



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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CALL FOR A WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTY AT INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY GALA DINNER

A prominent Namibian politician and former Ambassador, Nora Schimming-Chase, called for the formation of a separate women's political party at an event in honour of the Centenary Celebration of International Women's Day.

“On this 100th anniversary of International Women's Day, only six countries within the SADC reached the protocol goal of 30% women in Parliament by 2010. If we haven't attained this goal, I don't have much hope for 50/50 by 2015, so I'm suggesting some drastic measures.”

Schimming-Chase made the suggestion for a separate women's party among a series of presentations reflecting on the measures needed to address women's continued under representation as voters, political leaders and elected officials in South Africa. She also called on women to play a more proactive part in promoting their own political emancipation, encouraging women to stand and to build solidarity networks.

During her presentation, Janine Hicks, Commissioner, Commission on Gender Equality, stated, “Despite notable achievements and the political will to sign on to regional treaties including the SADC Protocol on Gender and Development, we have failed to see a significant transformation in women's lives and inequality still prevails.”

Hicks highlighted the mechanisms that have been put in place to promote and protect gender equality, including South Africa's constitution and its principles, which call for a society based on equality. Despite these, however there continues to be a lack of gender transformation generally within political structures and government. She highlighted the need for policies and programmes to support and promote women.

The event, hosted by the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI) and the Commission for Gender Equality was held on 7 March 2011 at the Women's Jail in the Constitutional Court complex, Johannesburg. This venue was previously a jail for women political prisoners and now represents a symbol of freedom and democracy. It was therefore a fitting venue to host the event. The theme for the evening was “**50/50 by**

2015: Creating an Enabling Environment for Increasing Women's Political Participation”.

Susan Markham, Director of NDI's Women's Political Participation Program provided an overview of the overriding goals and features of its programming, including highlighting examples from the region where NDI has been active in Lesotho, Botswana and Namibia.

The occasion of international women's day represents an important opportunity to reflect on progress made towards women's equality. The function included representatives from the government sector, political parties, academics and the international community.

NDI, which is re-establishing its presence in South Africa after a lapse of just over a decade, was pleased to partner with the Commission for Gender Equality in hosting the event, which is a precursor to the aspiration to partner on a program of action, which is in the process of being formalized and will be rolled out in the course of 2011.

The National Democratic Institute is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization working to support and strengthen democratic institutions worldwide through citizen participation, openness and accountability in government. More information is available at www.ndi.org.

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