

26 April 2022

Dear Editor,

We are pleased to write to you in the context of the upcoming parliamentary elections, which are scheduled to take place on the 15th of May 2022 and the important role media organizations like yours can play in encouraging a broad and inclusive participation of women in the political life and elections and in addressing issues such as gender discrimination and violence against women in politics.

The equal and fair participation of women and men in political life is fundamental to ensure transparent democratic processes. Elections are a time of intense media scrutiny, whereby voters rely tremendously on the news and media outlets to campaign, put forward their opinions and inform their vote. It is therefore essential that candidates have equal access to the media and are portrayed in a fair and accurate manner throughout the period.

International conventions, such as the [1995 Beijing Platform for Action](#), include specific provisions related to the media given their role in promoting gender equality, ensuring women's access to decision-making processes, and combating unfair representation of women. [General Recommendation 19](#) of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) also reaffirms that effective measures should be taken to ensure that the media respects and promotes women, including ensuring the availability of free on airtime and fair representation of women. The Convention also recommends that efforts should be taken to ensure that all candidates regardless of gender receive equal visibility in the media, especially during election periods.

Numerous studies in Lebanon have shown that women candidates are not fairly represented in the media, especially so when it comes to elections. A study by [UN Women in 2020¹](#), which examined the experiences of women candidates in the 2018 parliamentary elections, found that the majority – 81% - of female candidates viewed media discrimination as a key obstacle during their electoral journey.

Results also showed that 50% of female candidates considered that the questions asked by reporters were gender discriminatory, which meant that they were not given a fair chance to effectively communicate their political agendas with viewers and potential voters. Other studies also confirm these findings, with Maharat Foundation reporting that female candidates got only 5% of the total press coverage and 15% of Lebanese TV coverage during the 2018 electoral campaigning period. A study conducted by UNDP and Maharat Foundation in 2021², found that women are still vulnerable to marginalization in the Lebanese media, just as they are marginalized in political life. The presence of women remains secondary in political dialogue programs, as well as in news reports, where the share of women appears to be marginal, as men still occupy the lead as the main speaker at 86%.

You would agree that the above clearly highlights the unfair representation of female candidates in media, a phenomenon which contributes to the sexist and violent language used against them on social media, traditional media and in public spaces. As the media remains an important partner in furthering development in Lebanon, it is our hope that we can count on your leadership and commitment in ensuring fair representation of female candidates in the media, particularly ahead of the 2022 elections.

The UN in Lebanon is available to discuss with you practical ways to ensure that your coverage of the 2022 elections is free from gender discrimination and gendered hate speech, and offer our support where we are able.



¹ El Kaakour, (2020), Pursuing Equality in Rights and Representation: Women's Experiences Running for Parliament in Lebanon's 2018 Elections; UN Women

² Thematic study on "Media Trends in Time of Change" - Publication: Media Trends in Time of Change - English

PRESS

The United Nations in Lebanon will also conduct media monitoring exercises, including monitoring the space given to female candidates, as well as the portrayal of female candidates, as opposed to male candidates, in the media. We will be providing feedback to media organizations in real time from this monitoring work. We will also be publicly posting this letter, which is being sent to a number of media organizations in Lebanon, to promote transparency and accountability between media organizations and candidates.

We look forward to hearing from you and would like to meet with you to discuss this issue further. We stand ready to support you and your organization in this joint work.

Yours sincerely,

René Paul Amry, Ambassador of Austria to Lebanon

Hubert Cooreman, Ambassador of Belgium to Lebanon

Chantal Chastenay, Ambassador of Canada to Lebanon

Jiří Doležel, Ambassador of the Czech Republic to Lebanon

Merete Juhl, Ambassador of Denmark to Lebanon

Miko Haljas, Ambassador of Estonia to Lebanon

Tarja Fernández, Ambassador of Finland to Lebanon

Anne Grillo, Ambassador of France to Lebanon

Andreas Kindl, Ambassador of Germany to Lebanon

Catherine Fountoulaki, Ambassador of Greece to Lebanon

Seán O Regan, Ambassador of Ireland to Lebanon

Nicoletta Bombardiere, Ambassador of Italy to Lebanon

Takeshi Okubo, Ambassador of Japan to Lebanon

Hans Peter van der Woude, Ambassador of Netherlands to Lebanon

Martin Yttervik, Ambassador of Norway to Lebanon

Przemysław Niesiołowski, Ambassador of Poland to Lebanon

Radu-Cătălin Mardare, Ambassador of Romania to Lebanon

Marek Varga, Ambassador of Slovakia to Lebanon

José María Ferré de la Peña, Ambassador of Spain to Lebanon

Ann Dismorr, Ambassador of Sweden to Lebanon

Ian Collard, Ambassador of the United Kingdom to Lebanon

Dorothy Shea, Ambassador of the United States to Lebanon

Joanna Wronecka, United Nations Special Coordinator for Lebanon

Najat Rochdi, United Nations Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator for Lebanon

Melanie Hauenstein, Resident Representative of the United Nations Development Programme

Margo El-Helou, Director of the United Nations Information Centre in Beirut

Costanza Farina, Director of the UNESCO Regional Bureau in Beirut and Representative of UNESCO to Lebanon and Syria

Rachel Dore-Weeks, Head of UN Women Lebanon

