

Women Politicians, Community Leaders in Sudan Call for More Influence on Government

By William Eagle
Washington,DC
16 November 2006

listen to interview with Agnes Nyoka (MP3) 

This past week, a meeting of Sudanese women from across the political spectrum ended in Khartoum urging that women be included at all levels of governance and peace making.

The meeting was arranged by The Initiative for Inclusive Security – a program of Hunt Alternatives Fund based in Boston, Massachusetts. The Fund advocates for the participation of all stakeholders, particularly women, in peace efforts around the world.

In their final communiqué, the participants at the conference urged that women make up 30 percent of all commissions – including those dealing with land, oil and civil service. They also challenge the current administration to ensure that women make up half of all posts at the national, regional and local levels of governance. Currently, government policy calls for 30 percent of all posts to go to women. The participants call for economic policies that better serve the needs of the poor. They urge increased transparency in decision-making to ensure women have access to economic opportunities.

Among those attending the meeting was Agnes Nyoka, a parliamentarian in the current national assembly, and a representative of the Sudan Peoples Liberation Movement.

She says that women across the political divide are united on a number of issues that affect women. Women make up a majority of the people of Sudan, and nearly three-quarters of those caught in conflict.

On the political level, Nyoka says women played a significant role in the negotiations that finalized a Comprehensive Peace Agreement two years ago between the national government and forces in the south.

“Women were involved at the last moment,” she explained, “through advocacy, and lobbying.”

Nyoka says women leaders are affected by a lack of financing for their campaigns, especially in an environment where a number of political parties are pursuing limited funds. (Security issues – such as the number of land mines yet to be neutralized – also limits the campaigns of many women candidates).

She says women’s groups have been affected by a law allowing the government to approve or deny outside financing of non-governmental organizations. Nyoka says most of the financial support for women’s groups comes from foreign donors.

The new parliament has only been sitting for about a year. So, far, Nyoka says it has not

acted on women's issues. But she's hopeful. Among the projects that she'd like to see tackled are poverty, and sexual abuse:

"Culturally," she says, "you're not supposed to mention anything about rape, torture within the (local) community."

Nyoka hopes that support is provided for NGO's and other groups that document abuse against women. She also wants the National Assembly to ratify the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women.

Print