

EN  GENDER

26 Albany Street

Edinburgh EH1 3QH

Telephone: 0 1 3 1 5 5 8 9 5 9 6

Email: development@engender.org.uk

Visit our website at www.engender.org.uk

10/04/2008



EN  GENDER

Press Release

Embargoed until 00.01 hrs on 8 March 2007

International Women's Day: Call for commitments to equality

Engender and the Electoral Reform Society today presented a joint briefing to MSPs, calling for action to get more women elected in Scotland.

On International Women's Day (8 March) the two organisations cast the spotlight on Scotland's achievements in women's representation and pressed parties to promote women candidates and women's issues in the forthcoming election campaigns.

Engender Executive Director, Niki Kandirikirira said the gains made by women in the Parliament were hard won and needed to be consolidated:

"We need a system **designed to deliver equality**; we can't leave equality to chance. International Women's Day is the perfect opportunity to celebrate the achievements so far, notably that 39% of MSPs are women. But we also need new commitments to tackle the unfinished business: the lack of representation for minority ethnic communities, failure to combat female poverty and the lack of power felt by many women voters.

"The number of women in the Parliament could go down if parties don't work to build in equality to their policies and election campaigns. Scottish politicians on local councils, at Westminster and in Europe are still mostly male, and parties also need to address that."

Amy Rodger, Director of the Electoral Reform Society Scotland, stressed that the first local elections to use STV are a key opportunity for women's voices to be heard on Scotland's councils:

"Just one in five of Scotland councillors are women, so there is plenty of room for improvement. Using the Single Transferable Vote to elect councillors provides an opportunity for women voters to have more say and for parties to promote more women candidates. That will only happen, though, if voters feel confident about the new system and if politicians are committed to making Scotland's councils more representative."

The two organisations have called on parliamentarians to:

10/04/2008

- Use International Women's Day to raise the issue of women's representation in the Parliament and with their parties;
- Put women and equality commitments at the forefront of forthcoming election campaigns;
- Link with women's groups in their constituency and encourage women to vote in both elections on 3 May.

The full briefing is attached.

Notes to editors

1. Engender is working to ensure that women have greater visibility, more effective voices, better representation and more power in their own lives and that of their communities and country. For more information: www.engender.org.uk
2. Electoral Reform Society Scotland is working to ensure as many people as possible to take part in the local elections on 3 May, understand how the new STV systems work and cast effective votes. For more information, see www.electoral-reform-scotland.org.uk
3. Current level of women's representation in Scottish politics:

Local Councils	22% women (7% below the UK average)
Scottish Parliament	39% (50 out of 129, fourth in the world, behind only Wales, Rwanda and Sweden)
Scottish MPs	15% (9 out of 59, behind England, Wales and Northern Ireland)
Scottish MEPs	29% (2 out of 7 MEPs)
4. International Women's Day takes place every year on 8 March to highlight the need for continuing action to achieve equal rights for women. The origins of International Women's Day are in the USA in the early 1900s when female workers went on strike to demand better working conditions and the right to vote.

Contacts:

Lorna Alhquist (Engender) 558 9596