



**EXECUTIVE OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT
OFFICE OF THE ADVISOR
ON WOMEN'S RIGHTS**

**REMARKS BY HON. HARRIETTE CHIGGAI DURING THE KEWOPA
RETREAT AT SAWELA LODGE, NAIVASHA HELD ON 12TH JANUARY
2023.**

Theme: Driving Change: The Value of Women in Leadership

Ladies and Gentlemen;

It is my pleasure to first and foremost thank you for inviting me to have an open and candid conversation on how to improve the value of women in leadership. Honourable members of parliament, The Office of the Women's Rights Advisor stands on the shoulders of women like you and others who have gone before us. It is your hard work that ensured the office is put in place and we are forever grateful.

The Kenyan State is a product of colonialism. Thus, to appreciate the struggle for women's political inclusion fully, we have to consider the two main epochs that characterise our recent history, being the colonial period and the independence era. The colonial State excluded not just the women but also the other races that included the native Africans, Indians and Arabs as well as minority groups such as persons with disabilities. In addition, it was averse to democratic politics. History has since demonstrated that such an exclusive and undemocratic state would not be productive.

Indeed, for the first time since Kenya's independence, the women of Kenya have a President that has the interests of women at heart. The President's Plan for his administration has put women at the centre of the transformation agenda. In as much

as women stand at the intersection of many prejudices and aspects of discrimination, women likewise, stand at the intersection of many solutions. It is important to note, a country cannot progress economically, politically or socially without half its citizens participating meaningfully in political spheres and critical decision-making processes. The low proportional representation of women in political and governance structures should awaken us as Women leaders. It is important to note that smart governments invest in their women (Kenya seems to be on the right trajectory).

I envision in future, there will be no female leaders. There will just be leaders. More can and will be done in relation to actualizing the two-thirds gender rule, which is not only a Constitutional imperative, but is simply the right thing to do. We have an increase of women representation in Parliament over time. **From zero in the 1st Parliament, to one in the 2nd, four in the 3rd, five in the 4th, two in the 5th, two in the 6th, six in the 7th, four in the 8th, ten in the 9th, and 16 in the 10th.** 16 women out of a total of 290 constituencies meant that women comprised only 7.6% of the most inclusive Parliament under the repealed constitutional order. We currently have 29 elected women with 47 affirmative action increasing the numbers to 76 within a constituency margin of 290.

While these figures speak volumes about the task ahead, it is Parliament's failure to enact the legislation to implement the constitutional requirement that not more than 2/3 of the members of elective and appointive bodies should be of the same gender that is most intriguing. Yet the ground remains unshaken despite several attempts at Bills and an Advisory by the former Chief Justice David Maraga for the President to dissolve Parliament. This scenario must call us to action.

We cannot fail to recognise the efforts made by H.E. the President in taking lead in the issue of representation in Parliament despite the political intrigues and interests.

I believe we are making incremental progress. Change is both a radical rupture and a series of small consistent steps that lead in the right direction. I believe women leaders will not only embrace and support each other in this journey, but will ensure to safeguard the milestones and achievements made thus far. It is my call that we embrace each other, get our hands dirty for a common good and for women of this country. creation of the office of the Women's Rights Advisor was such a radical rupture in the case of gender equality and inclusion in Kenya, the next steps then are incremental. We should work to ensure that office is properly entrenched for posterity. We must continue making our voices heard to make additional gains as we progress.

In the words of Muhammad Ali Jinnah, founder of Pakistan;

“No nation can ever be worthy of its existence that cannot take its women along with the men. No struggle can ever succeed without women participating side by side with men. There are two powers in the world; one is the sword and the other is the pen. There is a great competition and rivalry between the two. There is a third power stronger than both, that of the women.”

This retreat I believe brings us together to meditate on the deliverables we want for women's space in leadership and governance. The President has given us both canvas and crayon, to design the tapestry of women's space in leadership. All blame will be on us if we lower our guard and become complacent.

There are several things we can do differently to increase women's political participation, particularly in parliamentary politics. For example, civic education and other conventional tools of social engineering can be deployed to change stereotypes and other biases that undermine women's political participation. Retrogressive societal norms and cultural values can be targeted under this scheme. Such measures

might require us to engage elders, particularly in communities where they have influence on the political direction of their communities. We can also use the Political Parties' Fund as an incentive for political parties to nominate a certain percentage of female candidates especially in their strongholds.

Training women candidates of the strategies and other requirements of competitive politics. Another useful intervention is to curb the problem of electoral violence particularly that which is directed at women.

Ultimately, we must enact the legislation, which the Constitution contemplates to operationalise the 2/3-gender rule. In his Memorandum to the Speakers of Parliament dated 9 December 2022, my President gave suggestion on this question, which, in my view, should be given substantial thought. To quote the President:

I add that the 2/3-gender rule should not be limited to Parliament. We need women in all important positions. But again, operationalising the 2/3-gender rule in other State and public offices also increase the chances of women to contest political offices successfully. Research shows that most women parliamentarians previously occupied State offices, which means that such offices put financial resources, strategies and visibility at their disposal of women hence giving them advantage in subsequent contests.

In conclusion all said, nothing will substitute an honest discourse informed by political will and the vigilance of the citizenry to implant a sustainable solution to the gender inclusivity question.

Thank you.

Hon. Harriette Chiggai

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