



Third Regional Conference of Women Parliamentarians and Women in Political Decision-making Positions of the GCC States

Partnership between women parliamentarians, the media and women's associations

Oman, 21-22 December 2008

INFORMATION DOCUMENT

1. The Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) and the Shura Council of the Sultanate of Oman are organizing the Third Regional Conference of Women Parliamentarians and Women in Decision-making Positions of the Gulf Cooperation Council States. The Conference, entitled *Partnership between women parliamentarians, the media and women's associations*, will be held in:

Muscat, Oman, on 21 and 22 December 2008.

2. Background and objectives of the conference

The recent increase in the number of women parliamentarians and women in decision-making positions in most of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) States reflects encouraging improvements and attests to the existence of political will to support women in politics. The experience has triggered a regional dynamic which the Inter-Parliamentary Union intends to keep in motion by organizing regular meetings of women MPs and women in political decision-making positions of the GCC States. A First Regional Conference was organized by the IPU and the Shura Council of Bahrain and took place in Manama in July 2006. It focused on the electoral processes and the challenges facing women entering parliament. The Second Conference debated the difference women can make once they enter parliament. It took place in Abu Dhabi in 2007 and was organized by the IPU and the Federal National Council of the UAE.

Despite certain achievements, women's political participation in the GCC States remains something of a challenge. There is a need for greater mobilization by all actors of society so as to: (a) increase the number of women in the parliaments of the GCC States; and (b) strengthen the input and visibility of women politicians in parliament and in political life generally.

Both objectives require cooperation with the media and women's associations and NGOs. Indeed, both are important partners for women candidates, women parliamentarians and women politicians. The media acts as an essential vehicle of image-setting: The visibility of women politicians in the media contributes to changing mentalities and serves to heighten the interest of women and girls in politics. The women's associations and NGOs serve as an important vehicle of support to women in accessing political decision-making positions. They are a crucial tool for women politicians to liaise with constituents. Two major questions remain: How can both the media and women's associations serve as a useful vector of change for women in politics? How can the media, women's associations and women parliamentarians ally for gender equality and women's issues?

The Third Regional Conference aims to examine the relationship between women parliamentarians, women's associations and the media. It will provide a forum for women to meet and debate, share their experience and strategize together with a view to devising common solutions and initiatives.

The Conference aims to strengthen women politicians' knowledge and support them in developing common strategies that will enhance their input in the political processes.

The event will also serve to follow up the previous regional events held in Bahrain in July 2006 and in Abu Dhabi in November 2007.

3. Themes of the conference (see provisional programme attached)

The debates seek to address some of the following questions:

What role do the media and women's association play in enhancing women's political participation? Is there room for women MPs, women's associations and media personalities to network on the basis of common interests and concerns? What strategies can serve a partnership between women politicians, women's associations and the media to promote gender issues? How does the media portray women politicians? Are they portrayed differently compared to male politicians? Is the higher number of women working in the media sector

positively influencing the general orientation of programming and the popular image of women? How can women politicians ally themselves with the media to increase their visibility? What part can parliament play in the relationship between women MPs, women's associations and the media?

4. Participation

The Conference is open to women members of parliament from Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. Yemen is invited to participate as an observer. In countries where there are no women members of parliament, women in other political decision-making positions will also be invited (ministers, members of municipal councils and parliamentary staff). Media representatives may also be invited to attend the conference.

5. Resource persons

The IPU, in consultation with the Shura Council of the Sultanate of Oman, will select resource persons, including independent national and international experts. These resource persons will make presentations and lead interactive discussions on each of the themes of the Conference.

6. Languages

The Conference proceedings will take place in Arabic and English. Simultaneous interpretation in the two languages will be provided throughout the meeting.

7. Documents

Written texts of the presentations by the resource persons will be distributed to participants as they become available.

To the extent possible and for the information of participants, the IPU Secretariat will make available background documentation relevant to the issues under discussion.

Participants wishing to distribute relevant documentation will be required to provide papers in sufficient quantities and place them on a table set aside for that purpose.

8. Registration of delegates

The parliaments participating in the Conference are kindly requested to make known the composition of their delegations before 25 November 2008 using the attached registration form. This information should be sent to the Shura Council of the Sultanate of Oman with copy to the IPU, at the following addresses:

Majlis A'Shura Attention: M. Said Al Mashani P.O. Box 981 Postal Code 111 C.P.O. Seeb, Muscat Sultanate of Oman Tel.: ++ 968 24 5104 44 Fax: ++ 968 24 510560	Inter-Parliamentary Union 5, chemin du Pommier, case postale 330 1218 Grand-Saconnex Geneva, Switzerland Tel.: ++ 41 22 - 919 41 50 Fax: ++ 41 22 - 919 41 60 e-mail: postbox@mail.ipu.org
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9. Travel arrangements

The parliaments participating in the Conference will be responsible for their own travel arrangements.