



## 2009 SUBSTANTIVE SESSION

General Segment, 23 July 2009, *Geneva, Switzerland*

Conference Room XIX, 4:30 – 6:00 p.m.

### The empowerment of women in countries emerging from conflict: The role of Parliaments

#### Statements:

Chair/Moderator: H.E. Mr. Hamidon Ali, Vice-President of ECOSOC

Panelists: [H.E. Ms. Catherine Mabobori](#), Member, L'Assemblée Nationale, Burundi

[Mr. Moez Doraid](#), Deputy Executive Director, UNIFEM

[Mr. Martin Chungong](#), Director, Division for the Promotion of Democracy, Inter-Parliamentary Union

[Ms. Huguette Bokpe Gnacadja](#), former Member of the Committee for the Elimination of Discrimination against Women

#### Overview

Women are central to the rebuilding of their countries after war. Peace processes and peacebuilding are more likely to succeed if women are fully engaged as participants, planners, implementers and beneficiaries. Women's representation in legislative bodies is an important indicator for inclusive development and participatory governance in the social, political and economic spheres. Through their participation in Parliaments, women can ensure that legal reforms promote gender equality and non-discrimination, that recovery efforts provide equal economic opportunities for women and prioritize women's needs in key sectors, such as health care, education and shelter.

In 1995, only ten percent of the posts of legislative bodies and an even lower percentage of ministerial positions worldwide were held by women. Even though there is increased understanding that progress in the area of women's empowerment is essential for progress in all post-conflict development areas, women's political representation remains low at 18.4 per cent in 2009. The Inter-Parliamentary Union highlights in its latest report that the main deterrents for women entering the political sphere are domestic responsibilities, prevailing cultural attitudes regarding the role of women in society, lack of support from family, lack of confidence, lack of finances, and lack of support of political parties. The continuing persistence of gender stereotypes and discriminatory attitudes regarding the roles of women and men is considered to be a significant barrier to achieving equal participation of women in decision-making processes at all levels. Other barriers include the low perceived legitimacy and credibility of women in public and political office

A number of post-conflict countries have provided good examples of what can be done in the area of women's participation in their parliaments. For example, Rwanda ranks

first among all countries to elect more than 50 per cent of women to its Lower House in September 2008 (56.3 per cent). Rwanda included in its constitution the equality of Rwandans as one of the fundamental principles; this respect for equality it to be ensured in part by guaranteeing women at least 30 per cent of posts in all decision-making organs. In Angola, the Political Parties Law established a quota of 30 percent to ensure better representation of women in elective bodies. This resulted in a 37.3 per cent women elected to the National Assembly in 2008.. Six other African countries are among the countries with more than 30 per cent women in the single/Lower House of Parliament, including Burundi (30.5 per cent). In Mozambique the high level of women's representation is attributable to the combination of the proportional representation system and the adoption of a 30 percent quota for women's representation by the government . Furthermore, women candidates were distributed evenly throughout proportional representation lists and not merely added at the bottom where they had only a slight or no chance of success.

The United Nations created a number of mechanisms and instruments to foster the empowerment of women in the peacebuilding process. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) sets an international legal standard for gender equality and non-discrimination in political life. The Beijing Declaration of 1995 stated that the active participation of women in decision-making is essential to achieve the goals of equality, development and peace. The Beijing Platform for Action called on Governments to take measures to ensure women's equal access to and full participation in power structures and decision-making. Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000) addresses the impact of armed conflict on women, and calls for the increased participation of women in all processes related to the the prevention, management and resolution of conflict.

The Peacebuilding Commission also clearly recognizes the importance of women's empowerment in post-conflict situations as reflected in its inclusion in the Strategic Frameworks for Guinea-Bissau and Sierra Leone. Depending on the country's national priorities, the Frameworks recommend that "policies, legislation and mechanisms to support and protect women are needed to facilitate the increase in the participation and advancement of women in public administration at decision-making levels" (Guinea-Bissau) and that, "ensuring equal participation of women, especially young women, within the political process constitutes a specific challenge and requires targeted interventions, such as legislative reform and sustained capacity-building" (Sierra Leone).

## **Objective**

As a way for ECOSOC to contribute to the dialogue on peacebuilding through its agenda items on "African countries emerging from conflict" and "Long-term programme of support for Haiti", and to support the Peacebuilding Commission's agenda in the area of economic and social development, the panel discussed strategies to strengthen women's contributions to rebuilding their communities through their participation and leadership in the governance of their countries.

## **Key questions addressed:**

- What mechanisms have contributed to increasing women's participation in parliament (such as quota, electoral laws, capacity-building for candidates and political parties) and how could these be replicated in other countries?
- What are some of the good practices and lessons learned from different countries? What is the impact of women's role in decision-making on recovery and peacebuilding?
- What is the role for bodies such as IPU and civil society organizations to support women's access to representative office and their effectiveness as legislators?

- How can ECOSOC support the PBC and the Security Council in fostering an integrated approach to women's political empowerment in conflict prevention and peacebuilding (as promoted by Security Council resolution 1325) in light of the 2010 Annual Ministerial Review on Gender and the Empowerment of Women?

**Some possible policy recommendations include:**

- Women's participation in all decision-making bodies should be strengthened to enhance the potential of post-conflict situations to build new leaders, new institutions and norms that do not discriminate against women
- Awareness-raising and training for women candidates and political parties through media campaigns, programs and workshops should be further strengthened.
- Funding for campaigns of women candidates should be made available through development aid.
- At the political party level, gender equality should be integrated into party platforms and in internal decision-making structures.
- Governments should provide financial support to political parties that are making efforts to increase the number of women in political parties.
- Measures must be taken to strengthen women's access to higher education and the labour market.
- The media should be encouraged to overcome gender bias in reporting about women in decision-making roles.