

COPENHAGEN DECEMBER 2011

# COUNTRIES IN TRANSITION

OPTIONS FOR  
WOMEN'S POLITICAL  
PARTICIPATION



# COUNTRIES OPTIONS FOR WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN TRANSITION

THE CONFERENCE WAS HELD IN COPENHAGEN, DENMARK

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## CONFERENCE ORGANISING TEAM

Marie Villumsen DANISH INSTITUTE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

Anna Villumsen AFRICA CONTACT

Sara Illeras C. Nicolaisen DANISH INSTITUTE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

Olga Ege GENDERNET

Pia Falk Paarup AFRICA CONTACT

Heather Patterson AFRICA CONTACT

Donatella Calabrò AFRICA CONTACT

## AUTHOR OF THE REPORT

Sara Illeras C. Nicolaisen DANISH INSTITUTE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

## EDITOR

Peter Kenworthy

## GRAPHIC DESIGN

Kit Halding

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## SUMMARY

In a relatively short span of time, many authoritarian and repressive regimes around the world have been replaced with electoral democracies. Nevertheless, the development of a participatory democracy entails much more than simply granting citizens the right to vote. Particularly, there needs to be a broad approach to the developing of an enabling environment for individuals, communities, civic organisations and social movements to engage in political and public life and hold policy and decision-makers accountable. This can contribute to the opening up of democratic spaces where men and women have equal means of participating in issues of governance and service delivery.

### THE CONFERENCE WAS DIVIDED INTO THREE MAIN PARTS:

**Panel 1:** Structures of exclusion - focusing on barriers to political participation

**Panel 2:** Responses to exclusion - focusing on best practises for enhancing the political participation of women

Workshops: Discussions of key challenges and recommendations divided into four themes:

- From global to local civil society cooperation
- Engaging international actors, with particular focus on the UNDP
- From politics of presence to critical influence and action
- From elite driven democracy to broad-based participation

### Structures of exclusion

The panel gave examples of the many barriers to the equal political participation of women, ranging from physical violence, religious and cultural systems and inadequate knowledge of political systems and processes.

In Zimbabwe, state sponsored political violence is used to silence critical or oppositional voices. The violence directly targeting women is consistent with and induced by a perception that it is not proper for women to engage in politics, which adds an extra layer of exclusion for female politicians and activists compared to their male counterparts. In Egypt, religious and cultural perceptions of women as being the 'weaker sex' have placed women in an inferior position, where they are expected to be under male guardianship rather than engaging actively in politics. In Tunisia, women running for parliament have inadequate skills in political campaigning and are further marginalised by the media and civil society ignoring or underreporting the plight and dealings of female politicians.

These challenges are obviously context specific and dissimilar in nature, but all share a common characteristic that is related to the general negative cultural and social perceptions of women. Men are inherently perceived to be agents of change and the main actors in the political arena whereas women are not expected to participate actively and publicly in political processes. These perceptions are used to justify and enforce the exclusion and marginalisation of women from positions of influence.

### Responses to exclusion

The participation of women is intrinsic to any democracy and there have been numerous high level conventions and agreements that have sought to address this issue. Nevertheless, the actual success-rate of these conventions is still regrettably low. The second panel explored some of the possible strategies for greater integration of women in political processes.

Political parties are central gatekeepers to power, and by reviewing their internal regulations and procedures it is possible to tilt the parties' internal mechanisms towards a more equal balance between the influence of men and women. The case of Zimbabwe shows that broader mobilisation of women in popular movements, civil society and political parties needs to be an inclusive process where women, men, families and communities join forces to address governance and service delivery issues. In Tunisia, experiences from the recent election confirmed that targeted education and dialogue with women on elections and democracy has a positive impact on the number of women who vote. The media also plays a key role in terms of the way women are portrayed and in ensuring a balanced coverage of male and female leaders, politicians and experts.

The presentations and discussions demonstrated that it is necessary to address the barriers to the political participation of women at various levels simultaneously. Mobilisation and education of women cannot stand alone, but needs to be accompanied by an opening of opportunities for women to seek influence within political parties, civic organisations and public institutions.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

It is evident from the presentations and workshop discussions that there is no quick fix to securing equal access to influence and power for women and men alike. It is therefore necessary to design long-term strategies to address the barriers for the political participation of women within a broader framework of democratisation, citizen participation and equal access and opportunity to taking part in political and public life. There is also a need to continue analysing and unpacking the cultural and social barriers for women's participation as well as the informal power-dynamics within societies.

### THE RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE CONFERENCE ARE

- Strategies for improving women's political participation should involve men and women in all stages of designing, planning and implementation
- Working directly with education systems, media and journalists is necessary in order to change commonly held attitudes to the political participation of women and perceptions of women and power.
- Grassroots mobilisation and the education of women, in particular in rural areas, should be key elements in initiatives to improve the political participation of women.
- Political parties need to review their internal regulation, in order to improve gender equality and women's access to decision-making processes within their party structures.
- Civil society and intellectual circles play an important role as intermediaries, and there is a need to strengthen this role as well as their use of the forums women engage with.
- Global partnerships and networks should be further developed to include a balance of mutual respect and trust, as well as towards an exchange of knowledge and ideas.
- The UN should broaden its scope to engage in new partnerships with political groups and stakeholder and increase outreach to rural areas.

A comprehensive list of the recommendations made by the four working groups is listed from page 15

## BACKGROUND FOR THE CONFERENCE

In recent years, there has been an increasing international focus on the political participation of women. There is still a long way to go, however, before women are equally represented and have the same influence as men in political processes around the world.

Across the African continent, new futures are being created as dictators are overthrown and transitional governments are re-defining political and governance systems. Egypt has begun the first round of parliamentary elections since Mubarak was toppled, the new Tunisian government is being consolidated, and Zimbabwe will soon be voting on a new constitution, which many hope will lead to a much more inclusive brand of democracy.

Women tend to be left out of the political arena during these processes of state reconfiguration and turmoil, and transition in practise therefore often means a transfer of power from one small group of men to another. The participation of women in these processes is also often impeded in many ways by e.g. discriminatory legislation, patriarchal attitudes towards female participation in issues of governance and political violence.

