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**Global overview of women's political participation and
implementation of the quota system**

**Draft Speaking Notes
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I. The Situation

1. Evidence shows that women's rights in politics and decision-making are an area in which slow progress has occurred and limited gains made. Progress has not been substantial in legislatures at national and local levels. This makes it difficult to enforce policies and decisions on advancement of women in parliament, senior positions in the public sector and local government level. Yet one of the critical areas of concern in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action is:

"Women's empowerment and their full participation on the basis of equality in all spheres of society, including

participation in the decision-making process and access to power, are fundamental for the achievement of equality, development and peace” (Beijing Declaration, para 13, United Nations 1995).

2. Despite the widespread movement towards democratization in most countries, women remain largely under represented at almost all the levels of political parties, public sector especially in ministerial and other executive bodies or in reaching the target of having 30% of decision making positions held by women by 2005 as endorsed by the UN Economic and Social Council. Women are not also well represented in private sector and even the traditional society. It was also reiterated that women have limited access to political power and decision making because of multiple factors including religion, other socio-cultural and economic ones.

3. These factors hinder women’s meaningful participation in decision-making, constitutional development and political processes. Efforts made to consciously enhance the visibility of women in governance have produced some results but not yet yielded achievements to date comparable to the expectations of Beijing 1995. As of May 2012, women make less than 20% of legislators (men still have 80.2% and women only 19.8% of parliamentary seats)¹. They have been notably underrepresented in the executive branch of government, and only in recent years have increasingly held the top profile portfolios for their governments in non-traditional areas for women in government, such as national security and defense, finance, revenue and foreign relations.

4. Today only 16 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 2047². Women in politics and decision-making are often faced with informal barriers, especially when they form a small minority although they represent one

¹ <http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/world.htm>

² See “Who Answers to Women: UNIFEM Progress of the World’s Women 2008/2009”.

half of the total population. Structures and mechanisms that are supposed to deliver in terms of gender equality are made less relevant or even irrelevant because of entrenched attitudes that perpetuate discrimination. How do we ensure that women's rights are translated into rights enjoyed in practice, and namely in terms of access to resources and decision-making power? Quotas systems play a crucial role in this respect, from first-generation – or electoral – quotas, i.e. quotas in elected bodies (which represents a consolidated field of analysis and policy advocacy), to second-generation quotas in non-elected public bodies (an area attracting growing attention), to the recently established new area of work of the so-called third-generation – or corporate – quotas in business and the private sector.

5. 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. For example, the recent UN WOMEN report "In Pursuit of Justice" remarks that in Rwanda, with 51% of female MPs, important legal reforms on women rights has been approved³.

6. 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

³ See "In Pursuit of Justice: UN WOMEN Progress of the World's Women 2011-2012". The report (p. 27) lists the following relevant legislation approved in Rwanda over the last years: "The Succession Act (1999) established gender equality in inheritance and property ownership. The National Land Policy (2004) and Land Law (2005) provided equality in statutory and customary land ownership. The Law on Prevention and Punishment of Gender-Based Violence was passed (2008); marital rape was criminalized (2009)."

broadly the implementation of reforms aiming at advancing gender equality agendas.

7. Alongside commitment to reforming normative frameworks, building capacities and institutions for implementing reforms and supporting the brave advocacy work that civil society organizations carry out on the ground, there should be effective investment in transforming semi-autonomous social fields – not captured by the law – and the pervasive informal institutions whose influence is an obstacle to the effectiveness of quotas.

II. The Role of the international community

8. The United Nations commitment to gender equality is of fundamental importance for the achievement of gender equality objectives. In May 2011 the UN reaffirmed such commitment at the highest level at a round table co-organized with International IDEA on gender equality and democracy. On that occasion, the UN SG stressed that while women's political participation improves democracy, the reverse is also true: democracy is an incubator for gender equality, and affirmed the need for gender equality to be treated as an explicit goal of democracy-building, not as an "add on", and the UN's strong engagement in this endeavor.

9. The work of UNDP on making gender central in democratic processes is very important, for example through experience-sharing on issues of quotas or reserve seats systems, improving campaign methods of fundraising, and gender belts in public administration. The recent UNDP-NDI analysis on gender and political parties confirms the results presented by the IDEA comparative research into the conditions that make political parties enablers (or obstacles) for women.

10. As noted by UN WOMEN Executive Director, Michelle Bachelet, at the May 2011 Round Table:

- We need to address the obstacles women face in participation in the electoral process and their ability to exercise a real choice in elections;

- We must consider whether spaces are created for women to articulate policy preferences or voice; and
- Democratic public institutions must be accountable to women.

11. In December 2011, Member States adopted at the UN General Assembly a new resolution that calls on countries to take concrete steps to increase women's political participation and leadership, and report back to the UN Secretary-General in 2013. It is no coincidence that the first priority set by UN WOMEN is advancing women's political participation and leadership, especially in view of the momentum that the Arab uprisings have given to the democracy and justice agenda, whose fulfillment is meaningless without women's full and equal participation in the political arena.

12. Since its establishment in 1995, International IDEA has pioneered comparative work on quota systems, based on sound analysis of experiences from around the world like the "Women in Parliament" Handbook (1998, revised edition 2005), a series of reports on the implementation of quotas in different regions (2003-2005), and other analytical tools aimed at helping legislators and policy makers in their effort at reforming electoral system with the objective of positively impacting on women political participation and representation. IDEA is also engaged in supporting gender equality in political and constitutional reforms in many countries in Latin America, Africa, Asia and the Arab region, by focusing on both design and implementation issues.

