**Disrupting the Status Quo: A Call for Progress in Women's Political Participation**

**Cairo- Egypt 18-20 September 2023**

Women's political participation in the Arab region remains limited despite some progress in recent years. Cultural and societal norms, as well as discriminatory laws, continue to restrict the political space for women in the region. Despite the efforts of many women's rights activists and organizations, significant barriers remain to full and equal political representation for women. The current political climate presents both challenges and opportunities for further progress towards gender parity in the Arab region.

The regional electoral support project, in partnership with the German Agency for International Cooperation (GIZ) and the Arab Women Organization (AWO), organized a high-level regional forum to facilitate discussion and thinking on a new path for women’s political participation in the region, the forum took place from 10-20 September in Cairo, Egypt. The forum brought together stakeholders from twelve countries. Participants included women's organizations, electoral bodies, parliamentarians, civil society, and international partners, united under the banner of accelerating progress in women's political participation. Innovative tools were employed to analyze system-level dynamics and develop a shared "direction of travel" across sectors.

The overall goal of the event was to collectively facilitate new thinking to generate new approaches to advance women's political participation in the Arab region that can be collectively implemented by CSOs, institutions and ministries at both the regional and national level. The three-day workshop used various innovative approaches and tools to explore opportunities for collective action and to generate a concrete action plan to address obstacles to women's political participation.

During the event, participants from each country provided insights on the status of women political participation based on their experience and their role. They were also introduced to innovative approaches, systems and portfolios that helped in identify barriers, generating new approaches to advance women's political participation in the Arab region, drafted a statement of intent and came up with concrete action plans that can collectively implemented at the regional and national level. Discussions were very interactive, and participants were very excited to be introduced to new innovative approaches and system thinking that enriched the discussions, the way of thinking to identify the challenges and to come up with new solutions. The event was concluded with agreement on the way forward and recommendations.

The event resulted in the adoption of integration and interconnection between sectors and initiatives as an approach to achieving paradigm shift in women’s political participation, to result in:

* Fostering a culture of norms and values that actively support women's participation in political life, utilizing all possible means and measures.
* Creating a comprehensive legal framework that ensures equality of opportunity between women and men, along with the conditions enabling them to benefit from these opportunities.
* Establishing a secure environment that encourages the active participation of women in economic, social, and political life.

Using the Statement of Intent as a programmatic guide, UNDP will analyze the system of women's political participation to identify opportunities for systemic transformation. A mechanism for continuous learning will also be established to understand what truly advances women's political participation.

The road to gender parity in political participation may be challenging in the Arab region, but it's attainable. Embracing the complexity of the system and designing a response informed by a jointly articulated vision across sectors is our source of hope. Together, we can challenge stereotypes, dismantle barriers, and create a brighter, more equitable future for women in the Arab region.