

The World's Women 2010: Press Release #3

Gender Quotas Helped Boost Women's Participation in Parliaments

(New York, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Statistics Division, 20 October 2010) — The 1995 Beijing Platform for Action urged Governments and other actors to take measures supporting women's participation in all levels of power and decision-making, including parliaments. Since then, the representation of women slowly and steadily increased in national parliaments. In 1995, women on average accounted for 10 per cent of members of the lower or single houses of national parliaments. By April 2009, this figure had increased to 17 per cent.

The World's Women 2010 report (published every five years by the UN Statistics Division) mentions that even if all regions improved gender balance in national parliaments, average female representation remained below 15 per cent in Northern Africa (10 per cent), Eastern and Western Asia (14 and 9 per cent, respectively) and Oceania (only 3 per cent).

The report implies that gender quotas helped increase the worldwide average representation of women in parliament. Eighteen out of the 23 countries, with at least 30 per cent representation of women have implemented some type of gender quota for national parliaments, either by law or voluntary decisions of political parties. Furthermore, on average in 2009, women comprised 21 per cent of parliamentarians in countries that used gender quotas, compared to an average of 13 per cent in countries that did not have such measures. Today, quota systems aim at ensuring that women constitute at least 30 or 40 per cent, or even a true gender balance of 50 per cent, as opposed to "only a few tokens." (Page 116)

The chapter on "Power and Decision-Making" notes that:

- Among the 23 countries with at least 30 per cent women parliamentarians, nine are from Western Europe and seven from sub-Saharan Africa. The highest proportion worldwide was registered by Rwanda in its 2008 elections. (Page 113)
- In 2009, only seven out of 150 elected Heads of State in the world were women, and only 11 of 192 Governments were headed by women. (Page 117)
- On average, in 2008, 17 per cent of cabinet members were women, which was a significant improvement from the 8 per cent average in 1998. (Pages 117-118)
- In 73 out of 77 countries or areas, women comprise no more than a fifth of all mayors. They also comprise only a small percentage of councilors in local government (Page 119)
- Out of 190 national statistical offices worldwide, 41 are headed by women (Page 122)
- Of the 500 largest corporations in the world, in 2009 only 13 had a female CEO — equivalent to less than 3 per cent. (Page 124)

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