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**PANEL II**

**Equal Participation of Women and Men in Decision-Making Processes, with  
Particular Emphasis on Political Participation and Leadership**

Written statement \* submitted by

Anders B. Johnsson  
Secretary-General of the Inter-Parliamentary Union

\* The paper has been reproduced as submitted.

## **Introduction**

1. This paper has been prepared for the United Nations panel discussion entitled *Equal participation of women*

3. The trend in terms of women's representation over the past decade has been one of gradual but steady progress. In 1975, at the time of the First World Conference on Women in Mexico City, women accounted for 10.9 per cent of MPs worldwide. Ten years later, in 1985, women's representation had increased by only 1 percentage point, to an average 12 per cent. In 1995, the number of women had actually decreased to 11.6 per cent. With the collapse of communism in 1989, the proportion of women represented in the parliaments of the former communist countries fell drastically. Not surprisingly, the world average followed suit: the percentage of women in lower or unicameral houses fell from 14.8% in 1988 to 10.3% in 1993. Whereas many communist governments and one-party States had effectively ensured the selection of large percentages of unopposed women (and men) candidates, the move towards multiparty democracies in the 1990s made the electoral process far more competitive for women.

4. A new impetus for women's participation in decision-making found expression at the Fourth World Conference on Women, held in Beijing in 1995, and the adoption of the Beijing Platform for Action (BPFA). By 2000, the number of women in parliaments had increased to 13.4 per cent of parliamentarians in lower houses.

5. In December 2005, a new global high was reached, as 16.5 per cent of the members of lower or single houses of parliament were women, and 15 per cent in upper houses, bringing an overall total average of **16.3 per cent** in all houses of parliaments.

6. It is also worth noting that in 2005, one out of every five member of parliament elected to Lower Houses of Parliament were women. In 2000, only 11 per cent of those elected were women. The figure rose to 18 per cent for elections in 2003, and fell to 16 per cent in 2004.

7. While steady, the progress has been slow. If current incremental rates continue, an average of 30 per cent women will not be reached until 2025 and parity will not be achieved until 2040.

**Table 2: Women in Parliament 1945-2005**

|  | 1945 | 1955 | 1965 | 1975 | 1985 | 1995 | 2000 | 2005* |
|--|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|-------|
|--|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|-------|

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Source: IPU, 2006. *Women in Politics: 60 years in retrospect* Information kit.  
<http://www.ipu.org/english/surveys.htm#45-05>

## Regional trends

8. Since 1995, the **Nordic countries** have maintained their exemplary position with averages consistently over 38 per cent. In 2005, the regional average rose to an all time record of 40 per cent. Although not often noted, today's percentages reflect enormous progress over a fifty-year time frame. In the post-war era, women counted for between 1.3 and 14.5 per cent of lower chambers in the parliaments of the Scandinavian countries. Dramatic change occurred during the 1970s, attributed to profound social changes in tandem with marked economic growth. That the regional average has continued to increase over the past ten years may indicate that these parliaments have yet more progress to make. Sweden has always been the top performer; it now has 45.3 per cent of parliamentarians who are women, followed by Norway, Finland, Denmark and Iceland.

9. Over the last ten years, women have continued to be least represented in the parliaments of the **Arab States**. While regional averages have oscillated in this period, the Arab States have seen an encouraging increase in the percentage of women in parliament, reaching a high of 8.2 per cent in both houses of parliament in November 2005. While this is half the global average, it is in fact double the rate of eight years ago, when the average was less than 4 per cent. Much of this progress is attributable to an expression of political will in favour of women's participation in politics, a growing public debate on women's role in society and the implementation of different types of quotas in some countries in the region, including in Djibouti, Jordan, Iraq, Morocco and Tunisia.

10. Outside these two regions, averages have tended to stabilise between 10 and 20 per cent. The most significant progress is evident across the Americas (+7 percentage points); in sub-Saharan Africa (+6.7 percentage points) and in Europe (excluding the Nordic countries) with a 6.1 percentage point increase.

