

## WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN POLITICAL DECISION MAKING MECHANISMS IN TURKEY

Honorable Delegates of Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean,  
Distinguished Guests,

I would like to thank you for inviting me on the occasion of this special task force meeting and for your warm hospitality.

I would like to greet you on behalf of my organization and my country.

My presentation will be on women's participation in decision making mechanisms in Turkey, with political focus.

Firstly I would like to give you a brief introduction about my organization and some projects.

IKAM, Istanbul Research Centre on Women, founded in 2006, is a non-governmental organisation focused on women's rights and gender equality.

We follow the global agenda to explore new concepts and works and are most willing to be one of the first organisations to launch them in Turkey both at local and national scale.

In that respect, we strongly believe the starting point of establishing equality between men and women is taking steps to ensure the equal participation of women in power and decision-making processes.

### IKAM'S PROJECTS

We believe the key issue is the empowerment of women.

In that respect, we have prepared the "LOCAL ACTION PLAN FOR WOMEN FRIENDLY CITIES" for municipalities. As a part of the Action Plan we aim to raise women's awareness on their existing legal rights, to improve women's status dealing with women's poverty, inadequate education, increasing the rate of propriety rights and to encourage women to take part and responsibility in local political decision making mechanisms in order to integrate gender perspective in local policies.

Secondly, our "POLITICAL MENTORING" project consists of 3 steps:

Step 1 – Candidacy: This step covers the selection of politically involved women and the introduction of the big picture of the political life. We have noticed that women are either reluctant to get involved with politics because they believe they are not apt to it. Or they aim for positions and

they do not know about the post they apply for, and they get disappointed afterwards and they do not succeed or they resign.

Step 2 – Training of selected women on politics, law, women’s issues if needed.

Step 3 – Mentor-Mentee Practice: Shadowing the mentor in political circles and works to get the feeling of political life and for networking. I would like to take this opportunity to inform you that the founder and the current chairwoman of IKAM, Ms. Alev Dedegil is one of the women deputies of the Turkish parliament and she is also the only female president of a parliamentary commission. When we first designed this project she had positioned herself as a mentee. Now, she’s ready to be a political mentor.

## WHY?

Why do we want to achieve all this?

Firstly, participation of women in decision-making mechanisms is most important indicator for the democratic representation and for the democratic process; and secondly a vital necessity since half of the population is women and women should be equally represented in political, economic and social life.

It is obvious that the sustainable development in any field would not be achieved without ensuring the active participation of women at all levels of management, and without securing the mainstreaming of the gender equality perspective in decision-making processes.

Achieving gender equality in power and decision-making processes will help to formulate more effective solutions for the problems and needs of women.

## TURKEY

In Turkey, there are many active women’s NGOs working on these issues and there is a strong political will.

Within the legal framework major amendments have been accomplished in recent years. Just to give you an example. The Article 10 of the Constitution used to refer that **“man and woman are equal.”** With a recent addition it now quotes that **“man and woman are equal and the state is responsible for maintaining this equality.”**

However, legal equality does not ensure equality in practice. In developing countries women usually have to take care of duties that either the state or the local governments should provide. The educational level of women, their economic status and their responsibilities within the family are determinants in the participation of women in power and decision-making processes.

I would like to share the latest development in Turkey. Last month the "Commission of the Equal Opportunities for Men and Women" has been established as a permanent parliamentary commission.

## WOMEN IN POLITICAL LIFE

Although Turkish women obtained the right to vote and to be elected in local elections in 1930 and parliamentary elections in 1934 (earlier than many countries in the world) they have not reached a satisfying level of participation so far.

It is evident from the figures that the efforts of women's NGOs on participation in political life and representation in the general elections of 2007 raised awareness and as a result of this, women represented in the Turkish parliament doubled and increased from 4,4 % to 9.1%, the highest rate achieved in the history of the Republic.

In the Millennium Development Goals Report 2005, Turkish Government has set the target rate of women's representation in the parliament as 17%. And we believe this is a plausible target.

One of the strategies frequently implemented to increase the representation rates of women in politics is to introduce "quota". In Turkey there are both supportive and opposing views on the quota practice. This strategy may have not been adopted constitutionally; however, there are no legal restrictions for political parties to adopt voluntary quota.

## LOCAL LEVEL

Local administrations play a key role in the development of democracy as well as the participation of women in decision-making mechanisms. Women can influence the decisions made at a local level to ensure more gender-sensitive decisions.

However, the representation of women in local administrations, which can be regarded as the first step of their participation in political life, is also low in Turkey. According to the Local Elections of March 2004, only 1.56 % of local administrators are women.

0.56 % of women are mayors (Only one out of the 18 female mayors is a provincial mayor, the others have been elected in municipalities at the district and town level.)

2.3 % of members of municipal boards are women.

1.81% of members of Provincial Assemblies are women.

For the forthcoming Local Elections on March 29th 2009, 169 women candidates will run for 2941 mayorship posts. However, the number of women candidates for local boards and assemblies has increased a great deal.

I would like to share with you an ad on last week's newspaper. This ad run by the Women's Branch of the ruling party reads that "First time in the Political History of Turkey, 1650 Women Candidates in Local Councils".

I believe the situation will improve in 2 weeks time.

## WOMEN IN PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

### The situation of Women in Bureaucracy is 17.9 %

#### TITLE WOMEN IN THE TOTAL (%)

Under secretary	0
Assistant Under secretary	2.5
Governor	0
Deputy Governor	1.2
Director General	3.9
Deputy Director General	6.6
<b>Sub-total</b>	<b>3.6</b>
President	6.8
Vice President	8.7
Secretary General	30
Assistant Secretary General	25
Head of Department	14.1
Assistant Head of Department	7.5
Regional Director	2.6
Sub-governor	1.8
Manager	16
Deputy Manager	27.3
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>17.9</b>

### The Situation of Female Personnel in the Presidency of Council of State

The senior executive posts are occupied by women.

#### TITLE WOMEN IN THE TOTAL (%)

President	100
Chief Prosecutor	100
Vice President	50
Head of Department	15.3
Member	47.3
Prosecutor	42.1
Investigating Judge	39.6
Temporary Rapporteur of the	

Constitutional Court	33.3
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>40.9</b>

### **The Situation of Female Personnel in the Supreme Court of Appeals**

#### **TITLE WOMEN IN THE TOTAL (%)**

President	0
Chief Public Prosecutor	0
Vice President	0
Head of Department	5.8
Member	16.4
Investigating Judge	45.3
Public Prosecutor of the Supreme Court	8.4
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>29.9</b>

### **The Situation of Female Personnel in the Court of Accounts**

#### **TITLE WOMEN IN THE TOTAL (%)**

President	0
Head of Department	0
Member	5.1
Audits	23.6
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>22.3</b>

In addition, 33 % of the lawyers registered at the Turkish Bar Association are women.

### **The Situation of Women in Academic Staff**

#### **TITLE WOMEN IN THE TOTAL (%)**

Presidents	5.3
Deans	12.6
<b>Sub-total</b>	<b>11.7</b>
Professors	27.1
Associate Professors	30.9
Assistant Professors	33.1
Lecturers	37.8
Research Assistants	45.7
Instructors	57.9
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>38.9</b>

The involvement of women in the academic staff is quite high, also when compared to other countries. However they do not occupy senior posts such as president or dean at sufficient levels.

When we take a look at these figures we can be both optimistic and pessimistic. When we examine the rate in academia or in law enforcement we are optimistic. When it comes to bureaucracy or political participation a certain level of pessimism gets us.

Fortunately, we know that it is a long haul process and requires a constant effort to achieve women's participation in decision making mechanisms.

But at the end, the fact that Turkey had been once governed by a female prime minister – with her pros and cons- makes my country a privileged one and definitely makes us optimistic for the future.

Thank you very much.