Closing the gaps on Women’s Political Participation and Representation and the Post-2015 Development Agenda

Date and Time: Friday, 13 March 2015, 10:00 am-11:15 am
Venue: Conference Room 11 (GA Building)
United Nations Headquarters, New York

Organised by the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA)
in partnership with the Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy (NIMD)

10:00-10:05 am: Introductory Remarks
Massimo Tommasoli, Permanent Observer for International IDEA to the UN

10:05-10:15 am: Participation and Leadership of Women in Politics in Latin America
Pilar Tello, Gender Coordinator for LAC International IDEA

10:15-10:30 am: Video: “Critical influence and actions - Voices of women in Kenya and Tunisia”

10:30-10:40 am: Participation and Leadership of Women in Politics in Kenya
Njeri Kabeberi, Director, Centre for Multiparty Democracy, Kenya

10:40-10:50 am: Participation and Leadership of Women in Politics in Tunisia
Donia Ben Romdhane, Senior Advisor Democracy and Gender, West Asia and North Africa Regional Office, International IDEA

10:50-11:10 am: Interactive Dialogue

11:10-11:15 am: Observations and Conclusions
Wouter Dol, Programme Manager, Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy

There is a growing consensus in the current process on the post-2015 development agenda on the relevance of gender equality for the achievement of an ambitious sustainable development agenda. A stand-alone SDG#5 “Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls” will be a key element of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) framework. At the same time, a gender perspective should be mainstreamed throughout the SDGs framework and the post-2015 agenda. In addition, the disaggregation of data by gender is another important element of the follow-up and review mechanisms for ensuring effective monitoring and democratic accountability at the national, regional and global level.

The shift from the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) to the SDGs framework in the area of gender equality and political participation and representation is an important one. The MDGs took
into account the “Proportion of seats held by women in national parliament” as an indicator from which to measure Target 3A on the elimination of gender disparities in education, within MDG#3 to “Promote gender equality and empower women”.

Since 2000 the MDGs Report 2014 has noted that “women’s political participation continues to increase, but glass ceilings remain”. The proportion of seats held by women in single or lower houses of national parliament shows that “women members of parliament accounted for 21.8 per cent of all parliamentary seats in January 2014, up from 20.3 per cent the previous year.” In January 2014, in 46 countries more than 30 per cent of members of parliament in at least one chamber were women.

The SDGs framework has made great improvements by elevating the importance of “Ensuring women’s full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life” to the level of a target (Target 5.5 of SDG #5). With intergovernmental negotiations on the post-2015 development agenda under way, it is critical to ensure that women are involved at the centre of the political decision making process, at the national, sub-national and local levels, as the SDGs are translated into country specific legislation. In addition, it is important that governments and representatives are held accountable to all citizens, both women and men, in the delivery of the services that are at the basis of the SDGs.

Despite the crisis of confidence and trust in political parties, these institutions are key to enhancing participation and representation as well as ensuring transparency and accountability. In 2013, legislated or voluntary quotas were used in 39 chambers holding elections. While such measures impact positively on women’s access to parliament, quotas alone are not enough: political parties need to field more women candidates.

Political parties are becoming increasingly important as they perform a central role in ensuring and enhancing women’s opportunities to effectively exercise the right to participate and be represented in politics and positions of power and decision making. Political parties' conduct of internal democratic processes such as in identifying, selecting and nominating candidates for internal leadership and public decision-making positions has tremendously influenced women’s participation and leadership in politics and positions of power and decision making.

The panel will focus on experiences on closing the gaps between women’s political participation and representation in Tunisia and Kenya and in Latin America. Panelists will address lessons learnt and best practices, relevant to the ongoing negotiations on the post-2015 development agenda, on the basis of concrete experiences gained by International IDEA and NIMD through their prioritised efforts to support reforms of political parties internal and external regulatory frameworks through the joint implementation of the Women’s Political Rights project. Panelists will focus in particular on the following issues:

- What are the main advances and gains registered in bridging gaps;
- What are the remaining obstacles and persistent challenges;
- Who are the key stakeholders/actors and key strategies to address the identified obstacles and persistent challenges.