



“The Role of Global and Regional Actors to Advance Gender Equality and Political Empowerment of Women”

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*Welcoming address by the Chair of the Working Group on Women and Democracy of
the Community of Democracies*

Ms. Audra Čiapienė, Minister Counsellor, MFA of Lithuania

Distinguished guests and panelists, ladies and gentlemen,

It is my pleasure to welcome you on behalf of the CoD Working Group on Women and Democracy to this panel discussion on Advancing Women’s Political Participation. I would also like to express my special thanks to the Baha’i International Community for hosting us in this beautiful building.

I would like to start with expressing our appreciation to our partner organizations – UNDP and International IDEA. Their involvement and effective collaboration have made this project a reality. More importantly, I would like to thank the Republic of Korea for its significant contribution to supporting the regional consultations that took place between 2016-2017. These important gatherings created a conducive atmosphere for dialogue and to gaining an in-depth understanding of the root causes of gender inequality.

The results of the conferences have demonstrated similarities and differences across regions in approaches to and obstacles for women’s political participation. No region is in a perfect situation, although it should be recognized that there has been an undeniable increase in gender equality over the last few decades as international women’s rights norms are becoming increasingly acknowledged globally. The United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) - a truly international bill of rights for women – has been ratified by 189 states.

Despite this progress, we still see many reasons for concern. The de facto status of women worldwide has not improved sufficiently, in part due to deeply rooted patriarchal and discriminatory practices that continue to have a negative effect on women and girls, differently and disproportionately to that on men and boys. Poverty, financial crises, conflicts, and gender-based violence also more significantly affect women, preventing them from a secure and dignified life, lowering job and career opportunities, and thus further reinforcing gender inequalities.

The estimated annual cost of gender-based violence against women constitutes around 2 percent of the global GDP, which is more than most of the world spends on education, defense or development aid. We cannot yet calculate the costs of excluding women from decision-making and political life, but we can expect it to be very high, which is why countering gender-based violence against women and girls is a priority of the President of Lithuania, Dalia Grybauskaitė.



Today, the policy guidebook on how to effectively advance women's political participation will be presented. This comes as the result of the consultations phase of the project. The next goal: implementation of these recommendations. How do we make progress in Asia, in Africa or in Europe? How do we strengthen the political will of governments to make improvements in women's political participation? How do we reduce traditional and cultural barriers that place women and girls in disadvantaged positions?

We do not have any other means but dialogue, targeted actions and the sharing of good practices. These are democratic means to facilitate change. We must continue to make progress, involving all members of the broader public: women as well as men, old and young, rich and poor.

We should make better use of existing human rights mechanisms, namely the Universal Periodic Review of Human Rights Council.

We should assist regional organizations, which need stronger mandates and the political support of Member States to implement their policies and mechanisms for promoting and enforcing gender equality in their regions.

We should also pay more attention to the underlying reasons for the lack of willingness to participate in politics and lack of self-confidence amongst women. In managing this issue, it is important that we communicate the importance of early education and help young people equally to take responsibility for their future starting from their first years at school, to amend school curricula, to train teachers, and to talk with parents. It is not easy to ensure a proper education, in particular for a disadvantaged segment of society. Let us analyze good experiences in cultivating political interest amongst girls and involving them in politics.

We should learn from good examples, adapt their methods, and expand to other regions.

The Community of Democracies should use all available soft means to motivate and inspire women and men, and to spread the message that democracy without women is only half of a democracy.

Finally, let me assure you that the Working Group on Women and Democracy of the Community of Democracies will continue its work on how to better advance political empowerment of women by systematically implementing the recommendations of the policy guidebook through dialogue with governments and civil society.

I wish you a fruitful discussion. Thank you.