

Report of Online Discussion

Women in Power and Decision Making

Organized by UNIFEM

20 January 2010 – 19 February 2010

The discussion on "Women in Power and Decision Making" was part of a series of United Nations online discussions dedicated to the fifteen-year review of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995) and the outcomes of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly (2000); and was coordinated by WomenWatch, an inter-agency project of the United Nations Inter-agency Network on Women and Gender Equality and an unique electronic gateway to web-based information on all United Nations entities' work and the outcomes of the United Nations' intergovernmental processes for the promotion of gender equality and women's empowerment. For more information and other "Beijing at 15" online discussions, visit <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/beijing15/>

Disclaimer: The views expressed in this report reflect the opinions of participants to the online discussion and not the official views of the United Nations or any agency associated with moderating this discussion.

**“Women in Power and Decision Making”
Summary of a WomenWatch Online Discussion**

Organized by UNIFEM

20 January 2010 – 19 February 2010

UNIFEM along with other UN partners and WomenWatch, a project of the inter-agency Network on Women and Gender Equality, organized an online discussion to discuss women in power and decision making to lead up to the 54th Commission on the Status of Women. This online discussion is a component of a system wide series of online discussion, which was hosted at the www.UNIFEM.org website. To read the comments received please visit <http://www.unifem.org/forums/governance/>

Participants were asked to share experiences, knowledge and opinions on promoting women's role and participation in decision making and politics. The objective was to increase discourse, encourage interest and share experiences on the Section G of the Beijing Platform for Action (BPFA) over 4 weeks. The BPFA presents 2 strategic objectives for Women in Power and Decision Making:

- Women take measures to ensure women's equal access to and full participation in power structures and decision-making.
- Increase women's capacity to participate in decision-making and leadership.

Week One: Achievements

There were 5 posts and 929 views on this topic. Participants noted the increased awareness on the paucity of women in leadership positions across business and politics. They emphasized the need for promoting discussions on the need for increased participation by women in decision making bodies. Participants noted the significant role quotas have played in politics and electoral system reforms are essential in achieving parity for women in politics. They agreed that institutionalizing systems that encourage women to come out and be visible forces of change is a key ingredient in the process of achieving critical mass in terms of numbers. The participants highlighted the need for focusing on the ‘quality’ of leadership and underlined the need for capacity building not just for encouraging women to contest for spaces that are denied to them but also continue to deliver once they have achieved positions of power.

Week Two: Gaps and Challenges

There were 5 posts and 913 views on this issue. Discussions focused on the importance of women working within their faith traditions to attain leadership at the highest levels, the apathy of mainstream media in focusing on issues that affect women but also the lack of coverage that women politicians get compared to men. In some countries the participants noted that the access to leadership for women in national level politics is easier than entering local level politics and legislative bodies. The need for focusing on electoral reform was echoed by participants in the discussions as an urgent need for

encouraging and supporting women. Some other gaps identified by the participants were: lack of civil society support, sensitizing political parties to gender issues and mainstreaming it in candidate selection process, need to focus on young women and men, lastly continuous capacity building efforts to support women politicians.

Week Three and Four: Future Actions

This issue had 5 posts and 547 views. The focus during the discussion around future actions was around a) needing to keep the gains made so far by women in politics through supporting them to getting re-elected; b) building capacities of women's organizations both at local and national level to continue to raise women's concerns; c) conducting evidence based research to capture the positive correlation between increasing the number of women in politics with progressive legislations focusing on women's concerns; d) working with national women's machineries to integrate women in development policy and budget strategies; e) continued cooperation and assistance to foster partnerships between the corporate world and communities; f) lastly, working with men to help promote women to positions of leadership.

Participation

There were one hundred and seventy three people who registered to be members of the online discussion and the participants were from many different organizations and backgrounds, including academics, non-government organizations, researchers, gender advocates, international organizations etc. The online discussion had total 21288 page-views over the 4 weeks. The discussion was moderated by Piyoo Kochar, Network Facilitator - International Knowledge Network of Women in Politics (iKNOW Politics): www.iKNOWPolitics.org on behalf of UNIFEM. iKNOW Politics is a partnership project of UNIFEM with International IDEA, the Inter Parliamentary Union, the National Democratic Institute and United Nations Development Programme.