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**Enhancing Women's Participation in Electoral Processes in Post-  
Conflict Countries**

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#### U.S. Commitment

From the onset of war, women and girls are besieged not only by combatants and other armed elements, but also by new societal pressures and expectations that result from the conflict. They face great risks of physical and sexual violence during flight, in refugee and internally displaced camp situations, and during post-conflict transition.

These women are often excluded from access to power structures and participation in decision-making. The United States places great emphasis on the role of women in resolving conflicts and building peace in countries that desperately need their vision and full participation. The United States has been and continues to be a leader in advocating and supporting the protection of and assistance to refugee and internally displaced women and girls through multilateral partners, such as the United Nations, as well as through non-governmental organizations.

United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 highlights the importance of involving women in helping their societies recover and rebuild after devastating civil strife. This is unlikely to happen unless women have access to the basic elements of participatory democracy and understand the beneficial role they can have in the decision-making process.

No approach to peace can succeed if it does not view men and women as equally important components of the solution. A successful democracy cannot exist without active participation from all its members, including women. And a vibrant democracy is necessary so that all of its members can use the system and its laws to promote their well-being.

That is why the United States is investing heavily to bring women into the political equation in post-conflict areas where their voices have been muted. U.S. efforts focus on four important areas: political participation,

economic opportunities, education and the promotion of women in civil society.

#### UN Resolution on Women and Political Participation

So committed is the United States to expanding political opportunities for women that it sponsored a new resolution on Women and Political Participation at the 2003 UN General Assembly session.

Adopted by the full General Assembly in December 2003, the resolution urges states to promote and protect the right of women to associate freely, express their views publicly, [and] openly debate political policy on equal terms with men.

The resolution also includes practical suggestions. It calls on all elements of government and society to eliminate discrimination against women, and to support initiatives - including public-private partnerships and exchange programs - that teach women how to vote, advocate, manage, and govern.

It encourages political parties to seek qualified women candidates and to provide training on campaigning and parliamentary procedures. And it encourages the media and educational institutions to recognize the importance of this cause.

In every region of the world, the United States is actively trying to implement the principles called for in this important resolution. From Serbia to Senegal, from Kabul to Baghdad, the United States is committed to increasing women's political participation, particularly in countries emerging from conflict and unrest. U.S.-funded programs train women in Latin America, Africa, Europe, East Asia, the Middle East and South Asia to run for office and lead nongovernmental organizations.

Many U.S. programs in this field are managed by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). Others are run by the National Endowment for Democracy or by the U.S. Department of State and its International Visitors Program, which targets rising women leaders in the political, social, health and economic spheres. The United States partners with non-governmental organizations

and the private sector on programs that help women around the world.

#### Public-Private Initiatives to Help Women

The United States believes that the private sector and the non-governmental community have critical roles in addressing and solving many of the world's problems - in areas such as human rights to infectious diseases and refugee flows. The United States attaches great importance to forming public-private partnerships to help advance women's political and economic opportunities.

A primary example of a dynamic public-private partnership is the U.S.-Afghan Women's Council, inaugurated by Presidents Bush and Karzai in January 2002. Co-Chairs of the Council are Under Secretary of State for Global Affairs Paula Dobriansky, Afghan Foreign Minister Abdullah Abdullah and Afghan Minister of Women's Affairs Habiba Sarabi. The Council members include U.S. and Afghan leaders from the public and private sectors.

The Council supports programs to give Afghan women the opportunity to prepare to reenter the social, political and economic life of a liberated Afghanistan, and mobilizes the U.S. private sector to support Afghan women. The Council's first major program in September-October 2002 was an International Visitor exchange program, which brought 14 women employed in various ministries of the Afghan government to the United States for training in leadership management, computer skills and proposal writing.

Through the U.S.-Afghan Women's Council, the United States is providing \$1 million in educational training to the women's resource centers, which the United States is helping to establish in 14 provinces in Afghanistan. The United States is also supporting the establishment of ten neighborhood-based women's centers in Kabul and several nearby towns. Women executives of AOL/Time Warner have raised \$60,000 for the Council's Gift Fund to be used to support a provincial women's resource center in Afghanistan.

