

Contents

UK News	1
International News	3
Events & Publications	4
Getting Involved	4



Launch of first Speaker's Conference in over 30 years

On 12th November, the House of Commons passed a motion to establish the first Speaker's Conference in over 30 years. The Conference will be asked to "consider, and make recommendations for rectifying, the disparity between the representation of women and ethnic minorities and disabled people in the House of Commons and their representation in the UK population at large. It may also agree to consider other associated matters." The last Speaker's Conference took place in 1977/78, and there have been only 5 in the whole of the last century. Speaker's Conferences normally deal with issues of electoral reform and have in the past led to women being enfranchised and the voting age being lowered from 21 to 18.

The Electoral Reform Society hopes that this conference will be just as bold and approach the issue with an open mind. Women, ethnic minorities and people with disabilities face a multiplicity of barriers on the road to Parliament, and this

conference requires a multi-faceted solution. One of these barriers is our electoral system. First-Past-the-Post is recognized as being one of the least favourable systems for the election of a more diverse range of parliamentarians. The Electoral Reform Society therefore urges the Conference to take a look at the impact of our electoral system on diversity and whether a change to a more proportional system would support the Conference's efforts. The fact that 10 out of 10 of the democracies at the top of the Inter-Parliamentary Union league table of women's representation elect their representatives by some form of proportional representation speaks for itself.

Speaker's Conferences operate in a similar way to Select Committees in that they are made up of a cross-party membership to discuss issues of great importance. No members have yet been announced, but it is expected that they should be made known before the end of the year.



New Welsh Assembly cross-party group on black and minority ethnic issues

On 19th November, the newly created cross-party group on black and minority ethnic issues met for the first time under the chairmanship of Kirsty Williams AM to 'identify and work towards removing barriers facing BME groups'. The founding assembly members are Liberal Democrat Kirsty Williams AM, Conservative Mark Isherwood AM, Plaid Cymru's Helen Mary Jones AM and Labour's Lorraine Barrett AM. Joining these 4 are a number of representatives from civil society organisations.

The Electoral Reform Society hopes that the cross-party group will also look at the issue of political under-representation of BAME groups in politics, as the exact remit of the cross-party group is still to be announced.

For further information about this group, please visit their [website](#).

Welsh Liberal Democrats guaranteed a woman as next party leader

The Welsh Assembly will get its first female party leader later this year, with veteran deputy leader Jenny Randerson and rising party star Kirsty Williams currently battling to succeed Mike German as Welsh Liberal Democrat leader in the Senedd. The Assembly set an example for the world when it became the first parliament to elect more women than men in its 2003 election and still has rough gender equality among its members, but until now only men have led the four main parties.

Described as a 'street fighter' and the "the nearest thing we have to an Obama" by her enthusiastic supporters, Kirsty appears to be the front runner after beginning her well-organised and more visible campaign earlier than her rival, although Jenny's high party profile over many years as a councillor, campaigner and Deputy Leader in the Assembly means she cannot be written off.

Kirsty's reputation as the nemesis of a proposed coalition deal with Labour and the Tories last year will help and hinder her with different sections of the party.

Hustings are underway, with both candidates aiming to convince members that they can improve their party's unbroken record of electing just six members in every Assembly election.

Ballots are posted out from November 21, with the result announced in December.

Baroness Ros Scott voted in as the next Lib Dem President

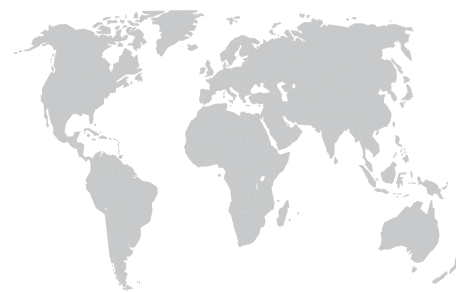
Liberal Democrats from around the country now also have a woman at the top of their organisation. Following an almost year-long campaign, Baroness Ross Scott replaces Simon Hughes as the next party president, winning over her opponent Lembit Opik by 20,736 to 6,247 votes. Baroness Ross Scott is only the second woman to ever take the role of President in the Liberal Democrats. She will be starting in this position on 1st January 2009.

Conservative candidates still most likely to be male

Despite a concerted effort by the Conservative Party to increase the diversity of the party and its parliamentary as well as local election candidates, with Theresa May and

David Cameron at the forefront of these efforts, the recent numbers of women selected to stand as parliamentary candidates for the Conservatives still has a long way to go. The ConservativeHome website on 17th November 2008 highlighted that while the number of female Conservative MPs is most likely to increase to almost 60 following the next General Election, over the last six months 85 percent of all candidates selected were men.

