

As delivered.

Statement
by
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on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women
at
NGO CSW Interactive Roundtable Discussion
On
"Equal Participation of Women and Men in Decision-Making Process at all Levels"
New York, 14 February 2006

Madam Chairperson,
Representatives of the NGO community,
Friends and Colleagues,

I am delighted to have the opportunity to speak at this important event on **"Equal Participation of Women and Men in Decision-Making Process at all Levels."** At the outset, I would like to congratulate the NGO Committee on the Status of Women for organizing this roundtable and thank you for giving me the opportunity to reflect on the barriers that exist to women's opportunities to shape a world based on gender equality.

The theme of this roundtable is particularly timely, as the issue of gender equality in decision making has emerged as an international priority. One of the seven goals set by the Summit Outcome in September 2005 to promote gender equality and eliminate gender discrimination is to promote increased representation of women in decision-making and ensure their equal opportunity to participate fully in the political process.

Ten years after Beijing, women and men enjoy equal rights with regard to franchise in almost every country in the world. In most countries, also, *de jure* equality exists between women and men in the area of political participation.

Yet, critical barriers to women's equal participation in politics persist. They are deeply rooted in feminization of poverty, in violence against women, illiteracy, and attitudes resulting in women's exclusion from political systems. Entrenched stereotypical ideas regarding the role of women in the family and their participation in public life, in a pervasive climate of discrimination, discourage women from entering public life. They are thus unable to influence key decisions that affect their lives and the future of society.

From its inception, through its Charter, the United Nations proclaimed the equal rights of men and women. The equal participation of women and men in public life is one of the cornerstones of the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). The Fourth World Conference on Women in

1995, defined two strategic objectives in its critical area of concern on women in decision-making: to ensure women's equal access to and full participation in power structures and decision-making and to increase women's capacity to participate in decision-making. With the subsequent adoption of other international instruments, such as the United Nations Security Council resolution 1325 on *Women, Peace and Security*, and the Millennium Declaration and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the international community recognized the fundamental role of women in decision-making in the areas of peace and development.

According to data from the Inter-Parliamentary Union, more women have participated in decision-making in legislative and executive branches since 1995. In the legislative branch, in January 2006, a new global heightened level has been reached. There are 16.5 per cent women in lower or single houses of parliament, and 15.1 per cent in upper houses, bringing an average of 16.3 per cent across all parliaments. A total of 19 Member States have 30 per cent or more women parliamentarians, with Rwanda in the lead; half of them are developing countries. While steady, the progress is slow. If current incremental rates continue, it will not be until 2025 that an average of 30 per cent women in parliament would be reached, and not until 2040 would parity be achieved.

With recent elections of three remarkable women: Ms. Angela Merkel, Chancellor of Germany, Ms. Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, President of Liberia and Ms. Michelle Bachelet, President of Chile, women of the world made a quantum leap of more than 30 per cent increase in their representation at the highest level of the executive branch. A woman was also re-elected as President of Finland. I wish to warmly congratulate them and all women of Chile, Germany, Liberia and Finland. Yet with only 11 women heads of State and Government out of 191, women are woefully under-represented.

Sweden, with 52.4 per cent of women ministers, tops the chart together with Spain and now Chile (50 per cent). This makes Sweden virtually the only country in the world that has fulfilled the principle of gender parity in politics. World-wide, only 14 per cent of ministers in the executive branch are women. Norway's decision to require parity on the boards of private corporations is indeed a novelty and an acknowledgement of the impact on society as a whole, and women in particular, of decisions such boards take, and therefore the need for women to participate and influence that process. This is a great step forward in the empowerment of women and their participation in decision-making.

In the United Nations itself, progress on women's representation is limited and uneven and the goal of reaching 50/50 has not been achieved. As of 30 June 2005, in the larger group of Professional staff with appointments of one year or more, the representation of women stood:

- 37 per cent overall with no change from 2004;
- 27 per cent at the D-1 level and above, a decrease from 29 per cent since 2004.

This situation is unacceptable – more women must have a place at the decision-making tables at the global level.

Madam Chairperson,

This scorecard tells us that both developing and developed countries can reach the 30 per cent target set in the Beijing Platform and even 50/50 per cent target. We have come a long way since 1995. Women have managed to use the opportunities afforded by international commitments made by Governments in Beijing and Beijing+5 to improve their access to decision making. Yet attention must still be paid to strategies for ensuring the real empowerment of women rather than providing them with just political space. Governments and political parties need to play a leading role in changing gender biases and entrenched attitudes. Increased participation of women in decision-making requires intervention at different levels and the use of multiple strategies. Above all, it requires political will and commitment.

Thank you for your attention.