In addition to the Council's general activities, individual U.S. members are actively working to start their own projects. One is an adopt-a-school program where

church communities in Texas will provide their adopted school with school supplies, textbooks, and training.

Looking to further assist women in Afghanistan and beyond, Under Secretary of State for Global Affairs Paula Dobriansky announced another public-private endeavor in October 2002. At Fortune magazine's annual Most Powerful Women in Business conference, the Under Secretary put forward a new wide-ranging U.S. initiative for helping women in post-conflict societies. This initiative, "Women Leading Women in Peace: Fostering Courage for Change," aims at facilitating exchange and interaction between Fortune's Most Powerful Women and women trying to make a difference in five select post-conflict societies: Afghanistan, Cambodia, the Balkans, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Colombia.

The initiative called for a series of "Conversations for Change" with key women leaders in Afghanistan. Last year the Department of State held several of these conversations, linking a group of Fortune 500 women in New York and Washington with a group of Afghan women leaders in Kabul via digital video conferences. These DVCs provide an important and convenient venue for U.S. and Afghan women, allowing them to exchange ideas about ensuring women's full participation in Afghan society.

In the coming months, the Women Leading Women initiative will move forward in the other selected countries, most immediately the Democratic Republic of Congo and Colombia, with a focus on micro-enterprise projects in those countries.

Other public-private partnership efforts feature mentoring programs for women entrepreneurs. In September 2002, the United States sponsored the Helsinki Women Business Leaders Summit. Fifty American women CEOs partnered with 50 of their Baltic counterparts to share best practices and create partnerships for mutual prosperity. Participants from Finland, Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Northwest Russia, and the U.S. discussed methods of accessing capital, secrets for success, surviving mistakes and moving from "success to significance." There are plans to hold similar summits in other regions of the world in the near future.

## Afghanistan

In Afghanistan, women have achieved remarkable results, but daunting obstacles remain. One of the keys to success is that the Afghan women themselves have been encouraged to take the lead in the common goal of restoring women to their rightful place in society.

Over the last two years, from the Bonn meetings in December 2001 through the June 2002 Emergency Loya Jirga and the discussions leading up to the recent Constitutional Loya Jirga, thousands of women have participated in public meetings, workshops and seminars on women's issues and democracy, in provinces throughout the country. The United States financed discussion groups and other activities to facilitate women's participation, particularly their ability to voice and defend their ideas.

Women in Afghanistan were engaged in the Constitutional process. Two of the nine members of the Constitutional Drafting Committee, and seven of the 35 members of the Constitutional Review Commission are women. In addition, of the voting delegates to the Constitutional Loya Jirga, 102 were women, more than 20 percent of the total delegates. The discussion groups, workshops and seminars funded by the U.S. and other donors, undoubtedly helped develop the ability of Afghan women participants in the Constitutional process to advocate for their interests.

The January 2004 adoption of the new constitution explicitly affirms that Afghan women have equal rights with men. The constitution provides for the rights of all citizens, so Afghan women will have the right to vote and the opportunity to run for political office in the 2004 elections. As U.S. Ambassador to Afghanistan Zalmay Khalilzad observed shortly after the conclusion of the constitutional Loya Jirga, Afghans' "accepting equality between men and women marks a revolutionary change in the roles women are able to play in Afghan government and society."

The United States is providing more than \$8 million to support the election process in Afghanistan, helping to build a politically active citizenry through civic education and by providing training to political parties and civic activists. U.S. programs have emphasized the

importance of voting and political participation, trained women candidates in running campaigns, and instructed political parties in mobilizing female membership. USAID is establishing Women's Resource Centers to provide a safe environment where women can receive job skills, literacy training, and learn about political participation.

The U.S. Department of State has also supported projects that focus on rights awareness, livelihood and skills training for refugee and returnee Afghan women.

### Iraq

In Iraq, the United States has strongly supported Iraqi women's participation in the political, economic, and social reconstruction of their country. After a long period of repression, they have begun to speak freely in local town hall meetings, municipal councils, national conferences, and other institutions being developed.