The political participation of women must be seen within the broader framework of governance, social and cultural systems in which women navigate. Limitations for the participation of women are often symptoms of a democratic deficit in governments, institutions, civic organisations and political parties, where women's access to influence and power is limited. In order to improve the conditions and opportunities for the political participation and influence of women, it is necessary to analyse and address these democratic deficits from the perspective of women themselves.

Organisations in the Global North play a key role in supporting partner organisations in the Global South in processes of political transition, and we believe that this support must include a renewed and strengthened focus on the gender-specific challenges to popular and broad-based democratic participation.

The conference, Countries in Transition: Options for Women's Political Participation, organised by the Danish Institute for Human Rights, Africa Contact, Gendernet, KVINFO and the Danish Institute for Parties and Democracy, brought together a number of leading democracy- and human rights activists, researchers and international organisations from Zimbabwe, Egypt, Tunisia, Sweden and Denmark. They shared their experiences and knowledge of the dynamics that influence the ability of women to contribute positively to shaping the future of their countries, and guided the participants of the conference through discussions on best practices and recommendations for improving the political participation of women in periods of transition and turmoil.

The conference is not to be seen as a separate activity, but as part of our continued efforts to build a stronger knowledge base, to improve and deepen partnerships and to join forces across national borders to make the political participation of women in transitional countries a top priority. The discussions will be continued through the establishment of a working group to further this agenda, as well as through the online platform - International Knowledge Network of Women in Politics, [www.iknowpolitics.org](http://www.iknowpolitics.org).

# WELCOME

BJØRN FØRDE

Director, Danish Institute for Parties and Democracy (DIPD)

At the beginning of the 21st century, more than 95 per cent of the world's countries have granted women the two most fundamental democratic rights: the right to vote and the right to stand for election. Universal suffrage has not guaranteed equal access to, or participation in, political decision-making processes, however. A large number of countries are undergoing processes of transition. New futures are being defined while internal processes of political, governmental and systematic change are taking place, but women tend to be excluded from the political and democratic space. Moreover, they are vulnerable to politically motivated violence such as rape, torture and harassment as a consequence of their participation in politics and society at large.

**THE PURPOSE OF THE CONFERENCE AND THIS REPORT IS TO:**

Identify challenges that specifically affect women, such as politically motivated violence against women and exclusion of women from decision-making processes.

Discuss best practices of how to create an enabling political culture and strategies for mobilising women to seek positions of influence.

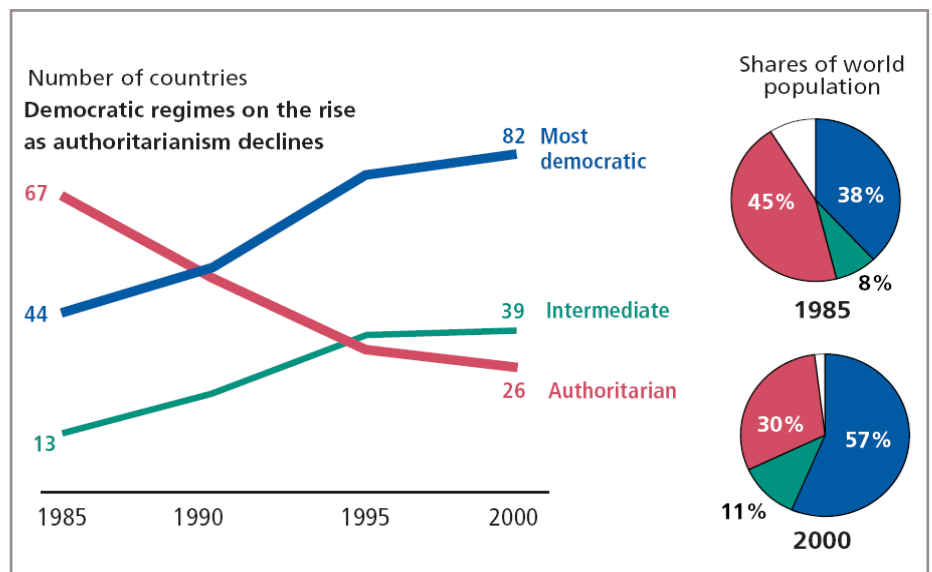
Make recommendations to donors, civil society and human rights activists.

## Countries in transition

The term countries in transition does not necessarily refer to fragile or failed states. Zimbabwe, for instance, has a very strong state. We also have to bear in mind that the countries debated at the conference are very different in terms of socio-political and religious structures.

Currently, the Global South is experiencing a third wave of democratisation, even though this process is happening slowly. Authoritarian regimes are being transformed and democratic changes are on the rise. There is still a need to discuss what we understand by the term democracy, however. Establishing an efficient multiparty system or holding general elections will not necessarily bring about a democratic state, as democracy is also about creating an enabling environment for broad-based political participation, which must self-evidently include women.

Third wave of democracy



## PANEL ONE: STRUCTURES OF EXCLUSION

A multitude of factors and mechanisms contribute to the exclusion of women from political and democratic spaces. Public and private forms of violence prevent women in Zimbabwe from being political active; religious and cultural traditions exclude women from the political scene in Egypt; and a lack of political awareness and civil society support constitute barriers for the political participation of women in Tunisia. These three cases show that even though different countries might have different political, cultural and religious systems, their cultural and social perceptions of women in politics and lack of an enabling political environment for women's participation are nevertheless similar.

## POLITICAL VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN DURING ELECTIONS IN ZIMBABWE

**SPEAKER 1: LOVEMORE MADHUKU**  
Chairperson, National Constitutional Assembly (NCA).

Zimbabwe is currently undergoing a difficult political transition. Zimbabwe is formally a democracy where elections have been held since independence in 1980. Nevertheless, the current Zimbabwean crisis is characterised by a refusal of its leaders to truly embrace democracy. People might thus have the right to vote, but in practice they are not able to exercise this right, which is why Zimbabwe's democratic structures need to be deepened and expanded and why its government must be made accountable to the people.

