



## National Platform for Women

### *A Unified Vision for a New Path*

Iraqi women are slowly increasing their involvement in government, political parties, and civil society, but they are still largely absent from the decision-making processes within these bodies. Women constitute 54 percent of Iraq's population, yet their voices are not reflected in the current political discourse. In conjunction with the upcoming national elections, a "National Platform for Women" provides an opportunity to alter this trend by encouraging debate on a common set of policy priorities.

The National Platform for Women will identify priority issues for Iraqi women and provide sound recommendations for government policy and political party action. After elections, the document will become a tool for newly-elected parliamentarians as they seek to respond to their constituents' priority issues. It will also serve as the point of reference for female politicians and civil society representatives to continuously engage in policy debates and to hold government and political parties accountable to their promises.

The National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI) will support civil society activists and representatives of governmental institutions in the creation of the National Platform for Women. The document will identify priority policy areas such as healthcare, education, employment, and political participation, and it will encourage the development of political party by-laws and national legislation that incorporate women as equal contributors to the democratic process in Iraq.

#### **First Stage – Identifying Policy Priorities**

On October 31, 2009, a three-day conference will bring together women and men from different segments of society to identify and discuss priority issues for Iraqi women. **The goal of the conference is to reach consensus on identifying approximately four policy areas of significance to Iraqi women.** For each policy area, a working group will be established and tasked with researching and drafting policy platform proposals that respond to the issues identified by conference participants.

#### **Second Stage – Working Group Meetings**

Throughout November, working groups will convene—both in meetings facilitated by policy experts and through the use of a secure online discussion site—to draft policy platforms for their specific areas of focus. Working group members will include male and female Members of Parliament (MPs) from various committees, government officials specializing in key policy areas, representatives from the Office of the Prime Minister, political party members, civil society representatives, and journalists.

For their consideration throughout this process, working group members will be provided with research and background on: relevant international standards and conventions; examples of similar women's initiatives in other countries; statistics and commentary from international NGOs operating in Iraq; progress reports on related Iraqi ministerial initiatives; and Iraqi political party positions on issues of concern. **The goal of the working group meetings is to create a "National Platform for Women" for presentation during the final conference in December.**

### **Third Stage – Launching the National Platform for Women**

In the second week of December, as political parties begin their month-long national campaigns, NDI will reconvene working group participants, ministers and ministry representatives, and members of the Iraqi media to launch the National Platform for Women. **The short-term goal of this conference is to widen the campaign dialogue to include the issues identified as priorities by a cross-section of Iraqi women.** The long-term goal is to encourage elected officials, government bodies, and political parties to embrace the National Platform for Women as they focus on addressing the issues facing the country as a whole.

### **Fourth Stage – Advocacy and Implementation**

The National Platform for Women will be distributed to political parties and legislators for their use in formulating campaign platforms and policy responses that address the short- and long-term demands of Iraqi society. To ensure that the National Platform for Women is used as a basis for discussing women's participation in politics, NDI will work with its civil society partners to incorporate the document into their advocacy campaigns. NDI will also use the National Platform for Women as a framework to support strategic planning and outreach undertaken by networks of Iraqi activists that elevate women's concerns and push for legislative action at the local and national levels.

