



Press Release

For Immediate Release

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iKNOW Politics Partners Launch Arabic Language Website to Support Women in Politics

Amman, Jordan: iKNOW Politics, an online network dedicated to the advancement of women in politics, launched a new Arabic language version here today, opening it up to potentially millions of new users in a region where women are underrepresented politically.

About 150 women leaders, political candidates, activists and representatives of women's organizations primarily from the Middle East and North Africa are attending the two-day launch event, which focuses on the impact of media and information technology on the number and effectiveness of women in politics in the region. It is designed to initiate an ongoing dialogue that will be carried out through iKNOW Politics, the International Knowledge Network of Women in Politics, www.iknowpolitics.org.

Her Royal Highness Princess Basma Bint Talal of Jordan opened the conference and gave a keynote address that offered further insight into the situation of women and politics in the Arab region. Princess Basma's role as an advocate for women's rights is well recognized in the Arab region as well as internationally. She is also a Goodwill Ambassador for UNIFEM. During her keynote address HRH Princess Basma said:

"Women political leaders have risen to some of the most commanding positions in the world, having utilized the power of the media and new media to the advantage of their political message and interaction with their constituencies." The Princess added:

"If Arab women in politics is the realization of the possible, then promoting their political roles promises to be one of the outcomes of a new technology

and media landscape, in addition to highlighting the important responsibilities that women have always assumed in our society. Not only will the iKNOW Politics Arabic website draw attention to these achievements, it will help to set positive change in motion by engaging its members in an open dialogue, and creating a forum in which information and knowledge exchange can consolidate the voices of women from all over the world."

This year, at least 200,000 people are expected to visit the iKNOW Politics website, which began in 2007 and also operates in English, French and Spanish.

The project is realized through a partnership between International IDEA, the Inter-Parliamentary Union, the National Democratic Institute, the UNDP and UNIFEM. The Arabic launch was made possible through the generous support of the United Nations Democracy Fund (UNDEF) and the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

While women face numerous obstacles around the world in their efforts to achieve political parity, they have a particularly difficult climb in the Arab region. For example, the global average of women in parliaments is 18.5 percent, compared to 9.7 percent in the Arab states.

The value of iKNOW Politics and the diversity of its uses and users were reflected by the participants at the launch event.

"The iKNOW Politics project gives women an opportunity to talk to each other across regions and languages," said Gisele Houry, host of "Bil Arabi" on Al Arabiyya TV in Lebanon and the director of ceremonies for the two-day event. "It is an innovative way to use new technologies to help women to be more active in decision-making positions."

Geraldine Fraser-Moleketi, director of the Democratic Governance Group of the UNDP and formerly a minister in South Africa, said, "iKNOW Politics is an important resource for all women in politics in developing and developed countries. It assists you from the sublime to what could be considered mundane and basic. It also gives you the reassurance that no obstacle is insurmountable even when confronted by cultural, religious or other challenges, as another woman has confronted it and is ready to share her experience! iKNOW Politics provides that support that every woman

politician needs, whether in a post-conflict environment or one that is considered normal."

"Women must trust each other," said the Hon. Milouda Hazeb, chair of the Al Nakheel Municipality in Morocco. "There should be some kind of solidarity among them, and there must be channels of communication to help share experiences."

The first half of yesterday's launch began with a ceremony at the Jordanian Parliament and was hosted by the Speaker of the House of Representatives, Abdulhadi Al Majali. In the subsequent conference, participants examined issues regarding women and politics in the Arab media, overcoming stereotypes and campaign messaging.

The introduction of Arabic as an iKNOW Politics language widens an ongoing dialogue on the site, which provides access for women across the world to resources and expertise, and allows women to expand their knowledge and share and benefit from each other's political experiences. It is, in effect, a network of networks, where women who use the site share what they have learned with political networks in their own countries.

The resources of iKNOW Politics are open to anyone who visits the website, which about 15,000 people did last month. There they can read online discussions, review a wide and expanding selection of articles on political topics, view links to more than 210 organizations and have access to a library of 1,500 free resources, including skills training manuals, sample legislation, and many other materials in Arabic, English, French and Spanish.

Last month, among the pages that were looked at most were on the involvement of young women in politics, tips for writing better speeches and a political campaign manual that included a step by step guide to winning elections.

Those who register as iKNOW Politics members, of which there are currently 6,000, can post information to the site and have access to the network's 70 experts from 30 countries who are available to answer individual questions.

They can also be participants in periodic online E-discussions, which have attracted submissions from 148 members in 35 countries in the past year. Topics have included strategies for fundraising, gender quotas in politics, involving men in promoting women in politics, the impact of women in local government and eliminating violence against women in politics.

iKNOW Politics also provides examples of role models. As part of today's conference, the site launched a video of women political leaders in the region, which can be found on the Arabic iKNOW Politics homepage at www.iknowpolitics.org/ar.

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