



Measures to Enhance Women's Participation in Politics

Centre for Women

UN- ESCWA

A quarterly ECW issuance aiming at raising the gender awareness and responsiveness through highlighting the gender dimensions in various fields.

Today, women constitute 19.2%¹ of the parliament members around the world. According to the Inter-Parliamentary Union and as of November 30 2010, the percentage of women in parliament in the Americas is 23.1%, 21.9% in Europe, 18.7% in Asia, 18.3% in Sub-Saharan Africa, 12.6% in the Pacific and finally 12.4% in the Arab States².

Given that the number of women in political institutions is growing at a slow speed, there is a need to take more efficient methods to reach gender balance and most importantly to safeguard the presence of women in these institutions.

Quotas present one such mechanism. Quota means a share, and the concept lies in the positive discrimination towards women. Several instruments and mechanisms call for using of temporary special measures to increase women participation in politics. For example, the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women adopted in 1979, calls member states to take temporary measures to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women in all fields including politics. The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BPFA) adopted during the 4th world conference on women in 1995 also calls member states to review the impact of

their electoral systems on women participation and to consider their reform when appropriate.

Most quotas aim at recruiting women into political positions, simply because the problem encountered is usually the under-representation of women in politics. The quota systems that are being put in place nowadays aim at ensuring that women constitute a large minority of twenty, thirty or forty percent of the members of the body or even to ensure true gender balance of fifty-fifty. However, some quota systems are put in place as gender-neutral whereas the requirement may be that neither gender should occupy more than sixty percent and no less of forty percent of the seats; this kind of quota aim at correcting the under-representation of both men and women. It is noteworthy to mention that quota systems are applied as a temporary special measure, until the barriers for women's entry into politics are removed. However, most countries applying quotas have not limited their use of quotas in time.



UN Photos

1 www.ipu.org/wmn-e/world.htm

2 *ibid*

Quotas: Advocating Quota Application

Quotas: Advancing Parliaments

Quotas: Advancing Member States

Different Quota Systems

“For a quota system to be most effective, it should match the country’s electoral system”



Woman votes in Sudan's Extended Elections, April 2010, UN Photos

Criticisms of Quota v/s Facts Advocating Quota Application

Percentage of Women in Arab Parliaments⁴

Looking at the world average, the most recent statistics from the Inter-Parliamentary Union, show that Rwanda superseded Sweden and is currently ranked in the first place worldwide in terms of women parliamentary representation at 56.3% against 45% for Sweden. South Africa comes in the third place at 44.5%. The chart below shows the classification for the Arab member states.

Country	Percentage of Women	Worldwide Rank	Arab Region Rank
Tunisia	27.6%	31	1
Sudan	25.6%	37	2
Iraq	25.2%	39	3
U.A.E.	22.5%	49	4
Mauritania	22.1%	51	5
Djibouti	13.8%	86	6
Syria	12.4%	91	7
Jordan	10.8%	97	8
Morocco	10.5%	98	9
Algeria	7.7%	115	10
Kuwait	7.7%	115	10
Libya	7.7%	115	10
Somalia	6.8%	119	11
Lebanon	3.1%	127	12
Comoros	3.0%	128	13
Bahrain	2.5%	130	14
Yemen	0.3%	132	15
Oman	0%	133	16
Qatar	0%	133	16
Saudi Arabia	0%	133	16
Egypt ⁵	1.8%	-	-
Palestine ⁶	12.8%	-	-

⁴ www.ipu.org/wmn-e/classif.htm

⁵ Percentage corresponding to the results of 2005 elections. The results of last elections held in November 2010 are not communicated yet.

