

United Nations  Nations Unies

**Commission on the Status of Women
Fifty-third session
New York, 2 – 13 March 2009**

INTERACTIVE DIALOGUE

Equal participation of women and men in
decision-making processes at all levels

Written statement*

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* The views expressed in this paper are those of the author and do not necessarily represent those of the United Nations.

1. INTRODUCTION¹

There has been an upwards trend in numbers of women in decision-making positions in public and private institutions have increased in recent years, although the present financial crisis is likely to slow this trend in the private sector. This presentation will review trends, it will consider the impact of women's participation in decision-making, identify some persistent problems and emerging threats to women's capacity to take up positions of authority, and it will also identify decision-making arenas in which numbers of women remain persistently and alarmingly low.

II. THE NUMBERS: PUBLIC OFFICE

The most visible arena in which women are appearing in greater numbers is national and local politics. In 24 countries women exceed 30% of representatives of national assemblies, with Rwanda taking the world lead with 56% of seats occupied by women. The rate of increase in numbers of women in politics recently has been promising, increasing from 11.6% of seats in 1995 to 18.4% now.

However, even at the accelerated rate of increase in numbers of women in public office, the 'parity zone' where neither sex holds more than 60 % of seats will not be reached by low-income countries until 2045 *at the present rate of increase*.

party decision-making. As a proxy we can use

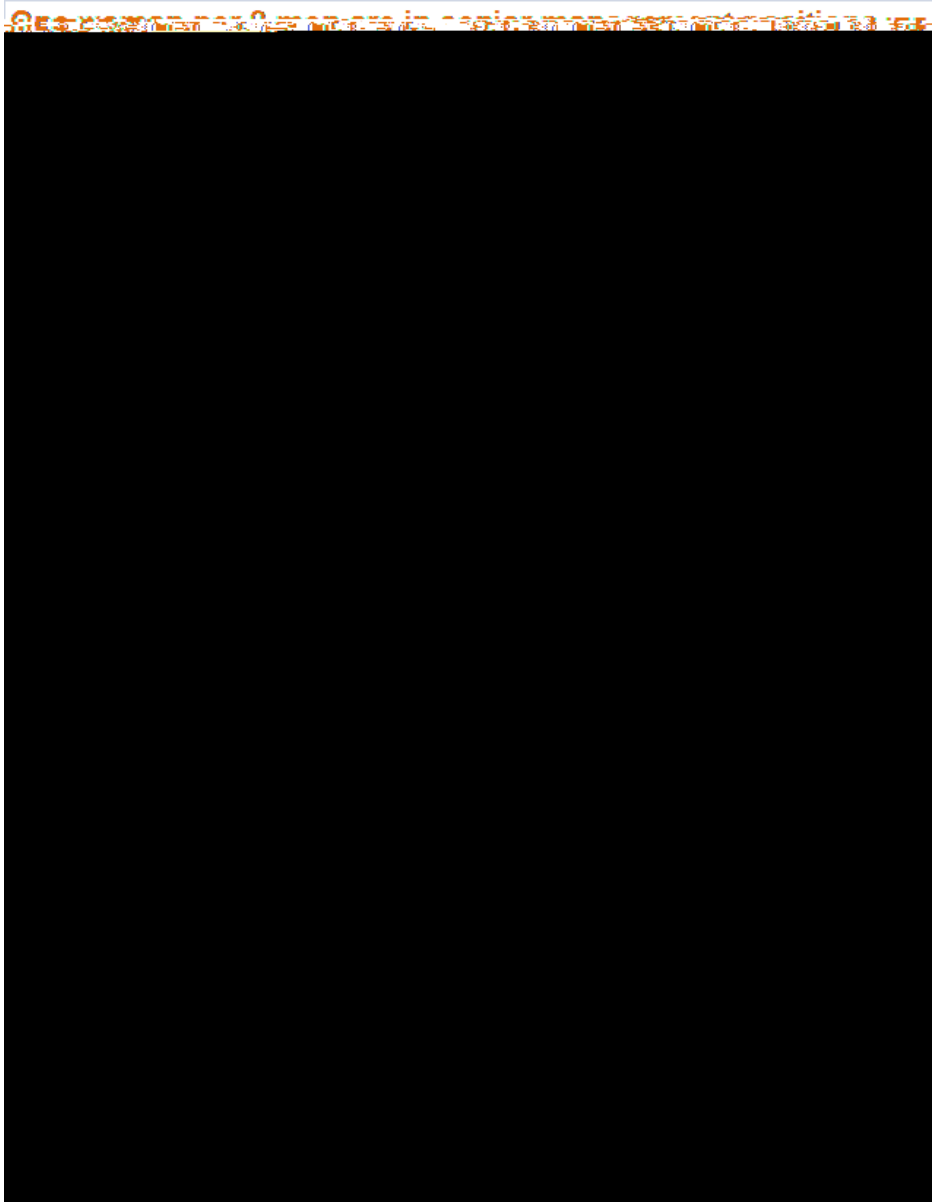
Two areas of public service are particularly sensitive to gender balance issues when it comes to promoting women's rights – justice and law enforcement. Both of these domains remain heavily male dominated. As the bar chart below shows, there are only two countries in the world where women make up 30% of the police – South Africa and Australia – and the norm is well below 10%.

