

**Committee/Council:** Special Conference on the advancement of women

**Issue:** Supporting women as political leaders

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**Position:** President

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## Introduction

Honorable delegates, my name is Danai Passakou and I will be serving as the President of the Special Conference during the 16<sup>th</sup> DSAMUN Conference. This year's Special Conference focuses on the advancement of women. One of the topics we should deal with is "Supporting women as political leaders". In order to understand this topic we should first of all keep in mind that the situation is totally different in each continent and in many cases it is different also among countries in the same region. The position of women differs from country to country and is directly connected most of the times with religious and social beliefs as well as stereotypes about the role of women. Undoubtedly, it is widely known that women have tried hard in order to be treated in the same way as men are treated in all fields of life. Politics is a field that women have struggled hard in order to be a part of and in some cases they have not managed it yet. On the other hand, there are examples of women who not only have managed to take part in politics, but also have managed to prove that they can be as good as men, if not even better than them. The main aim of your resolutions should be first of all to give to the women of all countries the right to participate in politics and also to try to struggle against some of the stereotypes that most societies have nowadays. I hope that this study guide will help you with your research and give you ideas about your resolutions. Do not forget that you have to do further research on your own not only concerning this topic but also concerning your country's policy on the matter, in order to be able to participate in the debate. If you have any questions about the topic or in case you need further clarifications, please do not hesitate to ask me. You can contact me via email ([danaipassakou@msn.com](mailto:danaipassakou@msn.com)) or via Facebook (Danai Passakou) and I would be glad to help you as soon as possible. See you in October and good luck with the preparation of your resolutions!

## Definition of Key-Terms

### Political leader

One who is actively involved in politics, especially party politics or one who holds or seeks a political office.

## Politics

The art or science of government or governing, especially the governing of a political entity, such as a nation, and the administration and control of its internal and external affairs or Political science.

## **Background Information**

The participation of women in politics is a fundamental prerequisite in order to ensure democracy and gender equality. According to studies the higher the number of women in parliament, the higher the attention to women issues. Female participation in several political sectors facilitates their direct engagement in decision making.

As the number of women who participate in decision-making positions increases, so is their political accountability. However, reforms concerning gender sensitive governance are imperative so as the elected parties will be able to promote and implement gender equality in the public policies

Even nowadays women in governmental positions are not represented equally to men. However, there is an increase in their being elected to become heads of state and government. Approximately 20 countries have a woman as the head of a national government office. Additionally, there has been an effort and measures have been taken in order to increase women's participation in both local and national levels of governance. The percentage of women participating in national level parliaments is 20%.

Among the obstacles women face in achieving representation in governmental positions is the fact that they are more suitable for the private sphere, which is associated with the family and the home. The public domain, associated with political authority and contestation, is considered to be a male sector and so the female ability to enter politics is curtailed.

It is a certain fact that gender inequality within households and families makes it harder for women to participate in the political arena. Another factor which contributes to the poor representation of women in politics is the cultural attitudes towards their role in society. For instance patriarchal societies and their structures and beliefs make it harder for women to acquire roles in public life and as a result, their interests are not represented.

Even in the case that all the above mentioned obstacles are surpassed and women receive political power, there is a tendency that they hold governmental positions of lesser valued cabinet ministries, or the so called soft industries, than men. Such

ministries are health, education and welfare. Seldom do women have decision making authority in domains such as finance and the military which are considered to be male domains and are associated with men. Therefore, women’s interests are rarely represented in powerful institutions. Moreover, women have little or no chance in their interests being represented in autocratic nations. There is a tendency that women who come from higher status families and have higher income have more chances to attain political standing, since in many cases male members of their family are involved in politics. In this case, however, they do not focus on issues that lower income families focus , thus the interests of these families are not appropriately represented.