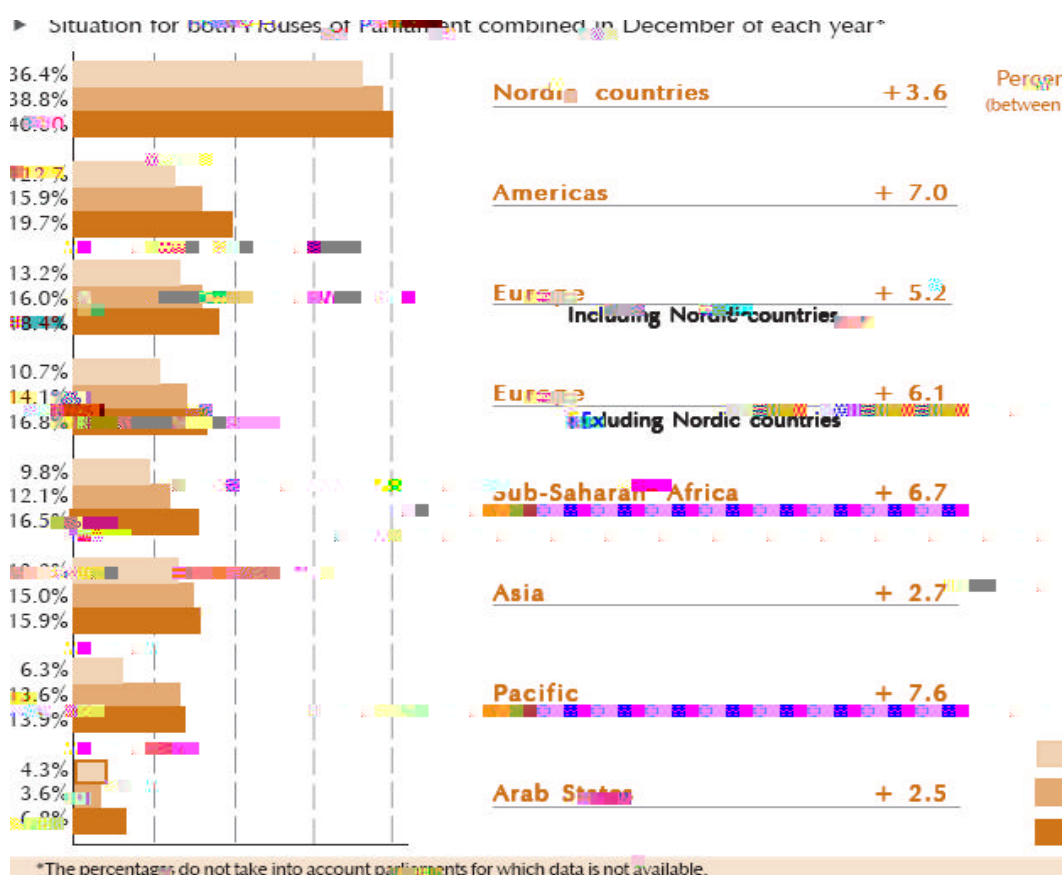
11. The impressive 7 percentage point increase in women's parliamentary representation in **the Americas** over the past 10 years is in large part attributable to the enthusiasm with which many countries in Latin and Central America have implemented affirmative action measures. Different types of quotas now exist in 17 countries of the Americas. More specifically, great progress was made after the 2005 election in Honduras (with an 18 percentage point increase to 23.4% women), the 2003 elections in Paraguay (+7.5 point increase to 10% women) and Mexico (+6.6 points to 22.6% women), the 2002 elections in Costa Rica, where women increased their representation by 15.8 percentage points to 31.6 per cent, and the 2001 elections in Nicaragua (+11 points) and Peru (+10 points). Elections in 2005 however, saw slight declines in the number of women in Dominica (to 12.9%) and Bolivia (to 16.9%).

12. Progress evident in **Sub-Saharan Africa** is also attributable to an open commitment to improve women's participation in politics and in some cases, the implementation of special temporary measures. The most successful cases, however,

have seen various affirmative action measures enshrined in constitutions or electoral laws following processes of post-conflict reconstruction. Nations emerging from internal conflict have succeeded in increasing the percentage of women in their new or restored parliaments. The revised national constitutions of Rwanda and Burundi, for example, now include provisions to reserve seats for women; in South Africa and Mozambique, the dominant political parties have introduced quota mechanisms.

13. At a sub-regional level, the Southern African Development Community (SADC) countries have also set a target for women's representation in parliament of 30 per cent by 2005. In South Africa, Mozambique and Namibia, women's representation in parliament now ranges from 22 to 33 per cent. In the United Republic of Tanzania, the proportion of women elected to the legislature in 2005 reached an impressive 30.4 per cent. Seats have been reserved for women in the United Republic of Tanzania for several years, and a constitutional amendment passed in 2000 increased the number of reserved seats from 20 per cent to at least 30 per cent, in line with the targets set by the Beijing Platform for Action (BPFA) and the SADC Declaration on Gender and Development.

**Table 3: Regional averages of women in Parliament: 1995, 2000, 2005**



14. Increases in **Europe** can be partly attributed to progress made in Central and Eastern European countries, and in some established western European democracies.

