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HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL
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Agenda item 4

**IMPLEMENTATION OF GENERAL ASSEMBLY RESOLUTION 60/251
OF 15 MARCH 2006 ENTITLED “HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL”**

**Letter dated 21 June 2006 from the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Croatia
addressed to the President of the Human Rights Council**

I have the honour to inform you that on 19 June 2006 in Geneva, women Ministers of Foreign Affairs from: Barbados - Billie Miller; Croatia - Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović; Liechtenstein - Rita Kieber Beck; Switzerland - Micheline Calmy-Rey; other high ranking officials and dignitaries of: Japan - Akiko Yamanaka, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs; Mozambique - Esperanca Machavela, Minister of Justice; Rwanda - Edda Mukabagwiza, Minister of Justice; Uruguay - Belela Herrera, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs; High Commissioner for Human Rights - Louise Arbour; Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights - Mehr Khan Williams, and Nobel Peace Prize recipient Wangari Mathai, convened on the margins of the first session of the Human Rights Council, to exchange experiences and views on women's rights and the reform of the United Nations, as well as on the participation of women in political and public life.

The participants unanimously adopted the Statement on the Participation of Women in Political Life, proposed by Croatia, which I have enclosed.*

* Reproduced in the annex as received, in the language of submission only.

The Statement also received the endorsement of Ms. Maria Teresa Fernandez de la Vega, Deputy Prime Minister of Spain, Ms. Benita Ferrero Waldner, European Commissioner for External Relations and European Neighbourhood Policy, as well as eight other women Ministers of Foreign Affairs - Ursula Plassnik, Dora Bakoyannis, Kinga Göncz, Tzipi Livni, Ilinka Mitreva, Anna Fotyga and Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma.

It would be greatly appreciated if you could issue this Statement in the form of an official document of the first session of the Human Rights Council.

(Signed): Kolinda GRABAR-KITAROVIĆ
Minister for Foreign Affairs of Croatia

Annex

STATEMENT

**by the Women Ministers of Foreign Affairs and High Officials
on the Participation of Women in political life on the margins
of the 1st session of the Human Rights Council**

We, women ministers, participating at the 1st session of the Human Rights Council, have to raise our voice against all existing forms of discrimination against women including cultural stereotypes and prejudices, and point out the need for ensuring full and targeted attention to end discrimination of women in political and public life.

Creation of the Human Rights Council is providing us with the unique opportunity to locate women's human rights at the heart of its work and to integrate these rights fully in all agenda items.

Realization of the principle of equality of women and men is a precondition for the functioning of any democratic society. This principle has been embodied in the constitutions and laws of many countries and in all key international instruments but its practical realization in political and public life is still far away.

Examining the present political landscape, it is evident that women are very much underrepresented in the political institutions and in public life in general. Even though some progress has been achieved since the introduction of policies and programmes resulting in an increase in women's participation in decision-making processes at the local, national and international levels, there are still economic, social and cultural barriers that limit their active participation.

Women's active participation at all levels of decision-making processes is essential for achieving the goals of gender equality, development and peace and for strengthening of democracy, as well as for the advancement of the society as a whole. We are also strongly convinced that the empowerment of women and their effective participation in all spheres of life are essential tools in the prevention and elimination of gender-based discrimination and all forms of violence against women.

Recalling the framework of international standards of equality and of participation of women and men in public life, including those enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Convention on the Political Rights of Women, we underline that women have, on equal terms with men and without any discrimination, the right to vote in all elections and to be eligible for election, to hold public office and exercise all public functions established by national law.

We take this opportunity to declare our support to the outcome of the 2005 World Summit which reaffirmed that the full and effective implementation of the goals and objectives

of the Beijing Declaration and the Platform for Action is an essential contribution for the achievement of internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals.

In light of the persistent gap between women's de iure and de facto equality, we urge governments to implement effective temporary special measures to accelerate the achievement of women's de facto equality.

The review and amendment of existing electoral laws is a precondition to enhance women's equal participation and we therefore call upon governments to adopt temporary special measures, such as provided for by the general recommendation No. 25 of the CEDAW Committee, including, setting benchmarks, for achieving equitable representation of women in elected positions and assisting women candidates to develop their skills, capacities and expertise. We are deeply convinced that, in the long run, it will result in the development of policies and programmes building a critical mass of women in strategic economic, social and political positions, and thus having a genuine impact on political life of any country.

In this regard, we fully subscribe to strategies aimed at involving men in the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women as well as fostering an enabling environment in decision-making processes at all levels, including measures for reconciliation of family and employment responsibilities.

We express our full commitment to undertake measures to eliminate occupational segregation and gender wage gaps in the labour market, and to develop strategies to eliminate gender stereotypes, including in the education system. We strongly recommend to all governments to set up a statistical system for successful monitoring of the progress of equality in all public sectors.

We, women ministers, will endure in our request for the removal of all barriers in order to achieve practical realization of gender equality in political and public life.

Geneva, 19 June 2006