While Iraqi society is still in the midst of reconstruction, conditions are generally improving and most now have hopes for a better future. A large delegation of Iraqi women leaders came to Washington in November 2003 to gain a better understanding of the democratic process.

The Governing Council and the Interim Cabinet established over recent months included three women as members, and one more heading an important ministry -- separate from the Governing Council. Tragically, one of those three women, Dr. Akila Al-Hashimi, died in September 2003 from injuries sustained in an ambush in Baghdad; another women, Salimah Al-Khaffagi, was appointed to replace her. Of the 37 members on the Baghdad City Council, six are women. More broadly, in each of Baghdad's 88 neighborhoods, citizens have chosen representatives for local councils. This democratically selected group is made up of seven hundred people -- including 80 women -- who are Sunni, Shia, and Christian, Arab, and Kurdish. The new Iraqi Ambassador to the United States is a woman, Rend Rahim.

In October 2003, the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) and Iraqi women's NGOs organized a women's conference, attended by hundreds of activists in Sulaimaniya, to establish a national women's umbrella organization to serve as a clearinghouse, watchdog, and

advocacy group. The conference established a steering committee to spearhead this drive. Similar meetings occurred in Baghdad in July and in Hillah in early October 2003.

As security improves and the habits of tolerance and economic freedom are revived in Iraqi society, we expect that more women will come forward to participate in national reconstruction. Iraqi women are increasingly taking the initiative to organize their own NGOs and advocacy groups. 80 women -- more than 10% of the total active members -- serve on local councils in Baghdad's neighborhoods.

#### Middle East Partnership Initiative

In December 2002, President Bush launched the Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI) to work with regional private sector and governments to expand political, economic, and educational opportunities, with an emphasis on women.

Regional campaign schools will provide leadership and organizational training for women seeking elective office. The International Republican Institute and the National Democratic Institute are working with the Department of State to organize the first MEPI regional campaign school in Doha, Qatar, in February 2004.

The *Women as Political Leaders* International Visitor Program, organized by the State Department's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, was the first program implemented under the auspices of the U.S.-Middle East Partnership Initiative. A delegation of 50 Arab women political leaders from around the region were brought to the United States on the Department of State's International Visitor Program to observe U.S. mid-term congressional elections in 2002, and to receive leadership and advocacy training.

#### Political Training for Women in Africa, Europe

While the United States is focusing on Iraq, the Middle East and Afghanistan, other regions have not been forgotten. The United States supports programs and initiatives that help women acquire knowledge and skills



necessary to become fully involved in the political process in all regions of the world.

The two major political parties in the United States are heavily involved in political training efforts. And while they compete vigorously in elections at home, Democrats and Republicans work side by side abroad to train women in grassroots politics.

The National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI) has been active in Senegal, where women have long faced the reluctance of party leaders to nominate women to the top tier of party lists. Prior to the 2002 elections, NDI trained over 2,000 women from every province in campaign techniques and skills. As a result of NDI's efforts, 82% of the approximately 2,100 women aspirants trained were nominated by their parties to regional, municipal, and local council lists. And in the 2002 elections, over 1,500 women were elected to local government positions, 93% of which have benefited from NDI's comprehensive training.

NDI has also been active in Eastern Europe. Before the 2000 elections, NDI assisted the democratic opposition in Serbia with training, polling, and strategic consultations to help attract women voters. In the election campaign, political parties gave women leadership roles and targeted women voters by directly addressing issues of importance to women. Many of the women who became active in the opposition movement that overthrew the Milosevic regime were participants in NDI's leadership and political training for women. Graduates have won elections and have risen to leadership positions. These include Natasa Micic, acting President of Serbia and Speaker of the Parliament, the mayor of Belgrade, and several members of parliament.

The International Republican Institute (IRI) coordinates a Women's Parliamentary Program in Russia to integrate women into political decision-making and to promote their leadership skills. The program provides training on a number of fundamental skills, including parliamentary procedure, legislative drafting, constituent relations, and communications.

