



**SECOND REGIONAL CONFERENCE OF WOMEN PARLIAMENTARIANS
AND WOMEN IN DECISION MAKING POSITIONS OF THE GCC STATES**

WOMEN MAKING A DIFFERENCE IN PARLIAMENT

United Arab Emirates, 30-31 October 2007

INFORMATION DOCUMENT

1. The Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), in cooperation with the Federal National Council of the United Arab Emirates, is organizing a regional conference of women parliamentarians and women in decision-making positions of the Gulf Cooperation Council States.

2. The conference, entitled "*Women making a difference in parliament*", will be held in:

**Abu Dhabi,
on 30 and 31 October 2007**

Background

3. In the past two years, women gained political rights in Kuwait and in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), were elected for the first time ever to parliament in Bahrain and the UAE and have become strong political actors as voters and representatives in most of the GCC States. The regional average of women in parliament in the Arab world has risen by two percentage points, from 7% in January 2006 to 9% in January 2007. This great progress was achieved in this short period of time thanks to the recent results of elections/renewals in the GCC States. Furthermore, enhancing women's political participation is a stated objective for most of the GCC leadership. A more balanced participation of women is considered as an important step for democratic strengthening and enhanced representation.

4. The regional level of women's political participation remains however the lowest in the world, far from the world average of 17%, and several challenges remain. The first is to support and increase the progress accomplished in terms of numbers of women in the parliamentary institutions of the GCC States. The second challenge is to strengthen women MPs' input in parliamentary work, all the more so with the important number of newly elected and appointed women MPs in the GCC States.

5. In July 2006, the IPU, at the invitation of the Shura Council of Bahrain, organized the first regional conference for women in decision making positions in the GCC States. This conference brought together women members of parliament, ministers, members of local councils, candidates and women working in parliament from Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar and Saudi Arabia. This first positive experience confirmed the need to offer a space for women to debate and share their experiences on issues related to women's political participation and gender issues in general.

Objectives of the Conference

6. The positive regional experience of the past years in the GCC has triggered a regional dynamic which it is important to support and develop. By organising regular meetings of women MPs and women in decision-making positions of the GCC States, the Inter-Parliamentary Union aims at contributing to this process.

7. The regional conference will provide a forum for women parliamentarians and women in political decision-making positions of the region to meet and debate questions relating to the development of political and parliamentary working skills, including through sharing of experience and presentations of case studies from GCC States and other regions.

8. The Conference aims to strengthen women's knowledge of political processes; promote an exchange of experience between women coming from a similar cultural and political background;

maintain visibility on the question of women in politics and encourage participation of women in politics.

9. The conference will also serve to follow up to the previous regional event held in Bahrain in July 2006. (see: <http://www.ipu.org/Splz-e/gulf06.pdf>)

Themes of the conference (see Provisional Program)

10. The conference will focus on the role and input of women in parliament. Participants will examine mechanisms to promote women's access to parliament and to facilitate their effective participation as legislators. It will examine women's political participation and the means of addressing the challenges faced by women in the political process. The conference will also propose different means for the action of women in parliament, including their partnership with men parliamentarians. The conference will provide a space for exchange of best practices on mainstreaming gender in parliament and on the coordination between women MPs and organizations from the civil society.

Resource persons

11. The IPU, in consultation with the Federal National Council of the UAE, 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 seminar.

Participation

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

Languages

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

Documents

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

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

16. Participants wishing to distribute to their colleagues relevant documentation will be required to provide it in sufficient quantities and put it on a table set aside for that purpose.

Registration of delegates

17. The parliaments participating in the Seminar are kindly requested to make known the composition of their delegations before 20 October 2007 on the attached registration form. This information should be sent to the Federal National Council of the UAE with copy to the IPU at the following address:

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