

United Nations Development Programme



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**Seminar on Paving the Way Forward for
Equal Opportunities in High-level Decision-Making Positions**

Remarks by

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- His Royal Highness, Crown Prince Haakon and Her Royal Highness, Princess Mette-Marit of Norway
- Yang Berhormat Senator Dato' Sri Shahrizat Abdul Jalil, Minister of Women, Family and Community Development
- His Excellency Trond Giske, Minister of Trade and Industries, Norway

Distinguished guests, members of the media, ladies and gentlemen.

On behalf of the United Nations Development Programme in Malaysia, it gives me great pleasure to welcome all of you today to this important Seminar on *Paving the Way Forward for Equal Opportunities in High-level Decision Making Positions*.

Gender equality and women's empowerment are human rights that lie at the heart of development and the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). In fact, gender inequality is not only a major obstacle to meeting MDG targets, but also a key factor that will make the achievement of the goals all but impossible if current significant gaps between women and men, in terms of capacities, access to resources and opportunities, and vulnerability to violence and conflict, are not fully addressed.

One of the key indicators of MDG 3, which promotes gender equality and empowers women, is the proportion of seats held by women in national parliaments. This is widely regarded as an important indicator because increasing the voice and participation of women in the political sphere is critical if we wish to seriously place both women's and gender issues on national agendas, and ensure that women are fully included as active participants in a nation's development.

Ladies and gentlemen.

In 1995, the landmark Beijing Platform for Action was adopted at the United Nations women's conference in Beijing, China. It identified two strategic objectives. First, to ensure women's equal access to and full participation in power structures and decision-making; and second, to increase the capacity of women to participate in decision making and leadership. Fifteen years on, too many women still face economic, political, and social barriers, hampering their equal political participation.

A firm commitment from both men and women is needed to break these barriers down, and to ensure that all citizens can enjoy the benefits of development. This should include providing more women with the opportunity to serve and lead in the highest political, as well as public and private sector offices in the country.

To this end, in 2008, UNDP and the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development Malaysia completed a project entitled *"Towards Achieving at Least 30% Participation of Women at Decision Making Levels in Malaysia"*. The purpose of the project was to analyze the representation of women in high-level decision-making positions, in both the public and private sectors, and develop a Plan of Action to improve women's participation in both.

With the Plan of Action completed and currently pending Cabinet and parliamentary approval, UNDP hopes that the Government of Malaysia will prioritize its approval as a concrete demonstration of its commitment to, and recognition of, the importance of ensuring women's participation in high-level decision-making positions.

In the absence of such a commitment, ensuring gender equality and justice in Malaysia will remain a continuous challenge because decisions about women, and these which directly or indirectly impact on their well-being, cannot be made without women, or just by men.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is UNDP's hope that this Seminar will significantly contribute to reemphasizing the need and importance of creating equal opportunity access in high-level decision-making positions in Malaysia, and that this will be measurable through concrete action at the highest political levels of Malaysian decision-making soon.

Once again, thank you for your support in furthering this important agenda.

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