Another issue of concern is that women who lead political careers are judged for their private lives and their stylistic choices. Media often criticize their fashion choices by saying that they either look too feminine and show too much skin or the opposite: they are too conservative and too masculine. It is noted that their private lives are subjected to a lot of criticism to such an extent that their role and stance on political issues of public concern are undermined. Women politicians are often victims of media criticism. In case they have successful families, they are criticized about how they manage to lead successful political careers and have balance in their family life. In the opposite case, if they are single they may be deprecated about their romantic lives which according to their critics may take up more of their time than their public responsibilities.

### Challenges within political parties

However strange it may seem in many cases, even in Western countries, there is evidence that female politicians become stigmatized for their gender from other male members of their own political parties. They tend to undermine women’s capabilities and their ability to maintain leadership roles. As it is obvious sexism is not something new in politics.

### Countries with the greatest representation of women

A list of the top 10 countries which present the greatest female representation in their national parliaments . The table below presents figures as of April 1, 2013.

Rank	Country	Lower or Single House	Upper House or Senate
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1	Rwanda	56.3%	38.5%
2	Andorra	50%	-
3	Cuba	48.9%	-
4	Sweden	44.7%	-
5	Seychelles	43.8%	-
6	Senegal	42.7%	-
7	Finland	42.5%	-
8	South Africa	42.3%	32.1%
9	Nicaragua	40.2%	-
10	Iceland	39.7%	-

## Major Countries and Organizations Involved

### The Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID)

The Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID) is an international, feminist, membership organization committed to achieving gender equality, sustainable development and women's human rights ([www.awid.org](http://www.awid.org))

### Center for Women's Global Leadership

The Center for Women's Global Leadership (CWGL) was founded as a project of Douglass College in 1989. Since 1990, CWGL has fostered women's leadership in the area of human rights through women's global leadership institutes, strategic planning activities, international mobilization campaigns, UN monitoring, global education endeavors, publications, and a resource center. ([www.cwgl.rutgers.edu](http://www.cwgl.rutgers.edu))

### International Women's Rights Action Watch (IWRAP)

The International Women's Rights Action Watch (IWRAP) was organized in 1985 at the Third World Conference on Women in Nairobi, Kenya, to promote recognition of women's human rights under the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), an international human rights treaty. IWRAP was founded on the belief that the human rights of women and girls are essential to development and that equality between women and men will only be achieved through use of international human rights principles and processes. (<http://www1.umn.edu/humanrts/iwraw/>)

### Timeline of events

Date	Description of event
1906-1907:	Finland becomes the first European nation to give women the right of vote, and 19 women are elected to the new 200-person Finnish parliament.
1916	Jeanette Rankin of Montana is the first woman elected to the U.S. House of Representatives.
1933	Frances Perkins, the first U.S. female Cabinet member, is appointed Secretary of Labor. This makes her the first woman to enter the line of succession to the US Presidency at number 11.
1946	Women vote and stand for election to the House of Representatives for the first time in Japan. Of the 79 women running for office, 39 are elected.
1960	Nakayama Masa is appointed Minister of Health and Welfare in Japan, becoming Japan's first female cabinet member.  Siramavo Bandaranaike of Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) becomes the world's first female Prime Minister.
1966	Indira Gandhi becomes the first Prime Minister of India.

1968	Soong Ching-ling named Co-Chairwoman of the People's Republic of China, becoming the first non-royal woman to lead the state of China.
1969	Golda Meir becomes the first female Prime Minister of Israel
1974	Maria Estela (Isabela) Martinez de Peron succeeds her husband and becomes the first woman President of Argentina and the first female head of state in the Americas.
1979	Maria de Lourdes Pintasilgo becomes the first woman Prime Minister of Portugal  Lidia Geiler is the first woman elected President of Bolivia.
1979	Margaret Thatcher becomes the first woman Prime Minister of the United Kingdom. She served in that position -- winning re-election in 1983 and in 1987 - - until resigning in 1990.
1979	Simone Weil of France is the first woman elected President of the European Parliament.
1980	Vigdís Finnbogadóttir is the first woman elected President of Iceland
1981	Gro Harlem Brundtland is the first woman to become Prime Minister of Norway
1982	Agatha Barbara is elected President of Malta
1982	Milka Planinc is the first woman to become Prime Minister of Yugoslavia.

