature of democratic governance for the latter to be worthy of its name.

By promoting both simultaneously we not only promote the equal human rights of women and men, but we also accelerate development progress. ■

## **ANNEX 5**

### **Statement by Ms Michelle Bachelet**

Executive Director, United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women)

#### **Ladies and Gentlemen,**

This year may well mark the beginning of the 'fourth wave' of democracy. As we have seen from the dramatic events of the 'Arab spring', women have been actively involved in the new wave of demands for political freedoms and dignity. In the streets of Tunis and Cairo and more recently in Sanaa, it

has been difficult not to notice that women from all walks of life have joined the ranks of protestors in the streets to raise their voices for democracy and citizenship. As a result, we are already beginning to see gains for some women.

In April of this year, the political reformers of Tunisia achieved what had been unthinkable only months earlier; a draft electoral law calling for full parity in the political representation of the new Tunisian democracy. The law proposes that in the next parliamentary elections candidate lists will alternate between women's and men's names.

These events remind us of how fundamentally democracy has changed since its inception. Once considered to be the sole domain of landowning male elites, it is now impossible to think of democracy as anything



but full and equal political citizenship for all. Of course this must be driven by leadership and commitment at the highest levels to ensure women's full and equal participation in democratic processes.

This morning I will focus on what we have learned from women's participation in democratic decision-making; that is, three key elements that must guide democracy assistance.

First, we need to address the obstacles women face in participation in the electoral process and their ability to exercise a real **choice** in elections. Second, we must consider whether spaces are created for women to articulate policy preferences or **voice**. Third, democratic public institutions must be **accountable to women**.

First allow me to start with the issues of **choice**. Over time democracy, as a political system, has developed mechanisms to integrate marginalized groups – mechanisms such as quotas or regional arrangements to amplify the concerns of politically disenfranchised groups. Women are often in the majority of populations, yet they face a wide range of constraints to effective participation even in the most basic of democratic exercises, such as voting, or running for political office. Ironically, even in 2011 we do not have accurate data on the numbers of women compared to men who register to vote in many countries, or who actually exercise the vote. We have even less data on the extent to which women's independent choice is constrained by coercion within the household or practical problems like a lack of mobility or violence at the polls.

The consequences of constraints on participation are well-known. Women make up less than 20% of legislators and less than 5% of ministers. Women have found themselves consistently constrained by

traditional gender roles in the exercise of their political rights even in the most robust of democracies.

The second constraint regards effective **voice**. Effective public participation depends on being able to articulate interests and form a constituency to advance those interests. We have to ask ourselves – do we put enough resources into women's civil society organizations so that women can pursue their interests? Do political parties reflect and respond to women's concerns? We must remember that democracies can deliver majorities that actually – in the name of a democratic process – can impose restrictions on women's rights. This can happen when there is not enough diversity and voice for women in politics.

If political party and government structures do not take into account women's needs and priorities, and the media and traditional and cultural practices consistently minimize women's value in political life, then democracies cannot deliver for women. What is more, the quality of democracy itself is weakened. Susan B Anthony, a famous campaigner for women's right to vote, said

*There never will be complete equality until women themselves help to make laws and elect lawmakers.*

And finally, we have to ask whether democratic institutions answer to women. True democracy is about more than just participation – it is about the checks and balances and accountability institutions that allow women to seek redress when their rights are abused and their needs are ignored.

The judiciary, parliamentary oversight processes, and public audit institutions, all need to ensure that their procedures and standards are designed to monitor women's rights violations and to enable women to call

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for inquiries and reviews. If these institutions are not in place and functioning, it sends a message to women that their citizenship rights are weaker than those of men, and indeed that their rights to security, to fair pay, or to property are subordinated to men's rights. If women cannot hold government accountable for promoting gender equality then women's citizenship is on fragile foundations.

Many of you here will remember the slogan of the 1970s: 'the personal is political'. This slogan reflected the fact that inequality in the private sphere undermines equality in the public sphere. Public laws and institutions can reinforce those private inequalities. This can prevent institutions from truly answering to women. There is another women's slogan that came from my own country during our democratic transition: 'democracy at home and in the state'. The logic is the same; a democratic state should be held accountable for abuses of women's rights. Full and true participation is not possible unless there is equality in everyday life. This extends not only to gender equality but to the need to address vast economic disparities as well – which pose extremely serious threats to democracy.

