

“Various definitions of empowerment for women exist. Empowerment is a process of gaining understanding of, and control over, the political forces around one as a means of improving one’s standing in society. This requires awareness of one’s situation, skill acquisition that enables change, and working jointly in effecting change. It involves ‘claiming equality’ instead of waiting for others to provide it. Empowerment can be used for social mobilization, changing women’s state of mind, and gaining access to the bases of social power. ... Empowerment begins when women ‘change their ideas about the causes of their powerlessness, when they recognize the systemic forces that oppress them, and when they act to change the conditions of their lives.’” (Women in the Third World: An Encyclopedia of Contemporary Issues, pp. 498 - 499)

“Hence Arab women have continued to join the different political movements as isolated individuals rather than as a collective force. In addition, women active in the political arena have remained a very small political movement and as a small minority have tended to suffer from the alienation and psychological disorders that affect such minorities. They feel the gap that exists between the reality imposed upon them and that to which they aspire, and realize that the political movement in no way represents them or expresses the problems they face every day in the family, in the workplace, and within society as a whole. Arab women are deprived of the right to reflect their situation, and the difficulties which they face. The reason given to explain this neglect is that a number of other important problems should be given priority.” (The Nawal Al-Saadawi Reader, p. 239)

“The few women who form the Arab political movements and become members find themselves surrounded by an atmosphere that leads them to adopt the ideas and way of thinking followed by the men in control of these movements. They tend to repeat the same ideas and slogans, and deny the existence of what we may call the problem of Arab women. Even if the existence of this problem is recognized, it is considered of secondary importance, or relegated to the category of issues that can be dealt with at a later date, since the time has not yet come when they should be faced and solved effectively, or it is treated as a matter that will find a spontaneous solution as soon as imperialist and class domination have been abolished.” (The Nawal Al-Saadawi Reader, pp. 239-240)

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that everyone has the right to take part in the Government of his/her country. the empowerment and autonomy of women and the improvement of women’s social, economic and political status is essential for the achievement of both transparent and accountable government and administration and sustainable development in all areas of life. the power relations that prevent women from leading fulfilling lives operate at many levels of society, from the most personal to the

highly public. Achieving the goal of equal participation of women and men in decision-making will provide a balance that more accurately reflects the composition of society and is needed in order to strengthen democracy and promote its proper functioning. ... women’s equal participation in political life plays a pivotal role in the general process of the advancement of women. Women’s equal participation in decision-making is not only a demand for simple justice or democracy but can also be seen as a necessary condition for women’s interests to be taken into account without the active participation of women and the incorporation of women’s perspective at all levels of decision-making, the goals of equality, development and peace cannot be achieved. (Platform for Action and the Beijing Declaration, p.109)

“One cannot deal with the problem of female representation by a quota system alone. Political parties, the educational system, NGOs, trade unions, churches - all must take responsibility within their own organizations to systematically promote women’s participation, from the bottom up. This will take time. It will not happen overnight, or in one year or five years; it will take one or two generations to realize significant change. ... This is what we are working on in Sweden. We did not start with a quota system. First we laid the groundwork to facilitate women’s entry into politics. We prepared the women to ensure they were competent to enter the field; and we prepared the system, which made it a little less shameful for men to step aside. Then we used quotas as an instrument in segments and institutions where we needed a breakthrough.” (Birgitta Dahl, Speaker of Parliament, Sweden)

“Quotas are a double-edged sword. On the one hand, they oblige men to think about including women in decision-making, since men must create spaces for women. On the other hand, since it is men who are opening up these spaces, they will seek out women who they will be able to manage - women who will more easily accept the hegemony of men.” (Anna Balletbo, MP, Spain)

“So it is that women in authority have often assumed male attributes, even male dress. In Egypt 3,500 years ago, the only woman Pharaoh, Hatshepsut, had to put a beard of lapis lazuli and a male kilt for ceremonial occasions. It was the only way she could perform the central ritual of Egyptian kingship, by which the god-monarch every morning celebrated the sun’s rebirth and re-transmitted life to the people of the Nile valley. In literature, Shakespear’s Portia, in the Merchant of Venice, amazes everyone with her legal skill — by which she ‘tempers justice with mercy’ and outwits the villain in his lawsuit for a pound of flesh. But she does so disguised as a man. Similarly, both Indira Gandhi and Margaret Thatcher were termed ‘statesmen’ and contemporary women executive wear ‘power suits’. The reverse, a man imitating a woman, is less frequent, particularly if the aim is to portray public power and influence.” (<http://www.idea.int/women.htm>)