13. IDEA is actively engaged in a strategic partnership with the UN, UNDP and UN WOMEN on the advancement of international action in support of the efforts at the national, regional and global level, through initiatives like the iKNOW Politics programme, the collection and analysis of non-prescriptive comparative qualitative data on the situation in countries from different regions, and the support to domestic political reforms, approaches and strategies to accelerate the equal participation and representation of women and men in positions of power and decision making.

III. Some Lessons Learned in the Field of Political Parties

14. What have we learned from experience in supporting efforts at the national level, including in a South-South partnership perspective, and bridging the gap between policy and practice? A major challenge is to understand why women are still under represented. Women are not under represented because they are not qualified or educated; other forces, like the power of choice and gender, play a key role. Men just choose to vote for men and not women and the 'old boy networks' keep women out. Yet women vote for men and not women. This is an issue that needs to change in favor of women. The new discourse of democracy needs to change with emphasis on the connection between women's representation and democracy process, by addressing especially the **how** (existing structures and institutions such as political parties, electoral systems), the **who** (the leadership) and the **what** (the political agenda and the issues). It must be known that equal representation is not possible without democracy. Gender quota proved to be effective means for increasing numbers, but they don't solve all problems. Other types of special measures that fit the electoral system locally could be used.

15. Here are some reflections on what has worked by engaging with political parties. Training is important, but to be more effective it should be comprehensive and include, among others, strategies for engaging political parties (who are indeed the gatekeepers), party nomination process, inclusion of women in playing significant roles, ensuring that legitimate women are listed in candidate lists and win-able positions, and leadership positions for women since they are perceived more transparent and less corrupt.

16. Political parties should begin using systematic programme approach in determining how to use quotas for increasing women participation in democracy. Among other measures, they could:

- Conduct assessment studies at the stage of designing party programmes;
- Understand the candidate selection and recruitment process from gender perspectives and bring talented women on board;

- Conduct focus group meetings and interviews to find out about what the party thinks about women issues and present the data officially to the party leadership in a convincing manner and as a special interest for inclusion in party Manifestos, Code of ethics/Internal party regulations and party nomination process, Guarantees for women.

17. Such measures should focus on entry points where parties set targets for participation of women, for example in conventions, to ensure gender equality. The candidate recruitment and nomination require that political parties adopt an internal voluntary approach if there are no legal quotas existing. Women advocacy groups need to make sure that parties implement quotas and not marginalize women to areas in which they will loose. It will be easier for them to hold political parties accountable. The more guidelines, the easier will be for women to hold parties accountable. Access to money through fundraising measures should be implemented early enough to ensure that women are nominated and benefit throughout campaigns.

IV. Some Key Challenges

18. There are some key challenges that have to be addressed:

- How to prevent electoral violence?
- How to demand more accountability in the funding of political parties and electoral campaigns?
- How to ensure a secure and enabling legislative framework and gender budgeting framework?
- How to reinforce the use of quotas and other temporary special measures, campaign finances and the gender responsiveness of election management bodies, structures and processes?
- How to ensure that the above issues are on the agendas of all political parties (the ruling party or coalition, the opposition and independents) to enable greater women participation in democracy?

- How to build new consciousness for political parties to address patriarchal systems and impact both on values and behaviors in democratization processes?
- How to engage young women in gender and democratic processes/politics?

V. Some Recommendations

A) To expand and deepen a policy-relevant knowledge basis

19. The expansion and deepening of a policy-relevant knowledge basis would include such actions as:

- To develop a relevant compendium of basic democracy, political culture, social media and gender issues to understand democratic parties and their internal working processes;
- To analyse how political culture portrays women's roles and interference with their participation and involvement in democratic/political processes in the public sphere.
- To better understand political parties mandates, manifestos, media selection, especially social media, and use of working tools for monitoring elections;
- To make the process of nomination and selection of candidates more transparent and inclusive and not for both men and women;
- To build capacity and strengthen election management, which is still a priority in many countries;
- To recognize the growing potential of information technology to provide access to knowledge and information across the world;
- To secure an enabling legislative framework and document good practices, model legislation and address issues of women's discriminatory practices in politics.
- To further reflect on and disseminate effective experience on the use of quota system and all temporary systems to increase women in all governance structures including local council level.

B) To develop mechanisms for the political mobilization of women

20. Mechanisms for the political mobilization of women will require:

- To build effective constituencies, networks and solidarity to influence democratic process design/planning, programming budgeting and reporting using social mobilization media;
- To help ensure that gender issues are well placed on the agenda and women have a real voice to speak and act on their issues based on the recent experience from Arab world. Women must be able to articulate their voice, rights needs and preferences and political parties must hear their voice and act. They should be part of debates for constitution and electoral law, set safety rules for campaigns and all other issues;
- To address the serious political constraints on women's political engagement, including the need for transforming political culture, providing political education and ensuring that campaign financing reaches women and that they are protected from backlash and measures are in place to combat gender based violence;
- To strengthen judiciary systems based on international judiciary accountability and constitutional change for gender and democracy;
- To provide guidelines for parties and support for election management bodies, and remove barriers for women to have access and share political power starting from manifestos to nomination procedures;
- To establish effective financing mechanisms before women are nominated, especially internal financial systems;
- To hold all democratic institutions including local councils, political parties, women wings, and civil society, accountable to women, and for meeting commitments to women's rights.

C) To develop capacities at different levels

21. A key responsibilities of democracy building institutions like International IDEA and the United Nations consists of developing the capacities of stakeholders at all levels, so as to enable them to play a constructive role in a

coordinated and coherent approach to democratic reforms focused on gender equality and empowerment. This would entail:

- To develop capacity for all actors to include women political aspirants by coaching them in self-development and advocacy skills;
- To encourage mentoring and exchange skills, local councils and government to offer better opportunities and facilitate women's participation.