Women have been a major driving force for change throughout the history of Zimbabwe. They have held, and continue to hold, key positions in political and civic movements and institutions, an example of which is the many Zimbabwean women who took part in the liberation struggle against British colonial rule in the 1970s. Politically motivated violence, and the targeting of women in particular, is therefore seen as an important way of retaining political power for Zimbabwe's political elite.

The current regime specifically targets politically active women with physical and psychological violence, including violence against the children of politically active women. Violence against women affects the whole family and community of these women, as women in Zimbabwe are widely believed to symbolically represent 'the family'. In this way, the persecutors force women to choose between protecting their family and being politically active. An example of this tendency is that women who go to the polling station are often asked: "Why are you here? You ought to be at home looking after your family."

The physical violence against politically active women in Zimbabwe is often accompanied by psychological terror, which helps reinforce the notion that women should not participate in politics. Political power thus ends up being limited to a small group of men within Zimbabwean society, the majority of women being effectively barred from setting the political agenda of Zimbabwe's political future.

### What is the future for Zimbabwe?

The NCA sees as its main goal a new Zimbabwean, people-driven and democratic constitution, which will ensure gender equality within the political institutions. Women play a key role in the achievement of this goal, and the NCA subsequently believes that without their involvement the democratisation process will not be a successful one.



Rally for the Zimbabwean opposition party Movement for Democratic Change, March 2011

## RELIGION: A DRIVING FORCE OR A HINDERING FACTOR?

**SPEAKER 2: MARWA SHARAFELDIN,**  
 PhD fellow, Oxford University

There are many reasons for the exclusion of women from the political scene, including cultural, socio-economic and religious barriers. In Egypt, certain religious concepts shape the common understanding of the role of women, which further cement structures of exclusion. Certain aspects of Islamic legal jurisprudence, such as Wilaya and Qiwama (which by some is interpreted as authority over women and by others as fulfilling the duty of alimony and care) are interpreted within a specific historical, cultural and political framework, and this is used to prevent women from being seen as equal and independent actors in politics.

Religious and cultural perceptions are highly intertwined, and concepts seen as purely religious are in fact often rooted in culture. In Egypt, women are still seen as inferior to men and in need of male protection, regardless of the fact that 25% of Egyptian households have women as the main breadwinners or that women are often the main decision makers in the rural areas. There is thus a discrepancy between reality and the realm of thought. Many women might work outside the home, but religious forces or cultural conservatives deny them any means of attaining political power. There are also numerous examples of political active women being beaten or sexually harassed to prevent them from participating in politics.

The current parliamentary election in Egypt is an example of how women continue to be excluded from politics. While the political parties abide by a recent law requiring them to include at least one woman on their party list, both religious and liberal parties have shown reluctance to place women at the top of their lists thus limiting their chances of election. Also more radical measure to exclude women from the political scene have found their way into the Egyptian election.

It should be stressed, however, that these pictures are not representative of the majority of political parties in Egypt.

### What is the way forward for women's political participation in Egypt?

Women can still play an influential role in Egyptian politics, as exemplified by the female candidate who won a seat in Upper Egypt recently. Egyptian women are important political actors, but conservative forces continuously try and minimise the political participation of women. In response to this, groups of international Muslim feminists, such as "Sisters in Islam" (Musawah), are reinterpreting the Koran, seeking to reconstruct the idea of women and their role in politics. Egyptian women still need to bridge the gap between religious and secular women's groups, however, just as more Egyptian women need to be mobilised from civil society in general.



This election poster carries a picture of a flower instead of a woman

## TUNISIA: MOBILISING WOMEN FOR THE OCTOBER 2011 ELECTION

SPEAKER 3: SOULEF GUESSOUM  
 Arab States' Regional Project Manager, UNDP

After former President Ben Ali was forced into exile in January 2011, there has been a dramatic transition towards democracy in Tunisia that has included a complete overhaul of the political system. In response to this, UNDP Tunisia has focused on supporting key institutions, processes and stakeholders that have had a significant impact on assuring a potentially steady transition towards democracy – including supporting the constitutional process, political parties and the political participation of women.

Key challenges in ensuring the political participation of women in Tunisia are that an overall understanding of Tunisia's political system is lacking, and that most female candidates who ran in the 2011 election were campaigning for the first time. Additionally, Tunisia's female candidates only received 4% of the media coverage during the 2011 election campaign, whereas male candidates received 42%. Female candidates also lack proper support from civil society because many civil society organisations refuse to support them due to the negative public perception of female candidates.

Through the regional project, "Parliaments and crisis prevention," the UNDP opened a summer university that enables women in politics to train other potential female candidates in the preparing and running of electoral campaigns. Participants are trained by national and international experts in how to overcome



Tunisian woman casting her vote in the Tunisian election

campaigning challenges such as how to establish campaigning teams, how to collaborate with civil society groups, and how to communicate with voters and the media. The programme trained 162 women, including 25 female heads of electoral lists. Four of the graduates of this programme were elected to parliament. The programme also trained 45 journalists in equal electoral coverage between men and women.

### Recommendations for the future

Technical support for women interested in pursuing a political career or running electoral campaigns should be increased and begin as early as possible to avoid the hurriedness that many women candidates experienced during recent elections in Tunisia. In addition to this, political parties need to review their internal regulations to improve gender equality, women's access to decision-making within the parties, and guidelines for equal representation within the political parties themselves. As for the role of the Egyptian media, it should provide more space for public discussions on the role of women in politics and analyse experiences from other countries where women have had leading roles in democratic transitions, as well as helping Egyptian women learn specific media skills.



Tunisian women demonstrating, wearing a hat, which is normally worn by men only.

## PANEL DISCUSSION 1

FOLLOWING THE THREE PRESENTATIONS, A PANEL DISCUSSION ENSUED BETWEEN THE PARTICIPANTS OF THE CONFERENCE AND THE SPEAKERS MARWA SHARAFELDIN, LOVEMORE MADHUKU AND SOULEF GUESSOUM.

