Rosary Sisters’ High School Model United Nations

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Political Committee

Women’s Political Participation- Bridging the Divide

Haneen Abdeen
Introduction:

Women’s political participation is considered essential as a major indication of gender equality. Women’s active participation in all spheres of politics including elections and political parties clearly signifies bridging divisions based on gender. Unfortunately, in many countries across the world, such political participation is impeded due to discrimination against women. Women face numerous obstacles as political candidates and as leaders which consequently affect democratic governance. Barriers include laws and legislations, gender inequality in education, stereotypes, and marginalization of women. Traditions and cultural factors are also considered as factors which contribute to women’s underrepresentation in leadership positions which negatively impacts equal contribution of women. Women often are subjected to harassment, violence and intimidation as tools to exclude them from political participation.

Democracy cannot be achieved if women are not active participants in decision making and represented in governance systems. Countries with increased women’s participation are more inclusive and democratic.

Definition of Key-Terms:

Women suffrage: women’s right to vote.

Democratic governance: According to Organization and Security for Europe- OSCE, “it is a system of government where institutions function according to democratic processes and norms, both internally and in their interaction with other institutions.” (1)

Quotas: a fixed amount, quality or number.

Background Information:

Measuring the status of women in countries is linked to women’s political participation in decision making and in all spheres of politics. Unfortunately, less than 20 percent of legislators are women. Not only are women underrepresented in politics but their rights as equal citizens are also violated in many countries. Women candidates and voters in elections face obstacles of resources and some cannot vote if the polling stations are in unsafe areas. Constitutions of countries set basic standards for gender equality; hence ensuring that abolishing discriminatory laws and protecting women through legal systems empower women and ensure their participation in politics.

A representative democracy implies that all voices should be heard. Political participation involves much more than only voting, it includes the freedom of speech, engagement in public affairs, ability to register as candidates, and to hold political positions in governments.
Moreover, barriers of women political participation increase in post-conflict societies which is usually recognized and identified by changeable and unsteady security status. In post-conflict countries, it is usually more difficult for females to appear as political leaders, or involve them in peace negotiations.

According to UN Women:

“Women in parliaments”
- Only 22.8 per cent of all national parliamentarians were women as of June 2016, a slow increase from 11.3 per cent in 1995.
- As of October 2017, 11 women are serving as Head of State and 12 are serving as Head of Government.
- Rwanda had the highest number of women parliamentarians worldwide. Women there have won 63.8 per cent of seats in the lower house.
- Globally, there are 38 States in which women account for less than 10 per cent of parliamentarians in single or lower houses, as of June 2016, including 4 chambers with no women at all.

“Across regions”
- Wide variations remain in the average percentages of women parliamentarians in each region. As of June 2017, these were (single, lower and upper houses combined): Nordic countries, 41.7 per cent; Americas, 28.1 per cent; Europe including Nordic countries, 26.5 per cent; Europe excluding Nordic countries, 25.3 per cent; sub-Saharan Africa, 23.6 per cent; Asia, 19.4 per cent; Arab States, 17.4 per cent; and the Pacific, 17.4 per cent.

“Other domains of government”
- As of January 2017, only 18.3 per cent of government ministers were women; the most commonly held portfolio by women ministers is environment, natural resources, and energy, followed by social sectors, such as social affairs, education and the family.
- The global proportion of women elected to local government is currently unknown, constituting a major knowledge gap.
- Women’s representation in local governments can make a difference. Research on panchayats (local councils) in India discovered that the number of drinking water projects in areas with women-led councils was 62 per cent higher than in those with men-led councils. In Norway, a direct causal relationship between the presence of women in municipal councils and childcare coverage was found.

“Expanding participation”
- As of June 2017, only 2 countries have 50 per cent or more women in parliament in single or lower houses: Rwanda with 61.3 per cent and Bolivia with 53.1 per cent; but a greater number of countries have reached 30 per cent or more. As of June 2017, 46 single or lower houses were composed of 30 per cent or more women, including 19
4 countries in Europe, 13 in Sub-Saharan Africa, 11 in Latin America have applied some form of quotas - either legislative candidate quotas or reserved seats - opening space for women's political participation in national parliaments.

- **Gender balance in political participation and decision-making is the internationally agreed target set in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.**
- **There is established and growing evidence that women's leadership in political decision-making processes improves them.**
- **Women demonstrate political leadership by working across party lines through parliamentary women's caucuses - even in the most politically combative environments - and by championing issues of gender equality, such as the elimination of gender-based violence, parental leave and childcare, pensions, gender-equality laws and electoral reform.”**


**Major Organizations Involved:**

One of the UN most essential principles is eliminating all forms of discrimination. The UN has a long history of addressing women’s human rights and especially women’s political participation, which could be clearly noticed through the efforts of UN Organizations.

**UN WOMEN**

Grounded in the goals of equality, UN Women’s programs support and promote women’s political participation. UN Women works towards removing all forms of discrimination against females in the political field.

**United Nations Development Program (UNDP)**

UNDP supports and promotes women’s political participation as electors and candidates in electoral process in addition to urging political parties to remove obstacles of women’s participation and emphasize addressing gender gaps in legislations.

**Relevant UN Treaties and Resolutions and Events:**

- The 2011 UN General Assembly resolution on women’s political participation (A/RES/66/130)
• The 2003 UN General Assembly resolution on women’s political participation (A/RES/58/142)

• Women’s strategic plan, 2018–2021

• Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the optional protocol

• Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (PFA)

• UN Security Council resolution 1325 on women, peace and security (2000)


• 2015 - Sustainable Development Goal 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls

Timeline of Events:

According to UN Women the following are milestones in the rights of women:

- 1945- UN Charter: "Fundamental freedoms for all"
- 1948, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights
- 1975, the UN begins commemorating International Women's Day (8 March).
- 1975, the first World Conference on Women
- 1993, The World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna,
- 1995, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action
- 2000, the UN Millennium Declaration
- 2000, the UN Security Council passes the historic resolution 1325
- 2010, the UN General Assembly creates the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women)
- 2015 SDGs - Sustainable Development Goals
**Previous Attempts to Solve this Issue:**

Women suffrage – the right of women to vote- was a long struggle to achieve the right to participate in the elections and run governmental offices.

The United Nations and a number of regional organizations tried to solve this issue through their resolutions, conferences, conventions, and initiatives. A major contribution is the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the optional protocol which stresses eliminating discriminatory actions against women. Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action in addition to the MDGs and the SDGs all support gender equality and women’s participation in all spheres of life. Numerous resolutions such as 1325 on women, peace and security (2000) and UN Security Council Resolutions: 1820 (2008), 1888 (2009), 1889 (2009), 1960 (2010), 2106 (2013), 2122 (2013) and 2242 (2015) clearly support Women’s political participation and role.

**Possible Solutions:**

There are several solutions which include, but not limited to: building capacity and training of women candidates, raising awareness, reform of legislations, enhancing legal rights of women, using the quotas system, involving civil society, and reforming party policies and practices.
Bibliography:


