

On International Women's Day 2017 Graduate Women International notes the extreme under representation of women in government and urges states, policy makers and communities to take action

Geneva, Switzerland, 8 March 2017 – [International Women's Day](#) invites us to celebrate the achievements of women in all spheres of life but also to remind us that gender equality remains a significant human rights challenge for girls and women in today's world.

On this occasion, Graduate Women International (GWI) calls for states, policy makers and communities to recognise the under representation of women in government and to take steps toward increasing representation by advancing political participation and developing leadership opportunities. According to UN Women, only [10 Heads of State](#) and nine Heads of Government in the world are women and only two United Nations Member States enjoy female participation greater than 50% in their single or lower parliamentary houses - Rwanda with 63.8% and Bolivia with 53.1%. Globally, only [1 in 5 women](#) is a parliamentarian.

The [1995 Beijing Platform for Action](#) (BPFA) highlighted women in power and decision making as 1 of 12 critical areas and declared equal and active participation by women in government to be instrumental in obtaining equality, development and peace. Greater representation of women in government is necessary for promoting women's interests, particularly gender-specific concerns relating to issues such as education, health and law. The under representation of women in government was again featured in the [Sustainable Development Goal for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment](#) agreed in September 2015. GWI urges states and institutions to observe Goal 5.5 which calls for countries to *ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision making in political, economic and public life*.

Advancing political participation and developing leadership opportunities are crucial components in achieving GWI's mission of *empowering women and girls through lifelong education*. Increasing the number of politically active women in governments worldwide will boost women's influence and provide equal representation in political and decision-making processes, thereby ensuring that issues affecting women and girls will have input from them. Women and girls must be heard but first they need a voice.

GWI President, Geeta Desai, expresses concern over the fact that half of the world's population is represented by only 22% of parliamentarians and urges states to end this political gender gap. She states, "There is mounting evidence that women in government prioritize gender equality and issue that predominantly impact women such as childcare, societal violence and lack of education more often than men do. If we are to improve the condition of women and girls it is imperative that many more women be included in all national legislative and policy-making processes".

Graduate Women International (GWI) is a membership-based international NGO based in Geneva, Switzerland, with presence in over 80 countries. Founded in 1919, GWI is the leading girls' and women's global organisation advocating for women's rights, equality and empowerment through access to quality education and training up to the highest levels. GWI is in special consultative status with ECOSOC since 1947 and is an NGO maintaining official relations with UNESCO and ILO.

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