When the Iron Curtain fell in Europe, so did the percentages of women in parliament in Eastern Europe. Women in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics for example, frequently accounted for at least 30 per cent of the legislature. Yet in 1990, the proportion of women elected in the Russian Federation, for example, amounted to less than 9 per cent. A return to “post-war” figures was similarly evident in the first pluralist elections held in many other Eastern European nations. In Romania, women comprised 3.6 per cent of the Chamber of Deputies and 0.8 per cent of the Senate, a drop from 34.4 per cent in 1983. In Hungary, women’s representation fell to 7.3 per cent in 1990 from 30.1 per cent in 1980, and 20.7 per cent in 1985. In the subsequent elections held between 1993 and 1995 some advances were made. Today, as multi-party democracy spreads in the region, and as European Union integration advances,

**Table 4: Countries with 30% Women Representatives (in lower or single houses of parliament)**

| Level | Country   | % Women | Quota   |
|-------|---|---------|---|
| 1     | Rwanda  | 48.8    | 30% Reserved seats (indirectly elected)<br>Voluntary party quotas** |
| 2     | Sweden  | 45.3    | Voluntary party quotas  |
| 3     | Norway  | 37.9    | Voluntary party quotas  |
| 4     | Finland   | 37.5    | N/A   |
| 5     | Denmark   | 36.9    | N/A   |
| 6     | Netherlands   | 36.7    | Voluntary party quotas  |
| 7     | Argentina   | 36.2    | Legislated quota of 33% women candidates on party lists             |
| 8*    | Cuba  | 36.0    | N/A   |
| 8*    | Spain   | 36.0    | Voluntary party quotas  |
| 9     | Costa Rica  | 35.1    | Legislated quota of 40% women candidates on party lists             |
| 10    | Mozambique  | 34.8    | Voluntary party quotas  |
| 11    | Belgium   | 34.7    | Legislated quota of 33% women candidates on party lists             |
| 12    | Austria   | 33.9    | Voluntary party quotas  |
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gradual profound social and political changes over the past 30 years together with marked economic growth and the adoption of party quotas. This type of slow but constant progress in the number of women elected is what Drude Dahlerup has coined the **slow track** to women's representation in parliament.

19. Secondly, one fifth of the countries are so called "**post conflict**" countries (Burundi, Mozambique, Rwanda and South Africa). These countries have been referred to as **fast track countries**, where in a relevantly short space of time, often in one election cycle, the representation of women has increased dramatically. For example, in South Africa the representation of women jumped from 2.7 per cent to 25 per cent in one election, and from less than 15.0 per cent to 48.8 per cent in Rwanda. An important part of the equation in these fast track countries is that they are countries in transition, and the process of establishing new constitutions and institutions and rewriting the rules of the political landscape provides a golden opportunity for women to influence the process and make their voices heard, especially in the drafting of electoral and political party laws.

20. Thirdly, nine of the 20 countries are developing countries, which demonstrates that **developing countries** are likely to be among the top performers in terms of numbers as are the developed ones.

21. The last point to note is that 16 out of the 20 countries use **electoral quotas**. Rwanda and the United Republic of Tanzania are the only countries to use reserved seats where 30 per cent of the seats in parliament are set aside for female legislators. In Sweden, Norway, the Netherlands, Spain, Mozambique, Austria, South Africa, New Zealand, Germany, Iceland (and formally Denmark), one or more political party, usually the ruling party, has adopted a voluntary party quota setting a target or firm percentage of the number of women candidates it fields for election. Costa Rica, Belgium and Argentina have legislated quotas, which specify that a certain percentage of candidates for election must be women. There are firm legal sanctions in place if the provisions are not met, such as rejecting electoral lists that have less than the statutory minimum number of women.

### **Positive results for States emerging from conflict**

22. As mentioned previously, countries emerging from conflict tend to fare better in terms of women's representation in Parliament. In 2005 elections were held to restore parliaments in four countries emerging from conflict: Afghanistan, Burundi, Iraq and Liberia. In all of these countries the percentage of women parliamentarians increased. In Afghanistan, Burundi and Iraq, constitutional drafting processes led to the introduction of electoral quotas and other mechanisms aimed at ensuring a certain level of women's participation in parliament and in governmental structures. Women now comprise 25 per cent of representatives in Iraq, and 27 per cent in Afghanistan. In Burundi, the proportion of women in parliament jumped from 18.4 per cent to 30.5 per cent. In Liberia guidelines were developed for political party candidacies in elections which specified a 30 per cent quota for women on party lists. However, political parties did not implement them as there were no sanctions for non-compliance. As a result, only 12.5 per cent of the candidates elected were women.

23. All four examples highlight the importance given to including women in post-



conflict State-building. Despite the vast differences between the countries, they share certain commonalities – the intersection between domestic women’s movements and the international community in supporting the election of women to parliament. Such results can be linked to a growing recognition of women's role during conflict and post-conflict periods, their inclusion in peace processes, the existence of a constitutional drafting process, which offers avenues for change and in some cases the inclusion of electoral quotas for women.

**Women’s political rights: Universality within reach**

24.

**Table 5: Women in the Executive, January 2005**

| <b>Position</b> | <b>Number of women</b> |
|-----------------|------------------------|
|-----------------|------------------------|

presence in parliament, but also to implement commitments made under international instruments, including the Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination against Women.

31. A number of expectations clearly underpin the implementation of such quotas, not least of which is the idea that increasing the visibility of women in positions of power will eventually bring about a change in social perceptions of the role of women in society. Quotas, that