UN Women's programming addresses these issues of choice, voice, and accountability. Around the world UN Women has supported women's movements' efforts to get women to vote and to run for political office, supporting training for candidates and working with media to generate better quality reporting on women's campaigns.

In Tunisia and Egypt, UN Women is supporting women in civil society to identify their priorities for constitutional reform. In Egypt, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and in many other contexts, UN Women has supported country consultations between women's civil society organizations and political leaders in order to develop Women's

Charters. These Charters list women's priorities for a gender responsive democracy, such as electoral gender quotas, consultations between gender equality constituencies and politicians, and building networks of elected women parliamentary caucuses, among others.

UN Women also supports initiatives to strengthen gender accountability in the public administration through gender-responsive budgeting and with programmes in Rwanda and Tajikistan that develop a feedback loop between public service providers and women citizens. UN Women has worked with the Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights to support countries to address violations of women's rights through support to Commissions of Inquiry and truth and reconciliation commissions. UN Women also supports countries around the world to put in place national legislative commitments to international policy and legal instruments such as the Beijing Platform for Action, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, the Africa Union protocol on the Rights of Women, and the Southern African Development Community protocol on gender.

To summarize, three basic requirements are critical for making democracy real for women.

**First**, we have to remove the obstacles that keep women from participating effectively: mobility, finances, access to information, lack of public safety, and coercion, intimidation and violence.

**Second**, we must recognize that participation is one thing but real *voice* is another. Are women able to articulate and voice their rights, needs and preferences? How far are political parties internally democratic? Have women in civil society had the opportunity to debate common positions on the constitution, electoral law, safety during campaigns, and other issues?

**Third** and finally, democratic institutions have to be held accountable to women, and held accountable for meeting commitments to women's rights.

If a democracy neglects women's participation, if it ignores women's voices, if it shirks accountability for women's rights, it is a democracy for only half its citizens.

I look forward to hearing the recommendations that come from the

discussions today so that we can enhance our democracy assistance. I recognize in the list of speakers and this audience today, many important democracy activists. We are privileged that you are participating today. The great courage shown by women and men across the world in this dawning of a potential fourth wave of democracy calls on every one of us to make sure that gender equality is addressed in our efforts to make democracy real for all. ■

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## **ANNEX 6**

### **Statement by Mr Vidar Helgesen**

#### Secretary-General, International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA)

The past three decades have witnessed a heightened international awareness of the need to empower women through measures that increase social, economic and political equity at all levels. The need to strengthen the global framework on gender equality; advocating gender equality and women's empowerment cannot be over emphasized.

The adoption of landmark governmental conventions and agreements, such as the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) adopted in 1979 and signed or ratified by 182 states, 1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action, UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security (2000) and the Millennium Declaration and Development Goals (2000), highlight the great importance of addressing

gender inequalities in all spheres of life. The recent establishment of UN Women is a sign of the strategic and political momentum for a heightened role of the UN system in pursuance of such commitments.

As a follow up to these obligations, many countries of the world are in the process of implementing actions and measures to achieve gender equality and women's empowerment in the civil, political, social, economic and cultural spheres. Despite the efforts the picture remains gloomy and it is apparent that beyond changing the laws and policies, transformation of practices in the home, community and the public sphere is fundamental.

Due to the fact that achieving the empowerment of women challenges one of the most deeply entrenched of all human attitudes and behaviours, progress remains grindingly slow and uneven across the world. For example, in many parts of the world violence against women in all forms is a terrible "fact of life" that is endured by women across the world and it is often condoned.

The present ideal of participatory democracy implies commitment and

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contribution of all parts of the population without regard to gender, class, sex, age, race, ethnic or religious background. Women are demanding full inclusion in politics and government and including women, who constitute half of the world's population, is a fundamental democratic advance.

While in nearly all countries women and men have equal rights to vote and stand for elective positions, equal rights to vote that exist in law can also be denied in practice. In some countries women's ability to stand for election may be restricted by the hostility of communities and community leaders to women's participation and leadership and due to cultural constraints.