### **How to combine the secular and non-secular:**

The speakers agreed that conceptual separation between secular and Islamist women can be problematic as they often share similar interests such as access to health care and education. Instead, we should seek to bridge the gap and find common ground between the discourses of Islamic Law and Western human rights discourses that are currently seen as antagonistic. In addition to this, there is a need to redefine our perception of women in society and address women's concerns more directly, as women presently tend to be perceived as passive beneficiaries and not active citizens.

### **The discourse of motherhood:**

In many Sub-Saharan countries, a clear division is made between the family and politics where traditional gender roles are used as a pretext to exclude women from the political scene. Women cannot be good mothers and political active at the same time, it is claimed – a claim that strongly curtails the political participation of women.

### **Quotas for women in politics as a viable solution:**

While some speakers strongly recommended quotas, others emphasised the risks associated with quota systems, especially quota movements associated with political regimes where popular movements can be co-opted by political figures, such as the first lady. When the political figures become discredited after revolutionary changes – so does the quota system, however hard civil society groups have fought to introduce them. This has been the case in Egypt and could also become the case in other countries such as Algeria.



From left: Soulef Guessoum, Lovemore Madhuku og Marwa Sharafeldin.

## PANEL TWO: RESPONSES TO THE EXCLUSION OF WOMEN

The second panel presented cases that focused on solutions and responses to the structures of exclusion of women from political participation. The exclusion of women must be addressed at various levels corresponding to the major challenges in a given context, the panel concluded. There is a need to analyse and address the underlying social and cultural perceptions of women and power as well as the institutional regulations and procedures in e.g. political parties and the media coverage of women in politics. At a more tangible level, protective mechanisms for women in risk of being physically assaulted due to their political involvement need to be established and linked with broader advocacy and lobbying efforts, as the case from Zimbabwe shows. In Egypt, experiences with mobilising women to vote has shown that significant gains can be made through education, but that there is still a need for improved mobilisation and education efforts at all levels of society.

## DEVELOPING AN ENABLING ENVIRONMENT OF WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION

**SPEAKER 1: RUMBIDZAI A. KANDAWASVIKA-NHUNDU**  
Senior Programme Manager, International IDEA

We often speak about transition, but in practice the transfer of political power is usually from one group of men to another group of men. Women's political participation might be intrinsic to any well-functioning democracy, but it is generally an afterthought in such political transitions.

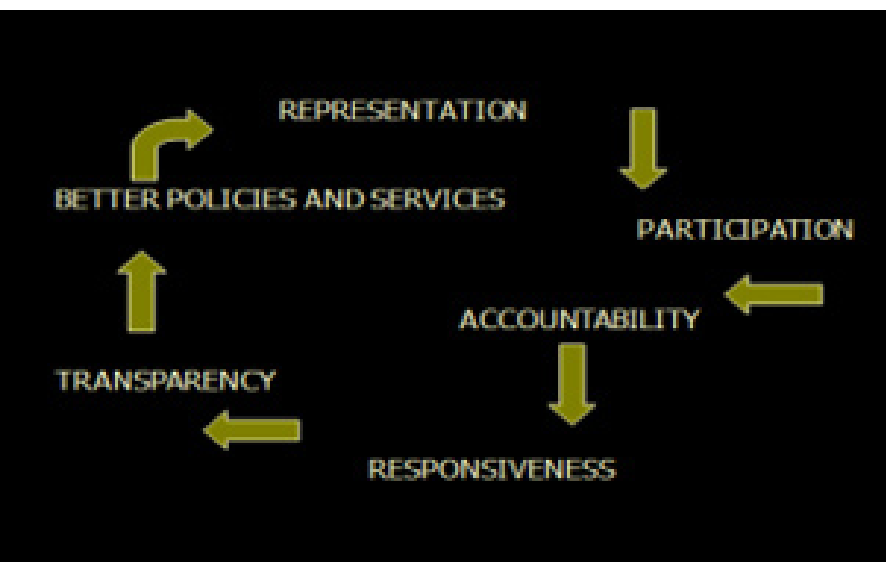
The first challenge is therefore to change the mind-set and attitudes towards the political participation of women and to ask: Do we actually truly value women's participation? There is no shortage of political conventions and agreements that promote the idea of the political participation of women, whereas the actual implementation of these conventions is often lacking.

We often leave the electoral processes to the politicians, but electoral democracy is not tantamount to democracy. The real gatekeepers of power are the political parties and we need to look deeper into their internal regulation and procedures. Many political parties might have women's leagues, but they are problematic in nature, not least as men often still fill the higher positions within the political parties themselves. Additionally, 76 % of the media coverage is given to men, which means that the views of men figure far more prominently than those of women.

### How can we create an environment that ensures the increased political participation of women?

We need to look further into the intra-party processes or the democratic process within the political parties, as they are the real gatekeepers for the political participation of women. The media also play an important role in creating an enabling environment for women's political participation. This means that the media must serve as a driver for democratic change by giving female political representatives the voice they are entitled to and by redefining how it portrays women in politics.

*www.quotaproject.org - Global Database of Quotas for Women (International IDEA). Can we create an enabling environment for the political participation of women through quotas?*



How women's participation is intrinsic to democracy



Launch of the campaign “ACT NOW Against Political Violence, Torture and Rape in Johannesburg, December 2010

## MOBILISING AND SUPPORTING GRASS ROOTS WOMEN IN ZIMBABWE

**SPEAKER 2: MUNJODZI MUTANDIRI**

International Coordinator, National Constitutional Assembly (NCA).

The political participation of women is not only about women being represented in high-level positions. It is in fact much more important to mobilise women at grassroots level to actively take part in improving their lives locally, as well as to contribute to the political debate and discourse at the national level.

In Zimbabwe, political violence against women is used to prevent women and their families and communities from participating meaningfully in politics. Zimbabwe’s political culture is characterised by widespread use of state sponsored political violence. Since independence, violence against the opposition and its supporters has been used to consolidate the political power of the elite, particular during elections. The first large-scale campaign of violence happened immediately after independence, where 20.000 people were killed in the Matabeleland and Midlands regions. Following a no-vote at a constitutional referendum in 2000, the violence again escalated and culminated in the Presidential elections in 2008, which were marred by extremely high levels of violence and resulted in the establishment of a transitional power-sharing government.

