

**53<sup>rd</sup> session of the Commission on the Status of Women**

decision-making bodies, including through ensuring their equal opportunity to participate fully in the political process.

The 2006 Commission on the Status of Women's agreed conclusions on "Equal participation of

discrimination, gender-sensitive and family friendly legislation and policies on issues such as equal pay for equal work, maternity and parental leave, social security, and access to health care. Women have also been instrumental in the development of gender-responsive budgeting, which aims to ensure that government budgets and allocations, and the policies and programmes that underlie them, address the different priorities and needs of women and men. In many countries, women's presence in the political arena and in decision-making positions has been critical in combating violence against women.<sup>2</sup>

Despite the broad recognition of the critical role of women in leadership positions, in both developing and developed countries, women continue to be under-represented in decision-making and leadership. For example with regard to the judiciary, as of 2003, there were four women out 15 justices (26 per cent) of the Supreme Court in the Philippines. In Israel, women comprise 41 per cent of the Supreme Court. In Nigeria, the first female judge of the Supreme Court was appointed just in 2005.<sup>3</sup>

In the private sector, very few women lead large companies or corporations, including multinational and transnational corporations and banks. Research shows that although women now occupy more than 40 per cent of all managerial positions in the United States, their participation among chief executives remains very limited. From the group of the most highly paid executives of *Fortune* 500 companies—those with titles such as chairman, president, chief executive officer, and chief operating officer— only six per cent are women; and only 15 per cent of the seats on the boards of directors are held by women.<sup>4</sup>

In the European Union the situation is similar, with women representing about 11 per cent of the top executives and four per cent of the CEOs and heads of boards of the 50 largest publicly traded corporations in each country. The governors of the central banks of all twenty-seven EU Member States are men. On average, there are five men for every woman on the highest decision-making bodies of EU central banks. In seven EU Member States (Czech Republic, Germany, Greece, Italy, Cyprus, Portugal, and Slovenia) and in Turkey, the highest decision-making body of the central bank is comprised solely of men.

Norway has taken an innovative approach to ensure an increase of women's representation on boards. In December 2003, the Norwegian parliament adopted legislation requiring that at least 40 per cent of the board members of all state owned companies and privately owned public limited companies be women. In April 2003, only 7.3 per cent of the board members were women. By February 2008, 39 per cent of the board representatives in public limited companies were women.<sup>5</sup>

Overall, the commitments on gender equality in decision-making in all areas have not yet been met. As a consequence of this gender gap, women do not participate fully in decisions that shape their lives; and communities and countries do not capitalize on the full potential of one half of their societies. Some of the principal obstacles include the prevalence of gender stereotypes and traditional values, violence against women, women's lack of self-confidence, the prevalence of masculine models at the senior-level of decision-making, the lack of support within

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<sup>2</sup> Ravinovich (2005). *Women for a change*. London, United Kingdom: One World Action. See also UNIFEM (2008). *Progress of the World 2008-2009: Who answers to women? Gender and accountability*. New York: United Nations Development Fund for Women.

<sup>3</sup> CEDAW//C/PHI/5-6, CEDAW/C/ISR/4, CEDAW /C/NGA/6, 5 October 2006

<sup>4</sup> Catalyst 2008 Census of the Fortune 500 Reveals Women Gained Little Ground Advancing to Business Leadership Positions. Press Release, New York: Catalyst Inc. (Headquarters), (December 10, 2008).

Ministry of Children and Equality, Norway.

constituencies, weak relationship with women's organizations, the inadequate access to high-level networks, and the poor implementation of temporary special measures. Other obstacles that prevent women to fully participate at the political processes are the nature of the political system, including the electoral systems, and the lack of access to financial resources and training for women candidates.<sup>6</sup> Women's participation in decision-making is also restricted by persistent poverty, women's unequal access to health, education, training and employment, and unpaid and domestic work. Armed conflict, lack of security and natural disasters are also factors that inhibit the ability of women to operate in the public life.

### **III. Format of the interactive dialogue**

The interactive dialogue will be introduced by two keynote speakers who will make presentations of seven to ten minutes. Member States, entities of the United Nations system and non-governmental organizations will participate in the ensuing dialogue, and are encouraged to share their experiences in implementing the agreed conclusions on "Equal participation of women and men in decision-making processes at all levels", highlighting achievements, gaps and challenges, as well as good practices and lessons learned. Interventions from the floor will be limited to three minutes. A Chairperson's summary of the interactive dialogue will be prepared.

### **IV. Issues for consideration**

The dialogue will focus on the areas identified in the agreed conclusions adopted by the Commission in 2006.

The following questions provide a non-exhaustive discussion guide:

- What quantitative data and qualitative analysis are available on the extent to which women are represented in high-level positions (in the private sector, parliaments, academia, the media, the judiciary and other areas)?
- What structural factors influence the levels of representation of women (such as the educational system, quotas in corporate by-laws or transparent hiring or promotion processes)?
- Which institutional policies help improve representation of women at senior-levels of decision making? What examples of effective programmes, strategies, good practices for promoting women's leadership in different areas can be provided?
- What role do human resources offices play in helping women develop their capacities and reach senior positions?
- What is the impact of women in leadership positions for example on governance, gender equality outcomes, and other issues?
- What are good practice examples of men's roles in facilitating women's access to leadership positions including for example mentoring programmes?

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<sup>6</sup> Rabinovich (2005) op cit.