



## PRESS RELEASE

### PAVING THE WAY FORWARD FOR INCREASING THE NUMBER OF WOMEN IN HIGH-LEVEL DECISION-MAKING POSITIONS

*HRH Princess Mette-Marit of Norway, accompanied by HRH Crown Prince Haakon Magnus, delivers special address on political and economic equality for women*

*Kuala Lumpur, 9 March 2010* - The Government of Malaysia, the Government of Norway and UNDP Malaysia came together today to pave the way forward for equal opportunity access in the political and economic sphere, via a jointly-organized seminar intended to share international experiences in formulating and operationalising effective policies that allow for increased representation of women in high-level decision-making positions in different arenas of public and private life.

Delivering the welcome address was Y.B. Senator Dato' Sri Shahrizat Abdul Jalil, Minister of Women, Family and Community Development, who said, "Equal representation of men and women in positions of leadership is the essence of an inclusive society and reflective of the progressiveness of a nation. By becoming visible, we inevitably ensure that women's issues are mainstreamed and discussed as matters of concern for the whole society."

Sharing the Norwegian perspective in her keynote address was H.R. Highness Mette-Marit, who said, "I hope that this seminar will spur further collaboration between the Governments of Malaysia and Norway when it comes to sharing information and lessons learnt on gender issues."

Speaking for the UNDP, Mr. Kamal Malhotra, Resident Representative for Malaysia, Singapore and Brunei Darussalam said, "Increasing the voice and participation of women in high-level decision-making positions, especially in the political sphere, is critical if we wish to seriously place women's issues on national agendas, and ensure that women are fully included as active participants in a nation's development; without this, gender equality will remain a continuous challenge because decisions about women cannot be made without women."

Despite Malaysia having made a number of strong efforts at gender mainstreaming through the years, and women having entered the labour force in unprecedented numbers thereby increasing their potential participation in decision-making, women continue to be under-represented in many formal decision-making structures, especially at the senior level in public positions.

In order to address this persistent imbalance, a National Plan of Action for the achievement of at least 30% participation of women in decision-making positions in Malaysia has been developed by the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development (MWFCD), in collaboration with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in Malaysia.

The Plan of Action was considered necessary and critical since it was recognized that participation of women in politics in Malaysia had only increased very moderately in recent history. For example, 2.9% of those elected to Parliament in 1959 were women, compared to only 10.8% in 2008. The percentage of women elected to State Assemblies was 2.7% in 1986, and 8.0% in 2008. The percentage of women in the Senate actually fell from 33% in 2004 to 26.7% in 2008.

### **About the seminar**

The jointly-organised seminar entitled *“Paving the Way Forward for Equal Opportunities in High-Level Decision Making Positions”* brings together key figures from the public and private sectors, as well as civil society groups, to discuss the issues and policies which facilitate as well as hinder increased women’s participation in high-level decision-making positions.

Globally, women’s participation in high-level economic and political decision-making still remains low in most countries, despite educational advances for women in many parts of the world. According to research by the International Labour Organization (ILO), between 2000 and 2002, women’s overall share of managerial jobs ranged between a mere 20 and 40 per cent in 48 out of the 63 countries for which data was available.

Even though women are increasingly well represented within professions such as law, medicine and engineering, their participation at the decision-making level remains low, especially in developing countries.

As such, this seminar seeks to provide a platform to share experiences and identify policies that have allowed countries such as Norway to have one of the highest percentages of women in high-level decision-making positions in the world. It also hopes to provide opportunities for the exploration of future collaboration between the Governments of Malaysia and Norway and UNDP on information sharing and lessons learnt on policies surrounding gender and the family.

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**About the Minister of Women, Family and Community Development Malaysia (MWFCD):** MWFCD is responsible for increasing public awareness on the important role played by women and the family institution in achieving the country's development agenda. We are also one of the lead ministries in the NKRA Lab, fighting to eradicate hardcore poverty. There are 5 agencies placed under MWFCD:

- Department of Women Development (JPW)
- Department of Social Welfare (JKM)
- National Population and Family Development Board (LPPKN)
- Social Institute of Malaysia (ISM)
- NAM Institute for the Empowerment of Women (NIEW)

For more information about MWFCD, please visit: <http://www.kpwkm.gov.my>

**About UNDP:** UNDP is the UN's global development network, advocating for change and connecting countries to knowledge, experience and resources to help people build a better life. We are on the ground in 166 countries, working with them on their own solutions to global and national development challenges. As they develop local capacity, they draw on the people of UNDP and our wide range of partners.

For more information about UNDP in Malaysia, please visit: [www.undp.org.my](http://www.undp.org.my)

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For queries, please contact:

**Alice Suriati Mazlan, Head of Corporate Communications,  
Ministry of Women, Family and Development Community**

E: [alice@kpwkm.gov.my](mailto:alice@kpwkm.gov.my) DL : 03-26904013  
M : 019-3274966 F : 03-26979966

**Jamie Menon, Communications Officer, UNDP Malaysia**

E: [jamie.menon@undp.org](mailto:jamie.menon@undp.org) DL: 03-2091 5154  
M: 012 280 7457 F: 03-2095 2870