

COMMUNIQUE

Gender, Human Rights and Women's Participation in Elections in West and Central Africa

We, the representatives of Election Management Bodies (EMBs), National Human Rights Commissions (NHRCs), Parliaments, Political Parties, Regional Organizations Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) in West and Central Africa, and the United Nations (UN), met in Dakar, Senegal from 11-13 May 2016, at a regional workshop on the theme of ***“Gender, Human Rights and Women's Participation in elections in West and Central Africa”***, held at the Hôtel des Almadies, on the initiative of the UN Women, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS).

Welcoming the alignment of the objectives of the workshop to regional and sub-regional policies and declarations for the promotion of women's rights and gender equality, including the African Union Declaration of 2016 as a Year of Human Rights, with a focus on African Women's Rights;

Recognizing the critical role of Electoral Management Bodies, National Human Rights Commissions and political parties to facilitating women's full and effective participation in electoral politics in West and Central Africa;

Committed to engaging and promoting solidarity amongst women, and to encouraging inter-generational exchanges with young women for effective knowledge transfer and mentorship on issues of women's rights and gender equality;

Noting with encouragement, the wealth of good practices in countries of West and Central Africa aimed at promoting a gender and human rights perspective and women's full and equal participation in elections, which include: the adoption of a Gender Parity Law in Senegal, which has resulted in an increase of women's parliamentary representation to 43 percent; the adoption of quota laws in countries including Niger, Guinea and Mali; an amendment of the electoral code in Cameroon to include a gender criteria in determining candidate lists; the appointment of women to leadership positions in National Electoral Commissions in Cape Verde, Ghana and the Central African Republic, the establishment of a Gender and Disabilities Desk by the Electoral Commission of Ghana; the adoption of a Gender Policy by the Electoral Commission of Nigeria; the establishment of a Women's Situation Room in Nigeria and other countries to promote peaceful elections, as well as innovative efforts by Cote d'Ivoire to establish a national compendium of women political leaders which can be accessed by political parties;

Noting with concern however, the continued existence of multiple structural, cultural, political, financial and technical barriers to women's full and effective participation in electoral politics in West and Central Africa, do hereby propose amongst others, the following recommendations:

Governments should:

- Commit to implement provisions of the Maputo Protocol which call for the equal representation of women in electoral processes at all levels and for the alignment of national legislation with international human rights standards;
- Adopt laws on parity or quotas for countries that have not yet done so, including: Benin, Cote d'Ivoire, Cape Verde, Ghana, Nigeria and the Central African Republic;
- Ensure effective implementation of laws pertaining to parity or quotas in countries such as Togo and Burkina Faso;
- Ensure that electoral laws include provisions that uphold principles of women's rights and gender equality;
- Foster close working partnerships between National Elections Commissions and National Human Rights Commissions in the context of addressing gender and women's rights considerations in elections.

Regional Organizations should:

- Continue to expand the provision of technical and financial support to Member States and civil society organizations with the aim of promoting women's rights and participation in electoral processes;
- Support the development and application of minimum regional standards and provisions to guide the integration of gender considerations into the work of National Election Commissions, which include the adoption of gender-responsive budgeting frameworks in countries of the ECOWAS and ECCAS regions;
- Establish with the support of UN Women, a Funding Facility, to be accessed by civil society and women's organizations within the West and Central African regions, to support capacity development, mentorship and training of women in politics, including both aspiring and elected women leaders.

Civil Society Organizations should:

- Advocate with governments and political parties for the adoption and/or implementation of laws on parity or quotas, and for the harmonization of domestic legislation in line with international and regional standards and conventions;
- Facilitate the establishment of a regional networking platform for women in politics to share knowledge and good practices on strategies for promoting women's leadership and political participation;
- Facilitate alliance-building between women running for political office and other constituencies, including the media, private sector and traditional authorities;
- Support mentorship programmes for young women in politics, which will facilitate leadership development and inter-generational knowledge transfer.

Political Parties should:

- Adopt and implement gender parity principles within their party constitutions and leadership structures;
- Adopt gender-responsive budgeting to inform implementation of their political activities and programmes;
- Adopt internal mechanisms to enable women to achieve political, professional and family life balance.

The United Nations and International Organizations should:

- Provide the necessary technical, political and material support to implement the recommendations emanating from the workshop.

Dakar, May 13· 2016.