Even within this violent political environment, women have always played a key role in the pro-democracy movement and have therefore become direct targets of violence. Women are targeted at two levels: due to their own involvement in political parties or civic organisations and because of politically active family members. The violence includes physical attacks, abductions, torture and rape, but psychological harassment, such as the threat of violence, is also widespread.

One of the worst examples of such violence was a ZANU-PF youth militia forcing family members to have sex with each other. Such acts of deliberate cruelty contribute to the breaking down of communities and leads to people withdrawing from the political arena and refusing to participate in politics. Political violence against women at the local level thus represents a democratic problem towards broad-based citizen participation in national issues.

In response to this, the NCA launched the campaign “ACT NOW Against Political Violence, Torture and Rape” in 2010 in cooperation with other grassroots-based and advocacy organisations. The campaign has established protective mechanisms and mobilised women and men to stand up against political violence and continue to demand democratisation in Zimbabwe.

Such protective mechanisms include the education of key individuals in the grassroots structures of the NCA in monitoring and documenting political violence, as well as the establishment of mechanisms for providing legal, medical and counselling support for the victims of violence. This documentation is recorded in a database and used for advocacy and lobby purposes. The promotion of women’s participation is addressed through grassroots workshops that encourage communities to unite against political violence, and through mass mobilisation events spearheaded by leading female activists and politicians. These activities give communities a voice to speak up against political violence, as well as make possible the addressing of broader issues such as the accountability of politicians towards the people of Zimbabwe.

### How can we support politically active women in Zimbabwe?

Political violence is not just about women, but also about giving individuals and communities an equal opportunity in shaping the future of their communities and country. This is why men must also play a key role in the fight for women’s rights and the broader struggle for community participation in political processes at both the local and national level. There is a need to analyse and address this issue in a broader framework of equal opportunities for all Zimbabweans to take part in politics and public affairs.

*Read more about political violence in Zimbabwe:*

[www.researchandadvocacyunit.org](http://www.researchandadvocacyunit.org) (RAU)

[www.akcampaign.wordpress.com](http://www.akcampaign.wordpress.com) (Africa Contact and NCA)

## MOBILISING WOMEN FOR THE OCTOBER 2011 ELECTION IN TUNISIA

**SPEAKER 3: LYLIA BEN HAMIDA**

**Tunisia Association for Management & Social Stability (TAMSS)**

Tunisia was the first Arab country to: Write a constitution (1861); Abolish polygamy and repudiation (1956); Grant Women the Right to Vote (1956) and Legalise abortion (1973).

Nevertheless, many people in Tunisia were generally disillusioned before the elections in October 2011. From July to October 2011, the Tunisia Association for Management and Social Stability (TAMSS) organised an eight-day-long training programme for community leaders on citizenship and political awareness in three regions of Tunisia; Tunis, Sidi Bouzid and Gafsa. These leaders subsequently took to the streets to discuss the issue of voting with the population at large and advocate people's participation in the upcoming elections. From August to October 21, these leaders approached and spoke to 3470 citizens in Tunis, 918 in Sidi Bouzid and 813 in Gafsa – an impressive number as the authorities tend to suspect organisations of political propagandising when they approach people in the streets.

During these discussions, it was discovered that the most successful way of involving people was to approach women at weekly markets, as it is otherwise difficult to engage women in the rural areas. TAMSS also visited university institutions, post offices etc. TAMSS was not able to hold larger meeting in public spaces, as the organisation was not able to get an authorisation from the government to do so.

TAMSS succeeded in convincing a great number of women to vote after these discussions, although the large regional diversity in Tunisia meant that success was unevenly spread. Some regions were much more open for debates about election, mainly due to the superior levels of education in these areas.

Generally, though, it would seem that the percentage of those who chose not to vote is decreasing, although a large proportion of especially young Tunisians did not vote. Many of these were politically active during the revolution but are now extremely disappointed with its outcome. One of their main concerns is the high unemployment rate, for which there is no quick or easy solution.

## PANEL DISCUSSION TWO

AS IN THE FIRST PANEL, THE THREE PRESENTATIONS WERE FOLLOWED BY A PANEL DISCUSSION BETWEEN THE PARTICIPANTS OF THE CONFERENCE AND THE SPEAKERS OF THE PANEL.

In Tunisia, the elite excluded the youth from the revolution, even though the youth movement were the instigators of the political transition that followed it. This meant that the voices and views of Tunisia's youth were not included in the democratisation process. There are no young people in Tunisia's new constitutional assembly and political parties tend to exclude both young people and women. The situation in Egypt is similar to that of Tunisia albeit even more violent. Here, the military has virtually taken over the reins of power and Egypt's youth movements have been detached from the political scene.

In general, we therefore need to be critical of the idea of democracy as a panacea (a universal remedy). Multiparty systems and general elections do not necessarily lead to democracy as such. Instead we need to ask: how does political change come about and how do we support the democratisation processes that are hopefully the result of these changes?

# THE USE OF VIRTUAL NETWORKING TO FOSTER THE POLITICAL PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN

**PIYOO KOCHAR**  
 Project Manager, the International Knowledge Network of Women in Politics (iKNOW Politics).

Information technologies such as radio, video, the Internet and social networks are increasingly becoming part of the political life of women around the world as they enable politically active women to connect and share experiences worldwide. Historically, women have been part of many powerful political transitions but are currently politically marginalised in many ways and in many countries. Knowledge networks open up new ways of women freely articulating their political experiences and concerns. As well as being a tool for women's political participation and empowerment, information technologies thus provide new political and democratic spaces for women, as well as potentially helping to change widespread stereotypical views of women.



Piyoo Kochar speaking about iKNOW Politics

iKNOW Politics was started in 2007 and is a partnership between International IDEA, the UNDP, UN Women, the Nation Democratic Institute (NDI) and the Intra-Parliamentary Union.