In the decision making area women still hold less than 20% of elected parliamentary seats globally. Today only 15 women are Heads of State or Government around the globe. At the current rate of increase, the "parity zone" where neither sex holds more than 60% of parliamentary seats will not be reached by developing countries until 2047<sup>13</sup>. Women in politics and decision making are often faced with informal barriers, especially when they form a small minority although they represent one half of the total population.

Over the past ten years, women's numerical presence in positions of power and decision making has received increased attention. As growing numbers of women are standing for election into public decision making positions, this has heightened the interest on ways and strategies to translate women's presence into "critical actions" and influence. Once in power women are expected to become effective political actors to transform political spaces and be held accountable alongside men for gender equality and social justice.

In order to identify the constraints and

opportunities for the definition of actions to guide gender strategies in this area, it is important to understand the status of representation and participation on women within political parties. Specific barriers at the party level constitute obstacles that hamper women's opportunities to actively engage and influence political platforms within parties, and more broadly the implementation of reforms aiming at advancing gender equality agendas.

Gender equality should become a fundamental dimension of the democracy building agenda targeting the strengthening of political parties intended as key actors for democratic development. It is equally important to assess the factors that define the level of political compromises and responses to the specific pressure for gender equality in the field of traditional political institutions, as well as civil society and social movements. Internal barriers to women within political parties need to be addressed with the same energy devoted to increasing the numbers of women in legislatures, which – as S-G Ban Ki-moon reminded us – is a key indicator of Millennium Development Goal 3.

The two efforts are closely inter-linked and their success depends on significant changes in the political culture that permeates traditional politics in democratic processes and institutions. The United Nations system should contribute, either directly or indirectly, to such changes in its democracy building work while addressing specific democratic challenges, especially during political transitions, like in the case of the dramatic demand for democratic change that swept through North Africa over the last months.

This endeavour should aim at:

- Expanding access and "getting the numbers right" (mechanisms/strategies for accelerating entry in and retention of

13 "Who Answers to Women: UNIFEM Progress of the World's Women 2008/2009"

gender parity in political leadership);

- Maximizing women's presence, increasing influence and transforming political spaces/"beyond the numbers" (mechanisms/strategies for influencing decision making or effective participation);
- Setting up advocacy and involvement of men on gender equality and women's empowerment.

The role of the media in furthering, or hampering, this agenda cannot be underestimated. In 1995 the Beijing Platform for Action included the need of multisectorial coordinated actions to increase the participation and access of women to expression and decision-making in and through the media, and the need to promote a balanced and non-stereotyped portrayal of women in the media. A concrete action proposed to achieve the above objective was to create networks among and develop information programmes for non-governmental organizations, women's organizations and professional media organizations in order to recognize the specific

needs of women in the media.

It is high time to review where do we stand on that issue and how the UN can contribute to addressing the challenges that gendered visions produced and reproduced by media of both politics and political institutions pose to the achievement of truly democratic processes. The impact of new media in this respect should also be assessed, given the role they are playing in many democratic transitions around the globe.

The possibility of sharing experience on a cross-regional basis and the potential of drawing non-prescriptive evidence-based recommendations in support of country efforts in such areas will be of great relevance to the debate of this roundtable.

Let me conclude by stressing that international IDEA stands committed to deepening its partnership with the United Nations, and in particular the DPA, UNDP and UN Women, for the advancement of the gender equality agenda in the field of democracy building.

Thank you. ■

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## ANNEX 7

### Meeting Briefs: Standard Operating Practices for Women's Effective Political Participation and 4 Key Practices for Women's Effective Political Participation





## Standard Operating Practices for Women's Effective Political Participation

Democratic transitions present new and unprecedented opportunities to strengthen women's leadership, empowerment and rights. Around the world, as countries transition to democracy, women have asserted their demands for political freedom, for participation, representation, and accountability.

As universal as these goals are, they remain elusive for many women as well as other social groups, such as youth and minorities. Progress has been too slow in increasing numbers of women in representative office – they still average just one in five parliamentarians and are also poorly represented in local decision-making bodies, whether as mayors or local council members. Political institutions – from political parties to electoral commissions -- often lack capacity to ensure that women's interests are articulated and addressed in public policy. Accountability institutions are not consistent in ensuring that power-holders answer to women for failures to protect women's rights or respond to their needs. When women and their interests are marginalized, the sustainability and benefits of democracies are also threatened.

