

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

Since its inception nearly two decades ago, the Community of Democracies, in line with its mission to promote and strengthen democracy worldwide, has actively supported advancing women's participation in public life. As outlined in the Community's Strategic Plan for 2018-2023, gender equality is one of the three cross-cutting themes mainstreamed into all activities undertaken by the Community.

We cannot build strong sustainable democracies without women's political participation nor can we build sustainable peace without women's inclusion. The Community's most recent efforts towards advancing women's political empowerment focused specifically on two areas: the inclusion of women in sustaining peace and the role of women in preventing and countering violent extremism - both of which are crucial in today's world scarred by acts of extremism and conflict in different parts of the world.

Governing Council Member States of the Community of Democracies lead the world in promoting and implementing women's inclusion through such actions in 2019 as new gender parity laws to development of foreign policy explicitly pursuing gender goals to increased numbers of women in public office. There is still a long way to go. The evidence shows that peacebuilding and reconciliation processes are more durable when women are meaningfully involved but in practice not enough progress has been made to achieve women's inclusion in this area, despite commitments in various international agreements and resolutions. To highlight that gender equality is a powerful force for conflict prevention, countering violent extremism, building and sustaining peace, the Community's recent activities under the project 'Engaging Women in Sustaining Peace' provided a platform to share best practices from across different continents and outline recommendations for policy makers.

The Community of Democracies remains fully committed to expanding inclusive participation in democratic processes and will continue to contribute towards advancing women's political engagement at all levels of governance. On today's International Women's Day, let me emphasize that successful democratic transitions, rebuilding war-torn societies, and ensuring sustainability of our democracies cannot be fully achieved without the meaningful inclusion of women. Working together towards a more peaceful and just world means working together to achieve a gender equal world.