The Department of State funds non-government organizations whose main goal is to help increase

opportunities for women's political and economic participation. One of these, the ALVA Consortium, has taught women politicians from Rwanda and Kenya the basics of running for office. A number of its graduates went on to be appointed to high-level positions or elected to public office in these countries. Rwanda now has the highest percentage of women in parliament of any country in the world.

The Department also supports the League of Women Voters in building partnerships with women's organizations in eight countries in Africa and training for grassroots leadership.

### Anti-Trafficking Efforts

An issue that has a disproportionate impact on women is trafficking. Each year hundreds of thousands of women and girls fall victim to the slave trade, depriving them of their basic human rights and causing great physical and emotional harm. In post-conflict societies, women are particularly vulnerable because they lack opportunity in their own communities and are often lured to other countries with false promises of well-paying jobs. Instead of receiving good jobs, many are forced or coerced into prostitution, domestic servitude, farm or factory labor, or other types of forced labor.

The United States government is seriously committed to fighting trafficking on many fronts, both domestically and internationally, working to provide women opportunities for political and economic participation. In his speech before the 2003 UN General Assembly, President Bush committed \$50 million to accelerate efforts that are rescuing women and children from exploitation and giving them the hope of a new life.

Examples of U.S. anti-trafficking efforts include the publication of an annual report on trafficking by the State Department's Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons; financial support for shelters and other assistance for women freed from slavery; training of law enforcement officers; public awareness campaigns; and diplomatic outreach to strengthen worldwide cooperation in this fight.

In FY 2003, the U.S. Department of States' Office of Citizen Exchanges awarded seven grants designed to combat trafficking in Southeast Europe and Eurasia. These projects support U.S.- based and in-country training for government officials, journalists and NGO leaders. Project activities include internships at U.S. media outlets, site visits at U.S. government and NGO organizations involved in the fight against trafficking and in-country workshops and consultations.

Domestically, the President's Interagency Task Force on Trafficking in Persons brings Cabinet-level attention to the issue to ensure cooperation and coordination of USG anti-trafficking efforts.

### Educational Needs

There is a critical need to provide young people - especially girls -- with the educational tools they need to become contributors to society, builders of communities and participants in the economic and political life of their countries.

Education is a common value and a positive tool and is essential to rebuilding societies ravaged by conflict. It is a key factor that will help post-conflict countries become stable and productive.

Two years ago, the United States launched a program called "Partnerships for Learning." This global initiative, based on the premise that people of good will, whatever their background, religious faith, or ethnicity, want only the best for their children, and that best starts with an education. "Partnerships for Learning," in partnership with counterparts in many other countries, has enabled us to reach out to the all-important successor generation.

A Partnership for Learning youth exchange is the Youth Exchange and Study (YES) program, in which 131 high school students from 11 countries spend a year in the United States living with host families, attending high school, and focusing on leadership. Fifty percent of the participants are young women.

## Micro-Finance Programs

Without basic economic resources, political participation is unlikely. One major U.S. commitment is support for micro-finance programs that promote entrepreneurship. Entrepreneurship is one path many women in post-conflict situations want to follow. Over the last few years, U.S. investment in these small loan and technical assistance programs (three quarters of which go to women) has topped \$130 million. This simple tool gives millions of women the means to better their own lives, the lives of their families and the economy of their countries.

In Sierra Leone, a U.S.-funded project established a micro-enterprise and self-reliance program that aims to include a strong percentage of women clients. The program provides a combination of small business loans with business training and marketing advice for returning Sierra Leonean refugees.

## Conclusion

Involving women in post-conflict governance reduces the likelihood of returning to war and unrest. Stakeholders must do their part to eliminate laws, regulations, and practices that prevent women from participating fully in society and to support initiatives that teach women how to vote, advocate, manage, and govern. Political parties must seek qualified women candidates, and train them on parliamentary procedures and running an effective campaign and encourage the media and educational institutions to recognize the importance of women candidates to a vibrant democracy.

As Secretary Powell puts it, "We, as a world community, cannot even begin to tackle the array of problems and challenges confronting us without the full and equal participation of women in all aspects of life." In many ways, the United States continues to demonstrate its commitment to ensuring that women everywhere have this opportunity.