



International Experts Urge More Active Engagement of Women in Elections and Nation-Building

(UNITED NATIONS, New York, 6 February) —A recent gathering of international experts called for the active participation of women in every step of post-conflict elections and nation-building. Organized jointly by the United Nations Department of Political Affairs and the Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women, it was held in Glen Clove, NY from 19 to 22 January.

“When we look at the fragility and volatility of situations such as in Afghanistan and Iraq, we see how crucial it is to involve women in electoral processes and transitional arrangements in order to establish societies that are based on democratic principles and the rule of law,” said UN Special Adviser on Gender Issues E.V. King.

Entitled, “Enhancing Women’s Participation in Electoral Processes in Post-Conflict Countries” the meeting drew prominent experts from post-conflict zones (Bosnia Herzegovina, Guatemala, Mozambique, Timor-Lest and the Middle East), and academia, as well as the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA), the Australian Electoral Commission (EAD), the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) and Women Waging Peace.

Discussions covered a broad range of topics, including: legal frameworks, political representation and political parties, voter and civic education, election administration and election observation. Within these areas, the distinctive and collaborative responsibilities of participants representing governments, the international community and civil society were detailed.

The meeting identified barriers to women’s full participation in post-conflict elections and made recommendations about best practices fully integrating gender perspectives into peace initiatives and electoral missions.

Among its recommendations was that international action involving elections in post-conflict countries include specific references to Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000) requiring women’s full participation in all aspects of electoral processes and peace-building.

It was also recommended that UN and other international actors work proactively to include women as part of delegations to international peace negotiations, structure negotiations in ways that include women as participants, and provide incentives for conflicting parties to recruit women on their negotiating teams. In addition, international collaboration was urged to continue to support the process of transition, democratization and equality in the aftermath of elections, including support for women elected as legislators.



In order to improve women's representation and full participation in all aspects of elections, the experts unanimously voted for creating gender balance in entities involved with the design or implementation of constitutional, political, legislative and electoral processes. It was agreed that special measures should be explored, including the use of quotas and incentives. The expert group noted that open lists and proportional representation systems have been shown in practice to lead to the election of greater numbers of women than majoritarian systems. Political parties were called upon to ensure that when formulating their candidate lists, women not only be included, but also proposed to run for "winnable" positions. It was also emphasized that a gender perspective should always be an integral part of election monitoring and evaluation.

The final report will contribute to the work of the Commission on the Status of Women at its forty-eighth session, to be held at UN headquarters in New York from 1 to 12 March 2004, when the issue of women's participation in conflict prevention, management and resolution and in post-conflict peace-building will be a major theme.

Recognizing the importance of disseminating information on this critical issue, the Department of Political Affairs and the Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women will produce a set of briefing notes on women and electoral processes for use in the field by both local and international staff. This will be accompanied by a comprehensive resource guide and bibliography to be made available on CD-rom and the internet.

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