



**Fourth Regional Conference of Women Parliamentarians and
Women in Political Decision Making Positions of the GCC States**

*National plans on gender equality : the role of women
parliamentarians*

Manama, Kingdom of Bahrain, 09-10 December 2009

INFORMATION DOCUMENT

1. The Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), the Shura Council and the Council of Representatives of the Kingdom of Bahrain are organizing the **Fourth Regional Conference of Women Parliamentarians and Women in Decision-making Positions of the Gulf Cooperation Council States**. Entitled “**National strategies and plans on gender equality: the role of women parliamentarians**”, the Conference will be held on:

9 and 10 December 2009, in Manama, Kingdom of Bahrain.

2. Background

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. The three previous regional conferences took place in Bahrain (2006), the United Arab Emirates (2007) and Oman (2008). They were organized respectively in cooperation between the IPU and the Shura Council of Bahrain, the Federal National Council of the UAE and the Shura Council of Oman.

Despite certain achievements, women’s political participation in the GCC States remains something of a challenge. There is a need for greater mobilization so as to: (a) increase the number of women in the Parliaments of the GCC States; (b) strengthen the input and visibility of women politicians in parliament and in political life generally and (c) support the parliament in addressing women’s rights and gender issues .

3. Themes of the conference

The Fourth Regional Conference, entitled “*National strategies and plans on gender equality: the role of women parliamentarians*” will explore the role of Parliament in general, and the contribution of women parliamentarians in particular, in the preparation and implementation of strategies and plans of action for equality, women’s rights and women’s empowerment. It will identify the means to strengthen the input of women MPs in the preparation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of national strategies and plans. The theme of the conference is of particular interest in view of the Beijing plan of action review (Beijing +15), scheduled to take place in 2010.

4. Objectives of the Conference

The regional conference of women parliamentarians provides a forum for women to meet on a regular basis, share their experiences and debate on the achievements made and the remaining challenges. It is as well a platform of exchange with women parliamentarians from other countries and regions.

The overall objective of the Conference is to strengthen women politicians' knowledge and support them to enhance their input in the political processes. It aims as well to enhance solidarity between women parliamentarians of the region and their input in achieving regional progress.

The event will also serve to follow up to the previous regional conferences held since 2006. Each of them focused on a specific theme which was identified by the participants as areas of interest: the electoral processes and the challenges facing women entering parliament (2006), the difference women can make once they enter parliament (2007) and the partnership between women parliamentarians, media and women's associations (2008). The conference endeavors as well to serve as a basis for the identification of national follow-up activities in support to women parliamentarians of the region.

5. 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 attend (ministers, members of municipal councils and parliamentary staff).

Letters of invitation were sent by the Shura Council of Bahrain to the invited parliaments. Convocations and information are being sent by the IPU to the invited parliaments.

6. Resource persons

Independent national and international experts will make presentations and lead interactive discussions on each of the themes of the Conference.

7. Languages

The Conference proceedings will take place in Arabic and English. Translation of the Conference's documents and simultaneous interpretation in the two languages will be provided throughout the meeting by the Parliament of Bahrain.

8. 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.

9. Registration of delegates

The Parliaments participating in the Conference are requested to make known the composition of their delegations before the conference to both the Parliament of Bahrain and the IPU.