As a global knowledge network, iKNOW Politics provides a forum for information and knowledge exchange through online tools as well as through a range of discussion circles. These discussion circles are designed to engage users and members, such as women leaders and political candidates, in discussions about the political participation of women. Members are invited to initiate new discussion circles and contribute to an ongoing discussion at the international knowledge network of women in politics, [www.iknowpolitics.org](http://www.iknowpolitics.org).

*Recent examples from the virtual platform, iKNOW Politics:*

*"It is very encouraging, getting connected with women in other African countries and across the world". Member of political party, Democratic Republic of the Congo.*

*"It provides tools and knowledge that empowers me in my political ambitions, as well as in my role as an advocate for women in Papua New Guinea". Political candidate, Papua New Guinea.*

# RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

DURING THE CONFERENCE, FOUR WORKSHOPS WERE ESTABLISHED TO DISCUSS KEY CHALLENGES AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE POLITICAL PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN WITH DONORS, CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS AND HUMAN RIGHTS ACTIVISTS.

## WORKSHOP 1: FROM GLOBAL TO LOCAL: STRENGTHENING THE LINK BETWEEN NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL CIVIL SOCIETY

FACILITATORS: LOVEMORE MADHUKU AND MUNJODZI MUTANDIRI (NCA).

Structures of exclusion differ from country to country and local challenges therefore need to be addressed by local actors who have country-specific knowledge, expertise and networks. Stand-alone, one-size-fits-all interventions by international actors without close cooperation with local partners are consequently often unsuccessful and can easily have a negative impact on the mobilisation of local women. Local actors, on the other hand, have the necessary sensitivity to the local power-dynamics, political culture and barriers for mobilising women.

In this workshop, Lovemore and Munjodzi guided discussions about:

- How does civil society in the North and South best coordinate their efforts to improve the political participation of women?
- How can civil society ensure that mobilisation, campaigns and advocacy strategies at the international level are rooted in specific national contexts?
- What should the main priorities for civil society organisations, seeking to support their national partners in countries in transition, be?

The participants came up with the following key challenges and recommendations:

Key challenges for strengthening the links between national and international civil society organisations

- The issue of women's participation is a political issue and is difficult to address.
- Organisations in the Global North and South do not necessarily have the same perspective on the political participation of women.

- Being open to new ideas from the Global North can be difficult for civil society organisations in the Global South.
- Civil society organisations in the Global North are sometimes too eager to impose political changes in the Global South, which can harm the local democratisation process from below.
- It is important that we do not perceive women as one homogeneous group.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

- We need to find a balance, where the cooperation between civil society organisations from the Global North and South can be based on mutual respect. Civil society in the North should promote the political participation of women in the South, but in close cooperation with local organisations and perspectives.
- Partnerships should be based on an exchange of ideas and not just cash flows. Civil society organisations in the North should provide technical expertise, knowledge and resources. Partnerships can be consolidated by letting people from Northern organisations work for civil society organisations in the South.
- Civil society organisations in the Global South should be open to new ideas and perspectives on the political participation of women from their partners in the Global North.
- Northern civil society organisations should not be afraid to introduce new ideas and perspectives to Southern partners.
- Northern and Southern civil society organisations should approach the general public regarding women's participation – not just political parties and intellectual circles.
- It is important to establish a stronger link between women's participation and other relevant issues.
- We must be patient. Northern civil society organisations should accept that political change is a process that takes time. In many countries, the political participation of women is a very sensitive subject, which can easily be perceived as an imperialist idea. Northern organisations must therefore recognise and respect that it is a difficult process, which needs to be locally rooted.

## WORKSHOP 2: ENGAGING INTERNATIONAL ACTORS: THE ROLE OF THE UN IN PROMOTING WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION

FACILITATORS: MARWA SHARAFELDIN, PHD FELLOW, OXFORD UNIVERSITY AND SOULEF GUESSOUM, UNDP ARAB STATES' REGIONAL PROJECT MANAGER.

Encouraging and promoting the active participation of women in political and transitional processes requires interventions which address the root causes of the exclusion and marginalisation of women. International actors play an important role in mainstreaming gender in programming and designing specific inter-

ventions that promote the active participation of women in political and transitional processes.

In this workshop Marwa and Soulef guided discussions about:

- How can the UN help put the issue of the political participation of women on the international development and human rights agenda?
- How can the UN best support and coordinate its efforts with local actors and initiatives?
- What should the main priorities for the UN's interventions in relation to the political participation of women be?

The participants came up with the following key challenges and recommendations:

Key challenges for the UN in promoting the political participation of women

- Difficulties in coordination between international multilateral and bilateral donors due to the lack of overall rules of coordination between actors at different levels.
- The UNDP work with a variety of groups and therefore also potentially empower groups that are not in favour of democracy.
- Support of governments versus support of civil society groups. It can sometimes be difficult for the UNDP to cooperate with local groups because such cooperation needs to be approved by the central government.
- It can be difficult to establish clear indicators to measure the political participation of women.
- Only a minority of women worldwide have access to the Internet or know how to use Internet platforms to bring about political changes.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- The UN should be open to new partnerships and organisations.
- The UN should secure an effective communication and coordination among UN agencies and other international and local organisations.
- The UN should focus on political groups instead of political parties.
- There is a need to develop a code of ethics for UN activities.
- There is a need to increase the intermediary role of civil society organisations.
- There is a need for the translation, interpretation, training and local framing of UN activities. The UN should reach out to groups in rural areas, which are not easily accessible, and support multiple stakeholders from all areas.

## WORKSHOP 3: FROM POLITICS OF PRESENCE TO CRITICAL INFLUENCE AND ACTION

FACILITATOR: RUMBIDZAI A. KANDAWASVIKA-NHUNDU, SENIOR PROGRAMME MANAGER, GLOBAL PROGRAMME (DEMOCRACY AND GENDER), INTERNATIONAL IDEA

Debates about the political participation of women tend to focus narrowly on women's representation in high level positions, such as parliaments, ministries and company boards. However, representation does not necessarily translate into power and influence on setting priorities, developing policies and decision-making processes. There is a need to move from a narrow focus on quota systems to broader strategies for addressing root causes of uneven power-relations between women and men.

