



NEWS RELEASE

Over 20000 People Reached by Successful Advocacy Campaign on a Gender Sensitive Electoral Law in the Democratic Republic of Congo

Campaign Urges Equal Access of women and men to electoral mandates and electoral offices

Kinshasa 25 November 2005....A two weeks high level advocacy campaign to promote equal access of women and men to electoral mandates and electoral offices has concluded in Kinshasa, the capital of the Democratic Republic of Congo. The campaign was organized by different women networks and organizations, working together under a 'Coalition for Gender Equality' and supported by the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), in partnership with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), MONUC, the Independent Electoral Commission and the Ministry of Women and Family Affairs. The campaign received the endorsement of numerous government leaders including the personal representative of the President and Head of State, Yerodia Abdoulaye Ndongbassi, Vice President in charge of the Commission of Reconstruction and Development, welcome and encouraged by the Vice President in charge of the Commission of Politics, Defence and Security as well as the Vice President in charge of Socio-Cultural issues.

The campaign was organized less than two months before the upcoming parliamentary debate on the draft electoral law that would guide elections and the holding of a national referendum on the Constitution. Its main aim was to target government officials, leaders of political parties, private and public institutions and civil society networks to call for an electoral law and constitution that would be gender sensitive and that would equal opportunities for men and women to claim their civic rights and participate in their country's development.

Activities during the campaign focused on raising awareness, and stimulating debate on the need for an electoral law and constitution that took into account the rights of both men and women. It employed a mix of media –through which over 20000 people were reached, using 20 radio and television channels, 25 newspapers, and a petition entitled "2500 reasons to vote for a proportional electoral system with closed and alternate electoral lists".

The main messages put across by the campaign included:

- Congolese women have a lot to offer to the nation. They have proven this in their active involvement of peace building and reconstruction initiatives. Involving them in the decision making of the country will serve only to magnify the development potential of the country.
- The DRC has signed and ratified international conventions to demonstrate its commitment to gender equality. It is among the countries that have included gender equality provisions in its Constitution (Constitution of the 3rd Republic). The time has come to translate this political will into concrete action with direct impact on women's participation in decision making processes.
- Equal Access of women and men to electoral mandates and electoral offices will improve governance and at the same time bring sustainable solutions to development of the country;

women are not seeking to govern against men, but to govern with men to maximize development potential in the DRC.

The Innovation of the advocacy campaign

A Coalition for Gender Equality was set up for the advocacy campaign which organized sensitization meetings with members of government, Independent Electoral Commission and International Organizations to express their position on the draft electoral law. This was enhanced with the petition on 2500 reasons to adopt a gender sensitive electoral law and a document entitled 'Argumentaire' which presents succinct arguments and commentaries on respective articles of the draft electoral law. By the time the campaign was ending, over 12000 signatures were obtained from women and men in Kinshasa alone on the petition, over 2000 copies of the 'Argumentaire', over 2000 copies of the Women's agenda on elections and over 1000 copies of 'EQUIVOTE' handout distributed.

UNIFEM is the Women's Fund at the United Nations Working for Women's Empowerment and Gender Equality promotion.

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