The judiciary is also a highly male-dominated field, although numbers of women are going up on the benches of international courts, as shown in the figure below. Women's leadership in the judicial sector is of critical importance in advancing gender equality and equal rights as this is the sector that is the final arbiter of what is fair and just in public and private life. Without a doubt, women leaders in the judiciary around the world have pioneered judgements to advance gender justice.

Nowhere is this more evident than in international criminal courts, where prominent female prosecutors in the International criminal

Data on numbers of women in executive posts around the world shows that positive action such as this is essential to breaking the 'glass ceiling' keeping women from senior enterprise management. The share of women in senior positions around the world remains low and is seemingly not correlated with numbers of women in full time jobs, although there is a positive relationship between female enterprise ownership and women in senior management. The share of women around the world in senior management ranges from 3% to 12%. This is not remotely in proportion to their share of formal employment ranging from 17% to 49%.

There has definitely been an upward trend in women's participation in the formal labor market and in senior management. However, the current financial crisis can be expected to constitute a very serious threat to women's market gains in the area of secure and formal employment. Informal economies are likely to expand, and are likely, as ever, to be dominated by women.



Traditional leadership: Crises in governance in many countries – where states have limited finances and capacity for ensuring full geographic reach in public services and administration – have revived reliance on traditional decision-making systems to compensate for limits in state capacity. For instance, in some contexts, where the justice system does not reach remote areas, or where regionally or ethnically distinct social groups demand a certain measure of autonomy, governments have recognized the authority of traditional leaders and customary dispute adjudication. This is most well-known in the case of transitional justice measures where the national judicial system cannot possibly cope with the vast case-load of war-related crimes and disputes, and assigns responsibility to traditional dispute-adjudication mechanisms to hear some of them. The Gacaca courts in Rwanda are a well-known instance. In that case and in some others, recognition of patriarchal leadership structures and the gender bias this brings has brought a revamping in order to ensure that more women are represented amongst the elders who hear local disputes. But in many of these systems, women are not seen as rightful dispensers of justice or of local governance.

measures are needed to enable higher female recruitment – this is true for women in the military and the police for instance.

3. *Elite character of the women in office.* In some contexts, and depending on the means by which women come to office (quotas or through a long political apprenticeship), and also depending on the nature of the political system, many of the women who attain office are relatively elite. This is particularly the case where women who are relatives of male leaders have best access to public office. This can limit their capacity to engage with or respond to the needs of poorer women, or women from disadvantaged races, classes, or disabled women.
4. *Shunning gender issues.* In some context research shows that although women in government –