

**PRESS STATEMENT:**

**Low female representation in politics needs to be addressed**

*"I believe that women's participation is fundamental to democracy and essential to the achievement of sustainable development and peace. And there is now data to show that countries with greater gender equality have higher gross national product per capita, that women's leadership in the corporate sector results in improved business performance. And we know that countries with more women in parliament tend to have more equitable laws and social programmes and budgets that benefit women and children and families."*

Michelle Bachelet - UN Women Executive Director (2011)

The importance of a gender balanced representation in political decision-making is widely recognized. In Malta, a successful gender balanced representation was achieved in the 2014 elections for the European Parliament, which resulted in a 66% representation of women. However, currently, the percentage of women in the National Parliament is 13% as opposed to the global average of 22.8%. Moreover, this situation is reflecting negatively on Malta's performance in the Global Gender Gap Report 2015 in the area of Political Empowerment, particularly in relation to Women in Parliament and Women in Ministerial Positions. Malta ranks 108 and 123 respectively out of 145 countries. In view of Malta's very low female participation rate in politics the National Commission for the Promotion of Equality (NCPE) is hereby calling for the introduction of measures at candidature stage in order to increase the underrepresented sex in this sphere.

NCPE is putting forward the proposal to introduce a system whereby Maltese society endeavours to be represented by a balance of women and men on a long-term basis. To achieve this objective, political parties would alternate between women and men candidates in the electoral lists presented at all three levels - local council, national Parliament and European Parliament elections. The system could be introduced over a number of years as follows:

- at least 30% representation of each sex in party electoral lists for the coming elections, at all three levels
- at least 40% representation of each sex in party electoral lists for the following elections, at all three levels
- at least 50% representation of each sex in party electoral lists in all subsequent elections for each of the three levels.

Lists that are not in line with this rule should be rejected by the Electoral Commission.

NCPE states that the introduction of a permanent system that ensures gender-balance in political decision-making will spur national institutions, political parties and civil society to become leaders for change and address those social, cultural and structural barriers that hinder women's political participation. These include a male-dominated environment that makes it harder for women to participate and succeed, a predominantly male incumbency, lack of women candidates, direct and indirect discrimination in the choice of candidates and weak support structures for people with family responsibilities, as well as issues related to lack of financial resources and family support.

NCPE underlines the importance of equal gender representation in the political sphere to address a democratic deficit since the underrepresentation of one sex, currently women, effectively means that women are not fully included in the democratic processes. Moreover, the participation of both women and men will lead to *“more equitable laws and social programmes and budgets that benefit women and children and families”* (Bachelet 2011).

**Tuesday 18th October 2016**