



COMMUNITY
OF DEMOCRACIES

Statement by Secretary General Thomas E. Garrett on International Women's Day

Today we are celebrating International Women's Day. This day is an opportunity for reflection on achievements in women's empowerment and for a call to address the challenges still in place on the way towards achieving gender equality in all aspects of life.

In many countries, we have witnessed significant progress in women's empowerment in both the private and public spheres. More women than ever before are graduating from universities, finding full-time employment and holding high-level positions in business and politics. Inspirational female leaders are the drivers of change in their communities and countries. But at the same time, 70 years since the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights declared equal and indispensable rights for all women and men, discrimination and violence still remain widespread and are experienced by women from all walks of life across the world.

Advancing women's political participation at all levels of governance is a vital step that must be taken towards gender equality and elimination of all forms violence against women. The political arena remains one of the most difficult public spheres for women to enter and only a minority of leadership positions in political parties, parliaments and governments across the world are held by women. Women must be able to fully participate in the decision-making process in local, national, regional and global institutions.

Democracy and women's rights form a mutually reinforcing relationship, with gender equal societies being the foundation of strong and sustainable democracies. As highlighted in the Community of Democracies' Democracy and Security report, higher levels of gender equality are strongly correlated with a nation's relative state of peace, its domestic security environment, and lower levels of aggression towards other states. As the Community of Democracies and our partners in the international community continue to assist countries undergoing democratic transition, we must commit to making gender equality an explicit goal of democracy building, ensuring the participation of women in politics, peace processes, conflict resolution mechanisms and political negotiations.

Now is the critical time to increase efforts to expand opportunities for women in politics including promoting their leadership in traditionally male-dominated areas such as foreign affairs and security. It is the time for women to play a greater role in peacebuilding and reconciliation processes, which have higher rates of success when women are meaningfully involved. It is also the time to engage more male leaders to promote women's political empowerment and emphasize zero tolerance towards gender-based violence and discrimination.

The Community of Democracies' Working Group on Women and Democracy will continue to assist governments and civil society organizations in efforts to advance women's inclusion and empowerment in politics, recognizing that gender equality is an integral element to achieve each and every of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

The Community of Democracies supports inclusive democratic institutions as a fundamental value outlined in the Warsaw Declaration and is committed to the advancement of women's rights and gender equality as a universal democratic value. On this International Women's Day, we recognize the tremendous progress that has been made, and call on all countries of the world to recognize that women's rights are human rights, and human rights are women's rights.