

## **LAUNCH CEREMONY OF THE INTERNATIONAL KNOWLEDGE NETWORK OF WOMEN IN POLITICS**

On the 27<sup>th</sup> of February 2007, at the Conference Room 2 of the United Nations Secretariat, history was made as the International Knowledge Network of Women in Politics (iKNOW Politics), the first virtual network linking women in politics throughout the world was launched. This ground-breaking initiative which was one of the parallel activities during the 51<sup>st</sup> Session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) was founded in partnership by the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA), the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), the National Democratic Institute (NDI), UNDP and UNIFEM with two main objectives of

1. To facilitate a global forum of knowledge and resources on women's political participation which would link members in discussions designed to advance women's political participation and
2. To equip women with tools and resources that can be used to inform and support efforts to increase the numbers of women in politics and the contribution women make in the political arena.

The occasion was moderated by Pippa Norris, Director, Democratic Governance Group, UNDP and the Panel of Discussants comprised three women politicians who have made their mark in politics - Margaret Mensah-Williams, Vice Chairperson, National Council, Namibia and Vice President, Executive Committee, Inter-Parliamentary Union; Syringa Marshall-Bunnett, President of the Senate in Jamaica and Geraldine Ferraro, a former member of US Congress, and former Vice Presidential Candidate.

In her remarks on the theme: *Women as Leaders in Parliament: Shaping Priorities, Policy and the Process of Governance*, Syringa Marshall-Bunnett highlighted two principles which have contributed to her success in politics as: "Being knowledgeable as much as you possibly can" and "maintaining all the linkages as much as you possibly can". She advised female politicians to equip themselves with knowledge of the issues particularly those issues that have been outlined for consideration as Parliament opens. They should pick their issues of interests and develop knowledge on them especially those that may demand legislative action. She advised the use of the internal mechanism – the Caucus and stressed the need to keep up all linkages taking note of the concerns of the constituents. On legislative roles, she emphasised that a legislator must be in touch with the sources of the bills coming before the legislature to be able to influence their contents. She endorsed the iKNOW Politics as a veritable resource for women in Parliament and those who are aspiring to be elected.

Geraldine Ferraro, the 1984 Democratic Vice Presidential Candidate, who spoke on Women, Democracy and Technology, explained the iKNOW Politics Network as a technology based tool that will serve as a unique platform to provide access to critical resources and expertise, create knowledge and share experiences on women's political participation. She identified two challenges that face a female new comer into politics as getting party support and raising funds, and stated that by sharing best practices and providing information – based experiences on the website, these challenges will be

minimised. She concluded that the network is a resource that will give women strategies and tactics to be successful in politics and encouraged women political aspirants to use the network to support their initiatives.

Anne-Marie Goetz, Chief Adviser, Governance, Peace and Security at UNIFEM, took the audience through the website of iKNOW Politics and explained that the innovative global platform is specifically designed to promote gender – sensitive governance and advance the role and number of women in political and public life. She stated that iKNOW Politics will connect parliamentarians, political party leaders, candidates, researchers, academia, etc. across borders, generations and faiths, equipping them with the materials, expertise and best practices to advance women’s political participation. She explained that the iKNOW Politics is an on-line workspace designed to serve the needs of elected officials, candidates, political party leaders and members, researchers, students and practitioners interested in advancing women in politics. The need for the resource was based on the fact that women are still under-represented and face innumerable obstacles to full participation in public life. The forum will provide users access to critical resources and expertise, opportunity to share experiences and knowledge and a platform to create knowledge and learn about latest developments and events related to women’s political participation.

iKNOW Politics will feature surveys on women in politics, information on strategies for a successful political campaign and an on-line library with more than 400 reports, handbooks and training materials from leading international agencies, research institutions, academia and civil society groups. It will include a data base of 100 experts on women in politics who are in a position to respond to questions put together by iKNOW staff received from users of the facility. The questions will be sent to experts who have experience in the areas, for responses that will be subsequently posted on the website. Other highlights include a virtual forum for mediated discussions, high profile interviews, member created sites and a variety of resources on campaigns, elections and quotas, political parties, parliaments and representatives, advocacy and lobbying, skills building, budgets and legislation and post-conflict and transitional participation. The contents are organised by themes and regions in three languages – English, French and Spanish.

Finally, she stated that the web will address issues of women and good governance, positing that many approaches to good governance are gender blind. The project will address good governance and gender equality issues as well as demand accountability from government on women’s political participation. Membership of the Network is open to everyone who is interested in making use of the resource and Registration for membership is simple and open. Participants were urged to visit the website, register for membership and subscribe different virtual journals available.

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