

## CONCEPT NOTE

### Regional Meeting on Promoting Women's Leadership and Political Participation in ASEAN 7-8 October 2014, Jakarta, Indonesia

#### Background

All ASEAN Member States have ratified the Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). Significant efforts have been made by ASEAN Member States to enhance the implementation of the Convention in general, as well as to promote and protect the rights of women in ASEAN in particular. Through the ratification of CEDAW by all ASEAN Member States (AMS), the AMS have thereby pledged and accepted legal obligations to take all actions necessary for promoting equal participation of men and women in all governance institutions including elected and appointed bodies, in the judiciary and civil service.

#### Women's Political participation in the ASEAN region

Nine of the ten states have sitting parliaments: Indonesia, Laos, Singapore, and Viet Nam have election systems with single house representation while Cambodia, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines and Thailand are bicameral, composed of a lower house and an upper house or senate.

**Table 1: Women Political Representation - National Level**

ASEAN Member State (AMS)	Percentage (%) of Seats Held by Women at National Level <sup>a)</sup>							
	by December 1997		by December 2002		by December 2007		by December 2012	
	Lower or Single House	Upper House or Senate	Lower or Single House	Upper House or Senate	Lower or Single House	Upper House or Senate	Lower or Single House	Upper House or Senate
Brunei Darussalam	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---
Cambodia	5.8	---	7.4	13.1	19.5	14.8	20.3	14.8
Indonesia	11.4	---	8.0	---	11.6	---	18,6	---
Lao PDR	?	---	22.9	---	25.2	---	25.0	---
Malaysia	7.8	17.4	10.4	26.1	10.0	27.7	10,4	22.7
Myanmar (2012)	7.9	---	10.5	---	6.6	---	6.0	1.8
Philippines	11.1	16.7	17.8	12.5	20.5	17.4	22.9	13.0
Singapore	4.8	---	11.8	---	24.5	---	23.5	---
Thailand	5.6	8.1	9.2	10.5	11.7	8.7	15.8	15.4
Vietnam	26.2	---	27.3	---	25.8	---	24.4	---

<sup>a)</sup> Source: information compiled by the Inter-Parliamentary Union on the basis of information provided by National Parliaments (<http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/classif.htm>) (archive of statistical data)



Among ASEAN Member States, only one country – Indonesia – has temporary special Measures to improve the representation of women (Election Law Quota). The Indonesian 2008 electoral law states that ‘at least 1 in every 3 candidates on political party lists for House of Representatives should be women’.

The representation of women in politics differs rather substantially across the AMS. Table 1 shows data from national-level representation of women. In 2012, women’s representation in lower or single houses ranged from 6% in Myanmar to 25.2% in Laos PDR. The range for women’s representation in upper houses or senates was equally wide (ranging from 1.8% in Myanmar to 22.7% in Malaysia). In the five bicameral AMS, women’s representation was lower in upper houses or senates than in lower houses in Cambodia, Myanmar and Philippines, while the opposite is experienced in Malaysia. In Thailand women hold a similar share of seats in both houses.

Over the 15 years between 1997 and 2012, notable increases in women’s national level representation were registered in Singapore, Thailand, Philippines, and Cambodia. Indonesia and Lao PDR also showed strong positive development. However, while perhaps not of great magnitude, Viet Nam has actually recorded a loss in the number of women in parliament in each of the last two elections. In 2012, five of the AMS had achieved a share of female political representation higher than the global average of 20%. Yet, given the actual percentage increases over the past 15 years, it does not seem likely that any of the AMS will succeed in meeting the MDG of 30% in 2015. The representation of women in sub-national government is also important. Local and regional representation can function as a pipeline for strengthened national representation of women. In addition, local and regional bodies are vital in delivering community services.

While increasing share of female representation is indeed a necessary first step, it is not a sufficient step toward improved gender equality and improved citizen well-being on its own.<sup>1</sup> The quality of women’s participation, and women’s ability to actually influence decision-making processes at their workplaces and in society, is equally vital. Importantly, female political and public decision-making representation in AMS countries does not reach the 30% threshold which is generally considered to be the minimum percentage required to ensure a critical mass of women (or other underrepresented groups) who can influence the decision making processes and political agendas. With fewer women represented in decision making bodies, it is difficult for women to have their voices heard.<sup>2</sup> In countries where the proportion of women in parliament is less than 30%, it becomes particularly important to go beyond numbers and to closely monitor and assess which is the reality behind the numbers and statistics.

Obstacles for women’s participation in politics and public decision making are many and diverse – ranging from discriminatory attitudes towards women in public positions to persistent gender inequities in literacy rate and education, in health care, and in economic empowerment and in women’s burden of care and unpaid work. Violence against women in various forms as well as trafficking in women and children also remain widespread. While these obstacles for women’s political participation are rather generic, the depth and influence of each obstacle vary across and between the AMS countries and progress is uneven, adding to complexities in the ASEAN region.

---

<sup>1</sup> Increasing women’s participation in public decision making and in politics has shown to have positive effects on citizen’s well-being, including greater attention to family-friendly policies and more support for working women (UN-INSTRAW 2005, cited in Fair Share for Women 2008, Executive Summary, p21.)

<sup>2</sup> UN-INSTRAW 2006). Among Asia Pacific countries, only New Zealand and Nepal with shares for women of 32% and 33% respectively achieved this threshold (as reported per October 2012).



The root causes of obstacles to women's participation in politics and public decision making are deeply entrenched in social norms, cultural attitudes and perceptions of gender roles of men and women, codes of conduct, traditions, informal and formal discriminatory laws. Social practices will not change unless root causes are addressed. There is therefore a pressing need to strengthen the systematic collection and analysis of adequate and reliable data and information in order to systematically monitor progress in addressing such root causes.

UN Women in partnership with ASEAN Inter Parliamentary Assembly with funding support from Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development, Canada will be organizing a Regional Meeting on Promoting Women's Leadership and Political Participation in ASEAN. The Regional meeting will include members of AIPA, especially members of Women's Caucus of the AIPA (WAIPA), representatives of the UN system, CSOs working on political participation of women in electoral processes.

#### **Objectives of the Regional meeting**

- To increase/deepen understanding by key stakeholders of women's political participation and voice in the ASEAN region and identifying gaps, barriers and good practices in addressing these.
- To discuss strategies, policies and programs as well as solutions by ASEAN Member States to promote women's political leadership including identifying support needed by women parliamentarians and arrive at recommendations to AMS
- To discuss a potential indicators for monitoring progress in ASEAN on women's political participation in ASEAN

#### **TIME AND VENUE**

The meeting date will be on 7-8 October 2014 at Hotel Four Seasons Jakarta, Indonesia.

#### **PARTICIPANTS:**

- Parliamentarians from AMS (4 members of Parliament from each AMS country including 2 members from the Women's Caucus)
- Members from associated Parliamentary bodies- one from IPU and one from ASEAN Parliamentarians for Human Rights (APHR)
- Regional CSOs
- UN Agency representatives
- Resource Persons
- Development partners