

NATIONAL ACTION PLAN ON WOMEN'S EQUAL PARTICIPATION IN PUBLIC SERVICE

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SUMMARY

The evidence has never been clearer that women's political, economic, and social participation and leadership are vital to development. Countries where women are fairly represented in government enjoy greater security, higher levels of development, and more inclusive policy-making. The incoming administration should take advantage of this critical moment in history by developing the first-ever National Action Plan on Women's Equal Participation in Public Service and sign an executive order directing that the plan be implemented. This plan would chart a course to enhance women's equal role in public service and political participation around the world, and it would transform how the United States approaches its diplomatic and development-based support to women, thus ensuring equal participation in all levels of decision-making.

Gender equality in all levels of the private and public sphere is not only a development objective in its own right, but also is smart economics.

Evidence now clearly shows that countries that fail to empower half their population will suffer from lower productivity, slower economic growth, and weaker development outcomes. In the United States, for example, only after women took their place in Congress were critical issues such as health care, child care and support, sexual harassment, domestic violence, and gender-based wage differentials, given priority. In India, gender quotas at the local government level increased the percentage of elected leaders who were women from less than 5 percent in 1992 to over 40 percent by 2000, and as a result, women are changing the face of politics and governance.

Evidence shows that women in elected office in India are more likely to invest in public infrastructure—particularly safe drinking water—

than their male counterparts and are less likely to feed into corruption.

The evidence has never been clearer that women's political, economic, and social participation and leadership are vital to development. When women are equal partners in decision-making, and their experiences are considered and voices are heard, the policies are more inclusive and have a broader influence. The U.S. government should take advantage of this critical moment in history to improve the prospects for economic development and inclusive governance by promoting and strengthening women's effective leadership and substantive participation in high-level government decision-making.

In the United States, women leaders have helped pass bills that make women and families more secure. This legislation has included the Violence

of Against Women Act of 1994 and the Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993. Other measures have increased assistance for survivors of domestic violence, increased penalties for batterers, supported federal rape-shield laws to protect rape victims, and furthered policies on payment of child support by non-custodial parents. Women leaders also supported women in the private sector, by launching initiatives that enable women and minority entrepreneurs to access low-interest loans, establishing a permanent Office of Women's Business Ownership within the Small Business Administration, and establishing a commission to study the "glass ceiling" that inhibits women from rising through the ranks in the workplace. Women leaders are responsible for establishing a Women's Health Research Center in the Department of Defense, enacting and reauthorizing the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Breast and Cervical Cancer Mortality Prevention Act, to provide pap smears and mammograms for low-income women, and supporting the Battered Immigrant Women Protection Act.

Across the world, too, when women are at the table, legislative bodies pass policies and measures that advance the development of women, their families, and their countries. Rwanda boasts the highest proportion of women parliamentarians in the world and is only one of two countries (Andorra is the other) with a majority of women in parliament. Working across party lines, the Forum of Women Parliamentarians helped pass a law combating violence against women. When the number of women in the Costa Rican parliament reached a critical mass of over 30 percent, a General Law on the Protection of Adolescent Mothers was promulgated to provide free health services and education to young women. In Tanzania, a gender quota was enacted to ensure that women held no less than 20 percent of the seats in parliament. Because of their presence, an amendment to the

Land Act grants women equal access to land, loans, and credit. In India, at the local level, women-led village councils approved 60 percent more drinking water projects than those led by men.

The U.S. government can and must do much more to support women's leadership at the decision-making table, both in the United States and around the world. Women are the cornerstones for productive and secure societies, and the U.S. government must commit itself to concrete actions that will support their voices. The new administration must take advantage of this pivotal moment in history, starting by developing the first ever National Action Plan on Women's Equal Participation in Public Service and by signing an executive order directing that the plan be implemented. The plan would chart a course to enhance women's equal role in public service and political participation around the world, and it would transform how the U.S. approaches its diplomatic and development-based support to women, thus ensuring equal participation in all levels of decision-making.

The goal of the national action plan is a call to empower women as full and equal partners in decision-making processes that affect populations worldwide. Achieving this goal is critical to national and global security. The plan must contain commitments by the U.S. Department of State and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) to meet the only fair goal of 50 percent of women in public service by 2050, a project that was launched by the Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton in 2011. In line with these objectives, the State Department and USAID will do the following:

- Establish and improve public policy-making and leadership skills training for women.
- Advocate the integration of women's equal representation in other countries'

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national action plans, legislative reforms, and constitutions.

- Build women’s capacity for roles in local and national government.
- Partner with nations and international organizations to develop laws and policies that promote and strengthen women’s participation in political and public life.
- Collect gender-specific data on women in public service around the world.
- Promote women’s equal access to education and vocational training as a way to get more women’s voices in decision-making.
- Promote investment in child care as a way to encourage more women to participate in public life.

In accordance with this action plan, the United States should strengthen efforts to work collaboratively with governments and non-governmental partners to accelerate women’s equal participation in public service through interagency coordination, policy development, and enhanced professional training and education. Doing so will ensure that more women are effectively recruited, retained, and promoted in public service, including into higher-level judicial service, foreign service, and parliamentary committees and commissions. The United States should promote the establishment of local coalitions or task forces composed of relevant government authorities and civil society organizations to combat barriers to public service.

The goal of equal representation of women in all decision-making levels in public service can be realized only through partnership and collaboration with government agencies, international organizations, and civil society organizations, as well as through strategic partnerships with the private sector.

The National Action Plan on Women’s Equal Participation in Public Service must express the U.S. commitment to integrating women not simply as beneficiaries of good policy-making but as makers of good policy. The United States must work with partners to make real the promises of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action 1995, which reaffirmed that “women’s equal participation in decision-making is not only a demand for justice or democracy but can also be seen as a necessary condition for women’s interests to be taken into account. Without the active participation of women and incorporation of women’s perspectives at all levels of decision-making, the goals of equality, development, and peace cannot be achieved.”¹

To ensure follow-up action, participating agencies will be held accountable for their commitments under the plan. The agencies should designate officers to ensure implementation, establish timelines, and commit resources for on-the-ground implementation. Such plans will be coordinated by a standing national interagency committee that will monitor and evaluate actions taken in support

of national objectives. A set of indicators will be designed to monitor and evaluate how successfully countries integrate the concepts behind women's political and public service participation into relevant national and local-level policies and strategies and establish frameworks for regular consultation with civil society representatives.

Engaging women in public service must be central to the U.S. efforts to provide development assistance; promote security; prevent, respond to, and resolve conflict; and rebuild societies. The increased participation of women in policymaking must complement and enhance existing initiatives to advance gender equality and women's empowerment in the December 2011 National Action Plan on Women, Peace, and Security, which builds on the goals of the U.S. National Security Strategy and the 2010 Quadrennial Diplomacy and Development Review.

Every five years leading to 2050, or until the goal of equal participation of women in public service is met, the U.S. government must conduct a comprehensive review of, and update to, the National Action Plan on Women's Equal Participation in Public Service. This review will

be informed by consultation with international partners and relevant civil society organizations. The plan should guarantee the country's commitment to ensure that women in the United States and around the world play an equal role in decision making, policymaking, law-making, and institution building.

ENDNOTE

- 1 Fourth World Conference on Women, "Platform for Action," Beijing, September 1995, <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/platform/decision.htm>.

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