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Statement submitted by Women in Europe for a Common Future, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



Statement

Across the diverse United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) region of 56 countries, despite some progress, unequal participation of women and girls persist at all levels of political life. Women are underrepresented at ministerial level and other executive bodies. Women's hold of power and political representation has improved over the years in all the countries (Albania, Armenia, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, North Macedonia, Serbia and Tajikistan) surveyed for a regional report developed in 2020 under the Women2030 programme. The Women 2030 Programme is being implemented in 50 countries across different regions of the world. It is constituted by a coalition of four women and gender network organisations cooperating to realise the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in a gender-equitable and climate-just manner. The coalition has a 5-year framework partnership agreement with the European Commission.

Political representation has been one of the major instances of change for women and one of the easiest to measure for countries. For example, during the 2017 Albanian's election, women comprised 40 per cent of the candidates, and 28 per cent of elected parliamentarians. With an increase of 10 per cent compared to 2013, this share of female representatives is the highest achieved in Albania to date. It was also the first time that the Deputy Prime Minister elected, Senida Mesi, a woman. However, she only kept the position for little more than a year. In the meantime in Moldova, 41.8 per cent of the registered candidates for the parliamentary elections of 2019 were women.

A similar trend appears in all countries in this report. Women made up 12.4 per cent of Serbia's parliament members in 2002 and 35.6 per cent in 2015. However, despite 26 per cent of the Government's members being women, including the Prime Minister, Ana Barnabic, women only represent 6 per cent of the mayors (2018). This stresses a major barrier: while national representation has globally improved, it is not necessarily the case at the local level.

In Georgia, only 15 per cent of parliamentarians are women. The situation is even worse at the local level where women hold no governorship, filling only one mayoral post out of 64 and just 13 per cent of seats in local councils. Furthermore, the latest legislative initiative to enact gender quotas was supported by more than 37,000 Georgian citizens, but Georgia's parliament rejected the bill in March 2018, because it did not receive enough support from Members of Parliament.

In Moldova, an increase of women's participation is noted at the local level. The number of women mayors increased from 18.0 per cent in 2011 to 21.8 per cent in the elections of 2019. This is owing the introduction of the 40 per cent representation quota of "both sexes" in the political and public decision-making process, as well as the distribution of women and men on the party list in the electoral rolls (out of 10 places, 4 places were covered by each of the sexes), with sanctions for the parties that do not comply with these provisions. Programmes were launched to provide trainings on political empowerment for women running for local and parliamentary elections. These programmes targeted women from disadvantaged groups, such as women with disabilities and Roma women to run for local elections.

The Gender Assessments conducted within the Women2030 programme stress similar results: respondents tend to describe women's political participation as low or show less proclivity to support it. Accession to power remains a severe disadvantage for women in all these regions despite governmental and civil society efforts to favour political representation of women.

The Women2030 programmes' Global Report showed that women are often excluded from decision-making in environmental matters and many climate and conservation policies and initiatives do not take into account their needs and preferences. They have lower representation in international climate negotiations, although feminist calls to give women equal voice in decision-making are gaining traction. Countries such as Bolivia, Colombia, Ghana, Nigeria and India explicitly commit to gender mainstreaming in their Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs). In Nigeria, Women2030 partner Women Environmental Programme has worked with the Federal Ministry of Environment to develop a gender and climate change action plan. Often, however, implementation plans are unclear and coordination is a challenge. In India, for example, national commitments on gender and climate do not translate to implementation plans of states, who are responsible for climate action (All India Women Conference, 2017). The picture seems even starker in the area of conservation. In Armenia women's key role in agriculture, herbs and wood collection for energy has not translated into decision-making power, which – especially in the context of illegal logging, has strong implications for sustainable ecosystems, poverty and gender equality. In Latin America biodiversity policies lack gender focus and in some cases SDG 15 implementation plans and reporting are even completely absent.

Structural barriers to women's full and effective participation and decision-making in public life include:

Patriarchal socialisation, gendered social roles and expectations hinder women and girls to enter and pursue a political career. This is further strengthened by religious fundamentalism emerging in some parts of the world.

Temporary affirmative measures, such as quotas, are often limited to parliamentary elections. National laws leave many loopholes that for instance foresee no sanctions for political parties not meeting the quota requirements.

Institutional infrastructure and working practices designed by men do not serve the needs of women and girls. That includes unaffordable or unavailable childcare, inadequate maternity and paternity leave arrangements, etc.

Violence against politically active women and girls includes a wide range of abuse and harassment (in person and online abuse, physical and verbal; direct and indirect). This is coupled with a lack of a legal framework to protect women politicians against all forms of violence.

Lack of an intersectional approach: the absence of inclusive measures to ensure that women and girls from minority groups such as LGBTQIA+, indigenous, Roma, migrant and refugee and IDP women, and women and girls with disabilities, actively and meaningfully participate in politics and other decision-making processes. These women face many different forms of discrimination and they are exacerbated when these women and girls attempt to exercise their right to participation.

Recommendations

Expand the involvement of civil society by providing spaces and supporting an enabling environment for women's rights and feminist civil society organisations to take part in policy processes. This can be political and financial support at the national and regional levels e.g. supporting the UNECE Regional Civil Society Mechanism (UNECE-RCEM) on 2030 Agenda, which enables cross-constituency coordination for regional policy processes. This will further strengthen women's forums and increase their influence.

Introduce legislation on gender quotas for national parliaments as well as local government bodies. This recommendation has been stressed by partners from several

countries (Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Serbia, Armenia) within the Regional Report of the Women2030 programme and requires quotas ranging from 30 to 40 per cent of women in institutions. Some countries, such as Kyrgyzstan, already have quotas on governmental level but none at regional level.

Ensure the implementation of a respective legislation on quotas by monitoring and holding institutions accountable. Hence, there could be a sanction of deregistering candidates who do not respect this provision.

Inform about women's rights is essential and should go hand in hand with monitoring the implementation of existing laws.

Start communication campaigns inciting women to engage in decision-making on all levels and capacity-building and mentoring to provide them with the tools to make it happen are needed.

Promote people-centred and locally rooted approaches, such as small-scale and community based gender-just energy cooperatives: they are an inclusive method to boost women's empowerment and the sustainable energy sector. Within cooperatives women can become members, managers, investors, producers, consumers and beneficiaries. Gender-just energy cooperatives are a way to guarantee women and men an equal voice in the development of energy production (in particular renewable energy).

Ensure that paid labour (in both the formal and informal sector) and unpaid (care) work is equally shared between genders; the value of unpaid care work needs to be taken into account when calculating national GDPs. Social protection systems should include the informal sector, including micro-entrepreneurs and self-employed people, especially the most precarious in domestic, care and services work, including sex workers, to ensure that all people have access to a universal basic income, paid leave, food, and caregiving services.
