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Contact: Leigh Pasqual - 212 906 5463  
leigh.pasqual@undp.org

## **PROGRESS OF THE WORLD'S WOMEN: MOST POSITIVE CHANGE SEEN IN WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION**

**No systematic differences between developed and developing world in women's share of seats in parliament - US, France and Japan lag behind 13 sub-Saharan countries**

**United Nations, New York** – A new report, launched today by the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), revealed that although women have progressed relatively slowly in the last two years in the areas of education, literacy and employment, there have been encouraging signs of improvement in women's legislative representation. The increase in women's share of seats in parliament was attributed mainly to political measures in several countries, where quotas were legislated or adopted on a voluntary basis.

UNIFEM's report, *Progress of the World's Women 2002: Volume 2: Gender Equality and the Millennium Development Goals*, is the second edition of a biennial publication first produced in 2000 to track and measure the world's commitment to gender equality. *Progress 2002* assesses improvements made towards women's empowerment within the context of the Millennium Development Goals, a set of eight goals created by the international community in 2000 to focus global efforts to end poverty, hunger and inequality. Analyzing the indicators for Goal 3 - 'Promote gender equality and empower women' - *Progress 2002* examines progress for women, or the lack of it, in education, literacy, non-agricultural wage employment and parliamentary representation.

The goal of increasing women's political participation is a long-standing one. The target of 30 per cent representation in key decision-making positions has been agreed on at numerous international conferences in the last decade. Although there were definite signs of progress in all regions between 2000 and 2002 towards meeting the target, *Progress 2002* indicates that women are still on the whole largely absent from parliaments. They account for about 14 per cent of members in 2002 overall. Only 11 countries had reached the 30 per cent benchmark in 2002 - Sweden, Denmark, Germany, Finland, Norway, Iceland, the Netherlands, South Africa, Costa Rica, Argentina and Mozambique. All of these countries have used quotas.

Furthermore, the report also shows that unlike the other indicators of progress which show systematic differences between wealthy and poor countries and an undeniable link between poverty and gender inequality, there are no such differences in terms of women's participation in national governments. This is the only indicator that is not affected by national poverty, resulting in the fact that in some wealthy countries, women's political participation is well below that achieved in many developing nations. The United States, France and Japan, where women's share of parliamentary seats are 12 per cent, 11.8 per cent and 10 per cent respectively, lag behind 13 developing countries in sub-Saharan Africa, which is experiencing the greatest regional poverty in the world. In South Africa and

Mozambique, women's share of seats is 30 per cent, while Rwanda and Uganda have 25.7 per cent and 24.7 per cent respectively.

Noeleen Heyzer, executive director of UNIFEM, reiterated the need for women's presence in political decision-making positions. "There is much more to be done to ensure that women are accepted as equal partners in key decision-making processes. Especially in post-conflict situations, where new constitutions and legislative structures are being created, it is critical that women are present at the peace table and in post-war policy-making. Real progress towards gender equality will be seen when women have more say in the decisions that affect their lives," she said.

UNIFEM is working with several organisations around the world to urge that more attention be paid to women's participation. In preparation for the parliamentary elections in Kenya in December 2002, UNIFEM partnered with local organisations, like the Kenya Women's Political Caucus, to provide media advocacy, election monitoring, training and capacity building for women running for election. The result was a noticeable increase in the number of women elected to parliament, the first ever appointment of six women to cabinet, and the establishment of a Ministry for Gender, Sport and Culture.

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***Progress of the World's Women 2002: Volume 2 will be available online at UNIFEM's website - [www.unifem.undp.org](http://www.unifem.undp.org)***

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*UNIFEM is the women's fund at the United Nations, providing financial support and technical assistance to innovative programs promoting women's human rights, their economic and political empowerment, and gender equality in over 100 countries. For more information, visit [www.unifem.undp.org](http://www.unifem.undp.org).*

*UNIFEM, 304 East 45<sup>th</sup> St, 15<sup>th</sup> Floor, New York, NY 10017, tel: 212 906-6400, fax: 212-906-6705*