In view of the considerable contributions that women make to democracy building, UN Women has outlined a set of core standard practices that will contribute to expanding women's capacities to advance their interests, and build public accountability for women's rights. As 'standard operating practices' for democracy assistance and governance reform, they will ensure that women participate in all political processes, that their rights and needs are substantively represented, and that those in power can answer to women.

*“If a democracy neglects women's participation, if it ignores women's voices, if it shirks accountability for women's rights, it is a democracy for only half its citizens.”*

~Michelle Bachelet, May 2011



## 4 Key Practices for Women's Effective Political Participation

1. **Make elections free and fair for women.** Promote **temporary special measures** such as quotas, waivers of nomination fees, access to public media, access to public resources, sanctions on non-complying political parties, to increase women's participation as both elected and appointed decision-makers in public institutions. Take measures to address the factors (**violence against women, lack of childcare, gender-biased media reporting, non-transparent political party practices, lack of campaign financing, lack of identity cards**) preventing women from participating in politics.
2. **Support women's civil society organizations to advance women's interests.** Provide assistance to develop collective policy agendas for instance through **Women's Charters** or by holding **National Conventions of Women** at least a year prior to national elections. women share priorities that cut across any differences they may have – these shared priorities may be about their right to hold office or their access to improved health care and child care. It is important for women to coordinate, create coalitions, work together and ensure common messages during times of change.
3. **Build accountability for women's rights in public institutions.** Ensure **constitutional revision** processes consider the impact of the design of political, judicial and other public institutions on women's participation and exercise of their social, political and economic rights. Constitutional revisions should ensure harmonization with international standards on women's rights. Promote **accountability mechanisms and governance reforms** that address women's needs such as **gender responsive service delivery, access to justice, budgeting and access to information.** Ensure **accountability processes** are in place through which public authorities answer for their **performance on national commitments on gender equality and women's rights.**
4. **Support women political leaders to expand their influence.** This entails support for mechanisms such as **women's parliamentary caucuses or women's networks** within civil service institutions. It also entails creating governmental mechanisms, such as **National Women's Machinerys**, that have the mandate, capacities and position in government to be an effective policy advocate for women's interests on a regular basis.

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# Abbreviations

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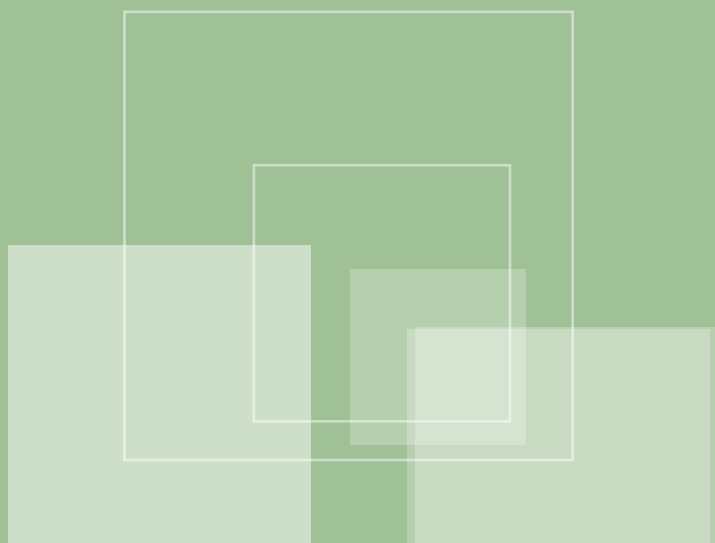
CEDAW	Convention on the Eliminations of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CRADIF	Regional Center to Support and Develop Women's Initiatives [Centre Régional d'Appui et de Développement des Initiatives Féminines]
CSW	Commission on the Status of Women
DRC	Democratic Republic of the Congo
ECOSOC	(United Nations) Economic and Social Council
ICT	Information and Communications Technologies
IDEA	(International) Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance
iKNOW Politics	International Knowledge Network of Women in Politics
KOFAVIV	Commission of Women Victims for Victims [Komisyon Fanm Viktim pou Viktim]
MDG	Millennium Development Goal
NDI	National Democratic Institute
SJS	If Youth Knew [Si Jeunesse Savait]
UN	United Nations
UNDEF	United Nations Democracy Fund
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UN DPA	United Nations Department of Political Affairs
UN Women	United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women



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