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UN chief calls for specific steps to close gender gap in parliaments



Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon with Margot Wallström, Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict

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Mr. Ban told a high-level forum on women and democracy, held in the Lithuanian capital, Vilnius, that it was time for “faster and wider progress” in promoting the participation of women at all levels of society.

“When women are included, democracies thrive. And when women take their rightful leadership roles, all of society benefits,” he said in a message to the forum delivered by Margot Wallström, his Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict.

Mr. Ban noted that although more and more women are taking their place in governments, fewer than 10 per cent of the world’s countries have a female head of State or government, and fewer than 30 countries have met the UN target of having women comprise at least 30 per cent of their lawmakers in national parliaments.

“We need to take specific steps to close this gender gap. Experience shows that the democratic ideals of inclusiveness, accountability and transparency are only achieved through laws, policies and special measures that address inequalities.”

The Secretary-General stressed that women's participation should be supported at all times, and not just during legislative elections.

“Our work to ensure gender equality must start with girls getting the food, health care and education they deserve, equal to boys. It must continue through all stages of life. And it must cover all realms, from the world of business to the halls of government and beyond.”

He noted that the UN is working on several fronts to promote women in democracy-building activities, whether through the new agency UN Women or through individual projects financed by the UN Democracy Fund.

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