In this workshop Rumbidzai guided a discussion about:

- How can we ensure that analyses of the political participation of women consider the informal power-dynamics in the political arena?
- How do we challenge and encourage men to support increased political influence of women in high-level positions?
- What can be done to transform the role of women from presence to power?

The participants came up with the following key challenges and recommendations:

Key challenges for women's critical influence and action

- There are two big challenges at the core of the power dynamics of gender: socialisation and patriarchy.
- Boys and girls are socialised into specific roles of womanhood and manhood where women are associated with the family and household while men are associated with action and power. The use of symbols in the media, schooling system and the entertainment industry reinforce these perceptions.
- In many countries, gender roles are shaped by deeply rooted traditions, practises and a culture of patriarchy, where men are perceived as the decision-makers and the role of women is confined to supporting their husbands and male relatives.
- Women have limited opportunities to engage with informal power-dynamics and decision-making mechanisms.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

It is necessary to investigate and analyse the power-dynamics in families and communities to unpack the underlying factors that shape socialisation and patriarchy. From this knowledge base, specific strategies can be developed to redefine the perceptions, symbols and mechanisms of power. In this regard, it is essential to educate and mobilise women to improve the understanding and

develop the skills to address the underlying root causes that prevent women from meaningful political participation.

- Mobilise and educating women at grassroots level
- Improve the national curriculum and teaching methods to avoid reproduction of male dominance of power
- Work directly with the media and journalists to change patriarchal portrayals of women and power

## **WORKSHOP 4: TRANSFORMING DEMOCRACY FROM AN URBAN ELITE PHENOMENON TO A BROAD-BASED SYSTEM WHERE WOMEN PARTICIPATE AS EQUALS**

FACILITATOR: LYLIA BEN HAMIDA, PROJECT MANAGER, TAMSS

Democratisation entails a number of processes, such as constitutional reform, development of institutions, and accountability mechanisms. Furthermore, it is often necessary to develop and strengthen the role of civil society as a critical and constructive watchdog that can counteract the power of the state. The ability to participate and make demands in these processes requires an advanced level of knowledge, networks and ability. Many women, particularly in rural areas, are not able to follow the often complex and technical debates on transitional processes due to low levels of education, patriarchal economic and social priorities and traditions that discourage women from partaking in policy debates. Many women are therefore effectively barred from participating in shaping the future of their own countries.

In this workshop Lylia guided a discussion about:

- How can analyses and debates about important national issues be made comprehensible to all women?
- How can women from all levels of society be able to actively take part and make their voices be heard in national debates?
- What can be done to bridge the gap between the urban elite and the rural women?

Following the discussions in workshop 4, the participants came up with a number of key challenges and recommendations:

Key Challenges for broadening women's participation

- Social, economic and cultural structures: education levels, illiteracy rates, lack of political cultural, traditional gender roles.

- Daughters and sons are raised differently – girls are raised to not take active part in politics.
- “Forgotten” rural areas without economic investment and development.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- Increase the involvement and participation of women in politics: reach out to different groups of women, including urban elites and rural women, through women's organisations, but also through men and male-dominated groups.
- Increase the involvement of men. Urge male representatives to act on the issue of women's involvement in politics and convey to them the advantages of women participating in politics. Ensure that men in power understand the benefits of diversity and gender equality.
- Ensure the economic empowerment of women.
- Change male and female attitudes/mentality towards women in power.

How this can be done: Find respected locals, such as doctors and teachers, and reach out to local communities. They are often seen as more credible than urban elites from large cities in the eyes of many in the rural areas. Find allies, such as members of parliament and other political institutions at various levels.

# LIST OF SPEAKERS

## **BJØRN FØRDE (CONFERENCE FACILITATOR)**

Present Director of the Danish Institute for Parties and Democracy and former Director of the UNDP Oslo Governance Centre, Representative of the UNDP in Botswana and member of the Board of the Danish International Development Agency (DANIDA). He has a degree in political science from the University of Copenhagen, and from 1975 to 2002 he held various positions at the Danish NGO Mellemløst Samvirke (MS), including that of Secretary General from 1995-2002. He has also published more than 25 books on a broad variety of development issues, mostly for educational purposes, as well as fiction for children and young people.

## **LOVEMORE MADHUKU**

Founding member and current Chairperson of the National Constitutional Assembly (NCA). He has been part of the struggle for a democratic constitution in Zimbabwe for many years, not least because of his strong roots in the labour and democracy movements. He has pursued his vision of a democratic Zimbabwe, and the NCA's vision of a genuinely people-driven constitution, regardless of numerous physically violent, legal and verbal attacks on his person by the Zimbabwean authorities.

## **LYLIA BEN HAMIDA**

Co-founder and Project Manager at the Tunisian Association for Management and Social Stability TAMSS, responsible for the Citizenship, Women's Empowerment and Youth Entrepreneurship. Through the 'Step by Step towards Democracy'-project, supported by Danish NGO KVINFO, TAMSS set up a citizen awareness programme to encourage women's participation in the July 2011 elections in Tunisia. Her educational background is in business and banking studies and she has been engaged in a broad spectre of initiatives, such as community needs assessments and micro-credit schemes.

## **MARWA SHARAFELDIN**

Currently writing her Doctorate in Philosophy in Law at the Law Faculty of Oxford University. Her research is focused on the efforts of Egyptian NGOs in reforming Muslim family law by using both Islamic law and international human rights law. Here she examines the process of interaction and re-interpretation that happens when these two bodies of law come into contact with the work of NGOs. She investigates how this process transforms the understanding and appropriation of certain elements in both Islamic law and international human rights law, which eventually create breakthroughs, compromises and silences in the family law reform efforts of NGOs. During her time at Oxford, Marwa has co-founded several Egyptian NGOs, including the Network for Women's Rights Organisations and the Young Arab Feminist Network. She also does work for the international Musawah movement for Muslim family law reform, and is generally active on issues related to women and gender in the Middle East.

