Miss- Representation: Women in politics

Hi, I'm Fiona Yelland, and alongside Devon and Kate I will be your Political I chair! This is my first conference as a chair, so if you're new to MUN don't worry! Please browse below for details on my chosen topic, and I hope to receive lots of Position Papers from you all! I hope that this topic will spark some interesting debate, but that we also have fun!

Democracy and egalitarianism.

Women constitute at least half of any population and should be represented proportionally. The recognition of this is that women's rights to full citizenship must be reflected in their effective participation in the various levels of political life.

There is no uniform view however on what form this "representation" should take. Is it necessary for women to be represented proportionally simply because they are half the population? Or is it because women parliamentarians are integral to ensuring issues which concern women in the community at large will be addressed? Support can be found for both arguments across the political spectrum and between men and women. Perhaps we need to look at all the angles in order to decide whether or not we can really introduce effective measures in order to ensure greater representation?

Reasons for introducing remedies for greater representation:

Legitimacy: Women's under-representation can be dangerous since it distances elected representatives from their electorate and more particularly from the women among their electors.

Differences in interests: Women have different social roles, functions and values. Like what? It is reasonable to believe that women are more aware of their own needs and are therefore better able to press for them.

Changing politics: Female politicians, if there are enough of them, can change the focus of politics by broadening the agenda to include issues such as child care, domestic violence, women's health etc.

Efficient use of human resources: Women comprise half the world's pool of potential talent and ability. In short, without the full participation of women in decision making, the political process will be less effective than it can, and should be, to the detriment of society as a whole.

A basic human right?: Should we be trying our best to represent women in the same way that our governments are attempting to represent people of different religions, races, and political beliefs?

Options for generating greater representation:

The introduction of a quota system for women: Quotas for women do not discriminate, but compensate for actual barriers that prevent women from their fair share of the political seats. It is argued of course that women have the right of a citizen to have fair representation. It is also argued that it is in fact the political parties that control the nominations, not primarily the voters who decide
who gets elected; therefore quotas are not violations of voters' rights. However, quotas imply that politicians are elected because of their gender, not because of their qualifications and experience and that more qualified candidates are pushed aside. Many women do not want to get elected just because they are women, and introducing quotas creates significant conflicts within the party organization. Quotas are already apparent in some countries, whether through legislation or through a voluntary system introduced by Political Parties. Rwanda's quota system has ensured that 56.3% of Politicians are women, whereas Taiwan's quota system still has females representing less than 1% of their politicians.

Facilities catered towards women: Changes to both premises and procedures which could be beneficial to prospective female candidates. This in particular includes childcare and family facilities within a parliamentary building. Also, the alteration of timings for sitting days, and the eradication of late night sittings would allow for more women to become involved with politics whilst still letting it fit in with their family lifestyle. For example, our own Scottish parliament boasts its own public crèche - the only facility of its kind in Europe. This would be taken into consideration by MSPs with young families.

Funding: Raising funds can present an obstacle for women. To overcome this difficulty, special funds for women candidates have been set up in a number of countries. In Canada, the Progressive Conservative and Liberal Parties established funds to provide training programmes and to give financial support directly to women to help pay expenses such as child care and housekeeping. In the United States there is a fund called Emily's List (Early Money is Like Yeast - it raises dough), which has 33,159 members who last year gave more than $11 million to Democratic female candidates who are pro-choice. This fund has helped put five women into the Senate and 33 in the House of Representatives. There is also an Emily's List in the UK. However, it is understood that many political parties across a variety of countries will not have the money to provide such funding for women. Therefore, maybe we should be looking to other possibilities for greater representation. Overall, Women are now representing 20% of the World's parliamentary seats, but the question is, is this really enough?

I hope that you find this briefing paper useful, and that you are inspired enough to write a Resolution to bring to the Conference (one of 2 you are expected to bring)! But in the meantime, you are all expected to submit a Position Paper (this should be around 50 words, representing your country's views on the topic) and send it to me at the latest by Friday 15 February. My email address is fyelland@hotmail.com. Please email me Position Papers, or if you have any queries about Resolutions, the Committee, or the Conference in general, please drop me an email.

Useful Links
http://www.quotaproject.org/country.cfm?SortOrder=Percentage
http://www.economist.com/blogs/graphicdetail/2012/05/focus-1
http://www.parliament.uk/education/online-resources/parliament-explained/women-in-politics/
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