

**EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT**  
**COMMITTEE ON WOMEN' RIGHTS AND EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES**

**Statement by Ms Anna KARAMANO**,  
Chairperson of the European Parliament Committee on Women's Rights and Equal  
Opportunities, on the occasion of the Meeting of Ministers of Women's Affairs,  
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The initiative to bring together women leaders from all over the world is of great importance. Thus, I would like to congratulate the International Assembly of Women Ministers and the Council of Women World Leaders for having arranged this meeting. It would be very important to end up this meeting by setting up a world wide Network and have a permanent structure. The Committee on Women's Rights and Equal Opportunities of the European Parliament would like to express its support to such a Network.

This meeting is convened in a very critical moment for world politics, faced with an escalation of violence, terrorism, insecurity, economic recession, religious fundamentalism, unemployment and a widening gap between the developed and the developing countries. At the same time women's basic freedoms and rights are being violated. Women continue to experience direct and indirect discrimination and inequality in the labour market, inadequate social infrastructure, unequal distribution of time, responsibilities and power between men and women, new phenomena of slavery and sexual exploitation, the portrayal of distorted stereotypes by the mass media and the double standards of sexual morality in many parts of the world. All these are problems dialectically connected to the low participation and influence of women in economic and political power structures.

At the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century women are faced with many challenges. There is a clear need to explore new ways of democratic governance by empowering women and identifying a new political culture. Women leaders should take over and start elaborating an alternative political platform, from the women's perspective, find new ways of settling differences, make efforts for a fairer distribution of power and resources among peoples and create a more human society. Women can be very successful, because historically they have been associated with non violence. Their value system is associated with dialogue, compromise, reconciliation and the settling of differences with peaceful means. This value system can hopefully provide an alternative to the current culture of violence and aggression, while at the same time it can help the development of a new political world order. I strongly believe that a critical mass of women in political decision making can change the current political agenda by placing more attention to social issues related to quality of life, such as peace, the protection of the environment, social security and welfare, health care, education, care for children and the elderly.

The Committee of Women's Rights and Equal Opportunities of the European Parliament has put on the top of its priorities, to promote women's participation in the decision making process and achieve an equal share of power, responsibilities and rights for men and women, in all areas of economic, political and social life. Here are our five strongest arguments:

**- reinforcement of democracy**

In any society, democracy is based upon the participation of all people in the process of decision making. Women constitute half of the population and are entitled to be represented proportionately.

**- application of the principle of gender equality**

Equality is a universal human right. The division of labour and double standards should be abolished; both men and women are entitled to participate on equal terms in both private and public spheres.

**- efficient use of human resources**

Women constitute half of the world's pool of potential talent and ability and their under-representation deprives society of the efficient use of human resources.

**- enrichment of political culture with different interests and value-systems**

Women's historical exclusion from decision-making and their confinement within the private domain has led to gender differences in values and interests. In any democratic society political decisions should reflect the interests and values of all the people.

**- rejuvenation of political culture**

The different principles, ideas and values of women are more compatible with the social demands and political needs of our times and can contribute to the renewal of the political agenda and political life.

Naturally, besides arguments, we need strategies to achieve our aims. We need solidarity among women and world wide action plans. We need policies which can help us reap the benefits of technological progress and achieve a fair distribution of potential prosperity. Building up a strong Network can help women come closer to the vision of a fair, secure and balanced world. It is up to us all!