## **MUNJODZI MUTANDIRI**

Coordinator of the National Constitutional Assembly's (NCA) International Office in Johannesburg and the driving force behind the NCA's international campaign, "ACT NOW against political violence". He has been part of the Zimbabwean student- and democracy movements, and active in human rights- and political issues in Zimbabwe for over a decade. In addition to his work with mobilisation and campaigning, he has done research on extractive industries, development and politics.

## **PIYOO KOCHAR**

Project Manager at the International Knowledge Network of Women in Politics, iKNOW Politics. iKNOW is an interactive network of women in politics who share experiences, access resources and advisory services, and network and collaborate on issues of common interest. Piyoo Kochar has extensive experience in working with development communication, using emerging technologies to develop programmes, which focus on women's issues, young people, and public health. She specialises in the development of programmes and the implementation thereof.

## **RUMBIDZAI A. KANDAWASVIKA-NHUNDU**

Senior Programme Manager, Global Programme (Democracy and Gender) at the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA), Sweden. She is a gender and development practitioner with hands-on experience at the national, regional and international level. Her expertise includes knowledge transfer and training on gender mainstreaming in political institutions (including parliaments, democracy and governance processes and systems), management of electoral processes from a gender perspective and Additional Empowerment Strategies-design and -facilitation for women in politics.

## **SOULEF GUESSOUM**

Regional Project Manager for the Arab countries at the UNDP, specialising in developing the capacity of parliaments to prevent conflict. She spearheaded the UNDP's support of political parties and women candidates in Tunisia during the elections of the constitutional assembly in October 2011. Previously, she was Project Manager at the UNDP's parliament project in Algeria and a Senior Programme Officer with the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI), working mainly with elections, political parties, media and women in politics. She has also worked as a news journalist, TV journalist and radio journalist.

# CONTRIBUTING ORGANISATIONS

## AFRICA CONTACT

Africa Contact is a solidarity movement rooted in the Danish anti Apartheid movement. The organisation was founded in 1978 by a number of Danish political parties, trade unions and other organisations in order to unite the efforts against colonialism and suppression in Southern Africa. With the end of apartheid, Africa Contact started supporting democratic and people-driven movements in Southern Africa and is currently deeply involved in the struggle for democracy, social and economic justice and human rights in the region. Africa Contact has two main areas of focus: (1) capacity building and empowerment of grass-roots movements in Africa, and (2) political lobbying and campaigning. Africa Contact seeks to improve the mobilisation and organisation of its partner organisations in Africa to enable them to take part in national and international political and economic processes. The mission of Africa Contact is to express the views of its African partner organisations and thereby change public opinion and contribute to fair governmental policies.

**Africa Contact**  
 Blågårdsgade 7B, st. th  
 2200 Copenhagen N  
 Phone: +45 35 35 92 32  
 Email: sak@afrika.dk

## DANISH INSTITUTE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

The Danish Institute for Human Rights (DIHR) is Denmark's National Human Rights Institution (NHRI). It is one of the world's leading NHRIs, playing an important role in the advance and implementation of human rights, nationally as well as internationally.

DIHR implements human rights programmes in partnership with state institutions and civil society organisations in Denmark and internationally, as well as supporting a number of organisations in their work to promote human rights. DIHR is a rights-based organisation that is rooted in the internationally recognised human rights conventions, such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, other UN conventions and the conventions of the European Council. DIHR is a member of a number of national and international networks.

**Danish Institute for Human Rights**  
 Strandgade 56  
 DK 1401 Copenhagen K  
 Phone: + 45 32 69 88 88  
 Email: center@humanrights.dk

## GENDERNET

Gendernet is a network of 50 Danish NGOs, as well as of numerous institutions and resource persons. It was established in 2006 to contribute to the joint coordination and sharing of gender and rights-based issues in development work. Gendernet seeks to

improve the capacity of Danish NGO's in addressing gender and rights-based issues by strengthening awareness and commitment and sharing knowledge between organisations. This is done through a range of different activities, including an up-to-date homepage, newsletters, an electronic library, and training events. Additionally, Gendernet arranges public meetings, seminars and thematic groups.

**Gendernet**  
 Nørregade 15  
 DK-1165 Copenhagen K  
 Tel: (+45) 33 18 78 78  
 Email: konsnet@dca.dk

## KVINFO, THE DANISH CENTRE FOR GENDER, EQUALITY AND ETHNICITY

The key role of KVINFO is to carry out research and to document and disseminate information and findings about gender, equality and ethnicity in Denmark and around the world, and in doing so, to contribute to the development of a more equal and less sexist world. In the international arena, KVINFO's activities include accumulating and sharing knowledge and information about mentor programmes for ethnic women; creating a platform for dialogue and debate about gender and women's rights in Denmark and the Middle East; and supporting the establishment of a library and document centre for gender and development at the University of Sana'a in Yemen.

**KVINFO**  
 Christians Brygge 3  
 1219 Copenhagen K  
 Phone: + 45 33 13 50 88  
 Fax: + 45 33 14 11 56  
 E-mail: kvinfo@kvinfo.dk

## DANISH INSTITUTE FOR PARTIES AND DEMOCRACY

The Danish Institute for Parties and Democracy (DIPD) was established in May 2010. The purpose of DIPD is to strengthen and complement Danish democracy assistance, particularly through supporting political parties and multi-party systems in a selection of developing countries in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Middle East. The activities of DIPD are carried out together with Danish political parties and other Danish stakeholders. The institute supports inter-party cooperation and capacity building of democratic parties in developing countries; supports independent media, think-tanks and non-state political organisations in promoting a democratic political culture and multi-party systems; engages in cooperation agreements with local partners in developing countries; and cooperates with international institutions and international partners on issues of democratisation.

**Danish Institute for Parties and Democracy**  
 Strandgade 56  
 1401 Copenhagen K  
 Phone: + 45 32 69 89 89  
 E-mail: dipd@dipd.dk