The Global Gender Gap Report 2008



This year's Global Gender Gap Report made for uncomfortable reading, with the UK falling into 13th position in the world, down from 9th position in 2006 and 11th position in 2007. The Gender Gap Report looks at a set of indexes such as Economic Participation and Opportunity, Educational Attainment and Political Empowerment and ranks countries according to their achievements.

While the UK comes in 1st position on educational attainment, along with a number of other countries, Britain falls far behind for example in its achievements around economic participation and opportunity (42nd position), health and survival (69th position) and political empowerment (21st position).

With the number of women in ministerial positions having fallen in the UK, France, Spain, and Germany, to just name a few, all rank higher on this year's political empowerment list.

For the full report please click [here](#).



The US elections

As President-Elect Obama puts the finishing touches on his White House team, an interesting picture is emerging on just who voted for him and Congressional democrats on the night of November 4th

Politico (5th November 2008), reporting on exit polls by the Associated Press and major television networks highlights that Obama won 43 percent of the white vote, with 39 percent of white women and 41 percent of white men as well as 54 percent of young whites giving their vote to the Illinois Senator. The mainstream black candidate for the US presidency saw 96 percent of African-American voters, constituting 13 percent of the overall electorate backing Obama.

But the United States did not only break the record on the presidential level. New Hampshire state senate also made history on 4th November 2008. The US state is the first US legislature to have a female majority with women taking 54 percent of the 24 seats. This stands in stark contrast to the national Senate, which saw only a small increase in women (up 1), bringing the proportion of female Senators to 17 percent. The House of Representatives also did not fair much better with only 3 more women now sitting the House also bringing the numbers up to 17 percent.

Canada's recent elections fail to deliver for women

Although Cheryl Gallant, Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke's Representative, celebrated her unprecedented fourth term to the House of Commons in the Canadian election this October, the election fell short of being the political breakthrough for women that it was expected.

Despite an all-time high of the election of 68 women MPs this year, women still only represent 22 per

cent of the House of Commons in Canada. The non-profit group that promotes the election of women, Equal Voice, cautioned that "many of the women candidates were running in 'unwinnable' ridings where their parties did poorly in the past." Many critics of the current system argue that proportional representation will more likely result in a ballot of candidates that resembles the population's 50-50 gender split. As the democracy's voting system is structured now, though, it is vital for parties to place their women more strategically, placing them in seats that are actually winnable.

Moroccan Government pays parties to field more female candidates

In an effort to broaden women's legislative representation, the Moroccan government has offered financial incentives to the party with the most women candidates in the 2009 local elections.

Over 1,000 Moroccan women's associations have banded together to form the Movement for One-Third of Elected Seats for Women for Equality in order to bring women's rights in Morocco up to international standards. Khadija Rebbah, the President of the Casablanca Moroccan Women's Democratic Association, stated that it's three main demands are: "the implementation of a roll-based voting system, the adoption of a quota for women in electoral law and a demonstrated commitment by parties to nominate women."

Miloda Hazeb, a member of the National Democratic Party, is sceptical of the financial incentive, stating that "what we really need is a higher power to push parties to abide by an honour code, or a legal rule stipulating the nomination of women." Hopefully, this will only be a transitional phase until the balance between men and women in government is achieved.



More Women More Power campaign

The More Women More Power campaign initiated by One World Action takes the issue of women's under-representation to the world level aiming to raise awareness of the continued political under-representation of women worldwide and in this country.

To find out more about the campaign, please go to the [One World Action website](#).

Don't miss out! Make a difference in your community

Interested in local issues? Have you got the commitment and drive to make change and champion issues in your area?

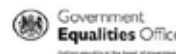
Local councillors play a vital role in their communities and we want to encourage more women, especially those from ethnic minority backgrounds, to get involved.

Find out more about how you can get involved. Hear from inspirational women like Yvonne Jardine from the Government's Taskforce, Baroness Gale, Women's National Commission (Commissioner for Wales) and others about how they got involved in public life.

This FREE event is being held on Friday 12 December 2008 from 10.00am - 2.00pm at the Guildhall, George Hall, South Road, Swansea, SA1 4PE

To register please go to: www.livegroup.co.uk/BAME
or: telephone 020 8481 3375
Email: BAME@livegroup.co.uk

More information from: www.equalities.gov.uk



BAME Councillors Taskforce event in Swansea

GET INVOLVED

2008 WOMEN + THE VOTE

The year 2008 is almost coming to an end, and so is the first part of the 2008: Women and the Vote campaign. It is now the time to make sure that you have shown your support for the campaign and signed the pledge on the website!

If you have only just found out about this campaign and would have liked to be more involved, then don't despair! The 2008: Women and the Vote campaign will continue in the next year simply amending its name to 'Women and the Vote'.

Under this umbrella the organizations involved in this campaign, amongst them the Electoral Reform Society, will continue to press for change.

So, look out – there is more to come!

www.electoral-reform.org.uk/join