⁶ Percentage of females, 2nd the Palestinian Legislative Council in 2006 <http://www.pal-plc.org/index.php/2010-07-06-18-10-33/2010-07-29-08-55-57/2010-07-06-18-27-27.html>

Examples from Selected Arab Member States

DJIBOUTI

Although women in Djibouti gained the right to vote in 1946, nevertheless, they never had the opportunity to participate in elections¹ and women's participation in the parliament was zero until late 2003. This was due to the fact that a law on quota was passed in 2002 requiring women to hold 10% of the seats in the parliament. It stated: "the minimum difference of either female or male candidate in each political party must be equivalent to 10% of the seats to be filled".

The implementation of the law experienced many difficulties at different levels being the president of the republic, the prime minister and the political parties, especially while forming the list of candidates.

- The 2003 elections were marked by the admission of women, seven in total, to the National Assembly.
- The latest elections were held in 2008, nine women were elected raising the percentage to 13.85%².

¹ The Arab Quota Report: Selected Case Studies, 2004, IDEA

² http://www.ipu.org/english/parline/report/s/2089_E.htm

JORDAN

The process of adopting a Quota law in Jordan evolved for around ten years and in 2003, a law on quota was passed in Jordan. It reserved 6 seats for women, in addition women can compete on all seats and the seats they win in competition with men are not counted towards the quota.

- In the 2003 elections, no woman was elected and a special commission was appointed to select the 6 seats reserved by the quota.
- In the 2007 elections the percentage of women participation reached 6.4% as one woman was elected in addition to the 6 reserved seats
- In the 2010 elections, 13 women entered the parliament¹.

¹ http://www.ipu.org/english/parline/report/s/2163_E.htm

MOROCCO

The concept of applying a quota for women in Morocco evolved over 20 years. In 2002, the Moroccan parliament approved a law reserving 30 seats for women on the national list. The law required "the chamber of representatives is to compromise 325 members elected by universal suffrage based on list voting: 295 members are elected in the districts and 30 members elected nationally"¹. As a response to the mobilization by women ahead of the elections, political parties agreed to keep all thirty places on the national list aside for female candidates.

- The 2002 elections were marked by the election of 35 females: 5 via the local list and 30 via the national list.
- In 2007, 34 women were elected: 4 via the local list and 30 via the national list putting Morocco in the 98th place worldwide at 10.5%².

¹ The Arab Quota Report: Selected Case Studies, 2004, IDEA

² http://www.ipu.org/english/parline/reports/2221_A.htm

IRAQ, MAURITANI and SUDAN

Iraq, Mauritania and Sudan, have a reserved seats quota system at 25% for Iraq and Sudan and 20% for Mauritania.

Women in the parliaments of Sudan, Iraq and Mauritania hold respectively 25.6%, 25.2% and 22.1% of the seats.

<p>...is a clear example of the impact of quota on the participation of women and also an example of what the situation will be like if governments decide to prematurely withdraw the quota system whatever the reason may be.</p> <p>While employing the principle of temporary special measures, governments should confront social and cultural beliefs about women through media, conferences, etc... until true equality is achieved.</p> <p>Beijing+15, Family Children</p> <p>...line/report</p>	<p>...were given to run for during the no women</p> <p>...9 elections, ...fited from y promised or the first ed: four in entage of in the</p> <p>Beijing+15, Committee,</p> <p>...e women ...nal Council ...and eight ...j the 49th</p>	<p>...evolution of in the notice that th 3 women s in 2005 lly 3.1% in</p> <p>...anon enter action to a er, husband comes after the woman other male age.</p> <p>...to mention r efforts to sting a 30%</p> <p>...arline/report</p>
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We're on the Web!

See us at:

www.escwa.un.org

About Our Organization...

The ESCWA Centre for Women was established on October 1, 2003, following the Commission's adoption of Resolution 240(XXII). This resolution, recognizing that a fundamental part of development is the empowerment of women, called for the creation of a Committee on Women comprising the member countries, and for the establishment of a women's Centre at ESCWA. The Centre continues and expands on the work carried out by the Women Empowerment and Gender Mainstreaming Team, formerly a part of the Social Development Division at ESCWA.

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