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Dispatch

**On the International Day of Democracy**

15th of September 2016

**Democracy Dispatch from Gender Concerns Internationals’ Local Offices**

**Hopes for Continued Progress Towards Gender-Inclusiveness Following Morocco’s Upcoming Elections**

In the last decades, Morocco has witnessed a great number of reforms for women's rights**. For example, a Family Code introduced in 2004, and a new Constitution in 2011 that includes article 19, which fully recognizes gender equality among Moroccan citizens in 2011.**

Women’s political participation has increased by impressive numbers following the 2011 general elections and the 2015 local elections. **The presence of Moroccan Women in the parliament went from 2 Women out of 325 MPs in 1997 (1%), to 35 female MPs in 2002 (11%) and 34 Female MP's in 2007 (10%). Female representation in the Parliament reached the number of 67 out of 395 seats, following the Constitutional reform in 2011 and the adoption of a new quota system granting 60 seats out of 395 to Women (17%).**Gender Concerns is hopeful that the upcoming elections in October will continue the country’s progress towards a gender-inclusive society. **But female candidates will still face many obstacles, ranging from illiteracy to conservative societal and religious gender stereotypes.**

**Nidal Azhary, Rabat Office Morocco**

**Elections in Afghanistan Postponed amidst Changing Public Perception of Female Leadership**

Gender Concerns International believes it is important to strengthen the role of women democratic processes. The political representation of women in Afghanistan should be increased in order to generate gender equality and improve the lives of Afghan women and girls. 2015 saw some positive milestones for gender inclusive governance; four female ministers and two new female provincial governors were appointed. Gender Concerns perceives the upcoming Parliamentary elections as an important moment for increased further.

Public support of women in leadership roles in community development reflects positively, however there is less support among the Afghan public women in higher positions in the government. Gender Concerns strongly feels that Afghan communities’ positive attitudes towards female representation can be promoted and cultivated further increase public support for women in higher leadership roles throughout the country.

**Nazir Mohd Tofan, Kabul Office Afghanistan**

**Increased Participation of Women Important for Myanmar’s Burgeoning Democracy**

The democratic elections in November 2015 brought the military rule in Myanmar to an end with a landslide victory for Myanmar’s face of democracy – Aung San Suu Kyi. She is tied to the new spirit of democratization as she is tied to Myanmar’s struggles on the way.

Myanmar is home to the longest running civil war in the world. This history of unrest is the cause for many of the country’s obstacles on the road to democracy, such as a weak rule of law, corruption and strong military influence. Aung San Suu Kyi has recognized the importance of peace. Subsequently, she convened the country’s first major peace conference in the end of August 2016, bringing together important stakeholders in the civil war to negotiate peace.

However, even though Aung San Suu Kyi is shining as a bright example of women’s potential as agents of change, women remain largely excluded from Myanmar’s peace process and are largely underrepresented in its political life. The importance of women’s inclusion should be recognized as a priority for the country along with the national reconciliation process, since it is vital for a functioning democracy as well as for sustainable peace. And peace is urgently needed: only days after the Peace Conference ended, fighting started again in some regions of Myanmar, causing an estimated 4000 people to flee their homes.

**Lina Stotz and Hanney Lwin Oo, Yangon Office Myanmar**

**Female Participation in Political Parties Remain a Challenge to Gender-Inclusive Democracy in Pakistan**

Women often face daunting social, economic and political challenges. For democratic governments to deliver to their constituents they must be truly representative, and women must be equal partners in the process of democratic development. As activists, and as elected officials, women’s contributions are crucial to building a strong and vibrant society. A key challenge to gender inclusive democracy in Pakistan is the lack of female representation within political parties.

The number of female MP’s in Pakistan rose above the 20% quota to 22% in the 2013 general elections. However, this still does not meet the international standard of 30% female representation. Gender Concerns International will continue to work for increased female representation in Pakistan since: women are highly committed to promoting national and local policies that address the socio-economic and political challenges of the country; countries where women are supported as leaders have a correspondingly low level of corruption; reconstruction and reconciliation efforts take root more quickly and are more sustainable when women are involved; by helping women become participating members of a democracy, one can look to mitigate conflicts or stop conflicts before they begin; and women has a profound positive democratic impact on communities, legislatures and the lives of citizens.

**Kunza Raja, Islamabad Office Pakistan**

**Long-awaited Local Elections in Tunisia Take Important Step Towards Gender-Equal Representation**

The upcoming local elections in Tunisia mark yet another milestone in the country’s path towards democracy. Democratic representation in local governance is much anticipated in a country that has waited for local elections to take place ever since the revolution in 2011. A recent statement from Mr. Chafik Sarsar, Chief of the Independent Election Commission of Tunisia, says that the local elections might not take place in March 2017 since the required new electoral law is yet to be passed. This is indeed worrying news, as the local elections were already postponed from March 2016. The people of Tunisia deserve local democratic representation.

However, there is also much positive news leading up to the local elections. With a recent law passed to ensure that around 50% of local council seats will be occupied by women, Gender Concerns is encouraged to believe that the local elections will further contribute to the gender inclusiveness of democracy in Tunisia. This law is fully in line with the gender-inclusive electoral reforms that Gender Concerns International has lobbied for extensively during and after the organization’s Gender Election Observation Missions (GEOMs) to the 2011 and 2014 elections in Tunisia.

**Tunis Office Tunisia**