	<p>Eugenia Charles, Doinica, is the first woman to become Prime Minister in the Caribbean.</p> <p>Rosario Ibarra de Piedra is the first woman to run for President of Mexico</p>
1984	Geraldine Ferraro (D) is the first woman nominated for Vice-President by either major political party in the United States
1985	Maria Liberia-Peters is the first woman to become Prime Minister of the Netherlands Antilles
1986	Corazon Aquino is the first woman elected president of the Philippines
1988	Benazir Bhutto is the first woman elected Prime Minister of Pakistan and becomes the first woman elected to head a Muslim country
1989	Violeta Barrios de Chamorro elected President of Nicaragua
1990	<p>Mary Robinson is the first woman elected President of Ireland.</p> <p>Ertha Pascal-Trouillot is the first woman elected President of Haiti.</p> <p>Carmen Lawrence is Australia's first female Premier.</p>
1991	<p>Edith Cresson is the first woman elected Prime Minister of France.</p> <p>Khaleda Zia Rahman is the first woman to become Prime Minister of Bangladesh</p>

	Rita Johnston is Canada's first female Premier.
1992	Hanna Suchocka is the first woman to become Prime Minister of Poland.
1993	Toujan Faisal is the first woman elected to the Parliament of Jordan
1993	Tansu Ciller is the first woman elected Prime Minister of Turkey.
1993	Agathe Uwilingiyimana is the first woman to become Prime Minister of Rwanda

These are some of the most important dates of this issue until 1993, the source is <http://www.iwdc.org/resources/timeline.htm>. You can find there more information about the timeline of events and the rest events until today.

## Relevant UN Treaties, Resolutions and Events

### Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women

EDAW, one of the basic international human rights treaties of the United Nations, is also known as the women's bill of rights. It was adopted by the UN General Assembly on December 19, 1979 and it was implemented as a treaty on December 3, 1981

Article 7 in (CEDAW): "...ensure to women, on equal terms with men, the right:  
 (a) To vote in all elections and public referenda and to be eligible for election to all publicly elected bodies;  
 (b) To participate in the formulation of government policy and the implementation thereof and to hold public office and perform all public functions at all levels of government"

### United Nation Convention on the Political Rights of Women

In 1954, the United Nations *Convention on the Political Rights of Women* went into force, establishing women's equal rights to vote, hold governmental positions, and have access to public services as in the case of male citizens within national laws.

## Previous Attempts to solve the Issue

The United Nations has identified some possible ways through which the participation of women in politics and governmental positions can be empowered. Firstly, females should be offered equal educational opportunities as males. Moreover, reforms of legislation are imperative in order to be given more attention to women and children's issues. Also, another measure is quotas concerning the number of females participating in governing bodies. Another way to obtuse these discrepancies is to finance budgets which will equally take into consideration female and male needs. Women's empowerment movements at grassroots level are also important for this matter.

## Possible Solutions

Hereby possible solutions concerning the support to women as political leaders will be presented. First, it is of utmost importance to ensure that both local and national elections will be free and fair for women and at the same time to ensure the transparency of the results of the elections. Moreover, it is equally significant to stand against all kinds of stereotypes and sexism that still exist against females. It is also important that all countries will take into account the existing lawful rights of females that UN countries have signed in several conventions and resolutions, for instance the United Nations Convention on the Political Rights of Women. Undoubtedly support should be offered to women civil society organizations to advance women's interests. Another possible solution is to build accountability for women's rights in all public institutions. Furthermore, we should ensure that decision making processes are participatory, responsive, equitable and inclusive. Additionally, we should ensure that all political parties include a minimum percentage of female politicians. This law already exists in some countries, but it is of great importance that all countries introduce and comply with it. Last but not least, organizations should support in every possible way female political leaders from all countries to expand their influence and to gain a voice in the political parties of their countries. These are some solutions that you can include to your resolutions in order to solve this issue, but you have to try to find further possible solutions on your own. Do not forget that you always have to consider the policy of the country that you represent.

## Bibliography

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