

# Women in parliament in 2005: the year in perspective

## Elections in 2005

### One out of five parliamentarians elected in 2005 is a woman

The year 2005 was marked by continued progress and new records for women in the political field. General elections took place in 39 single or lower houses of parliament. In total, 1,548 women gained seats, accounting for 20 per cent of members elected to parliament in 2005. In 2000, only 11 per cent of those elected were women. The figure rose to 18 per cent for elections in 2003, and fell to 16 per cent in 2004.

The statistics of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) also reveal that by the end of 2005, an average of 16.3 per cent of members in the upper and lower houses of parliament were women, up from 15.7 per cent (December 2004). This trend confirms the sustained progress made since 1995, when the proportion of women in parliament stood at 11.3 per cent.

### More parliaments reach the 30 per cent threshold

Increases in the ratio of women parliamentarians were registered in 28 of the 39 parliaments that held elections in 2005 (72%). Significantly, in nine countries, more than 30 per cent of those elected or returned to parliament were women.

Norway topped the ranks in 2005. Some 37.9 per cent of those elected were women, placing it in third position behind Rwanda and Sweden in the global ranking. Both Denmark and Germany registered slight decreases in the proportion of women elected to parliament in comparison with the previous elections. In Denmark and Norway, women have held more than 30 per cent of parliamentary seats since the mid-1980s. This raises concerns as to whether these countries have reached a "ceiling" in terms of women's participation, and if so, how it might be overcome.

Andorra, Burundi, Iraq, New Zealand and the United Republic of Tanzania are new to the list of countries where 30 per cent or more of legislators are women (the ratio of women parliamentarians in Andorra decreased shortly after the April polls to 28.6 per cent, after a female member of parliament was appointed to a ministerial post in June 2005).

New Zealand elected the highest number of women ever to its parliament. This is consistent with the high number of women who hold constitutional positions in the country. The increase in women's presence in parliament is one of the consequences of the change of the electoral system from a majoritarian system to a mixed-member proportional system (combining political party lists with constituency elections) that took place in the 1990s. In total, 23 of the 39 women elected gained their seats through party lists, with the rest elected in constituencies. This highlights the tendency for women to fare better on party lists. Ten women were newly elected.

In the United Republic of Tanzania, the proportion of women elected to the legislature in 2005 reached an impressive 30.4 per cent. This result is noteworthy, as it is the highest percentage of women ever achieved under a majoritarian electoral system. Seats have been reserved for women in the United Republic of Tanzania for several years, and a constitutional amendment passed in 2000 increased the number of reserved seats from 20 per cent to at least 30 per cent, in line with the targets set by the Beijing Platform for Action (BPFA) and the Southern African Development Community targets. Of the 97 seats that went to women, 17 were filled from constituencies and the rest were filled from special seats.

### Significant increases and setbacks

The largest gains this year were seen in several Latin American countries. Honduras for instance registered an 18-percentage-point increase, attaining a level of 23 per cent and in Venezuela the proportion of women in parliament increased by 7.7 percentage points, to 17.4 per cent. These gains are consistent with general trends in Latin American legislatures. These two countries, along with Argentina and Bolivia, have implemented electoral quotas to promote the candidacies of women.



**A REVIEW OF PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS AND RENEWALS**

In Mauritius, the number of women in the parliament tripled from four to 12, which translates into an impressive 11 percentage-point gain. This followed in the wake of a concerted awareness-raising campaign by members of civil society and political parties to increase and strengthen the participation of women. Debates touched upon mechanisms to promote women in parliament but no concrete measure was adopted.

A decrease in the number of women was observed in eight countries. The drop ranged from 0.4 to 10 percentage points. In Egypt, women continued to face challenges in the electoral arena, with only 2 per cent of representatives elected in 2005 being women, a marginal decrease compared with the previous elections. The question of women's participation in politics was, however, the subject of a pre-election debate, which led to several proposals aimed at enhancing women's participation, all of which were eventually defeated. In

Bulgaria, Dominica and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, the percentage of women in parliament dropped by between 4.5 and 5.8 percentage points.

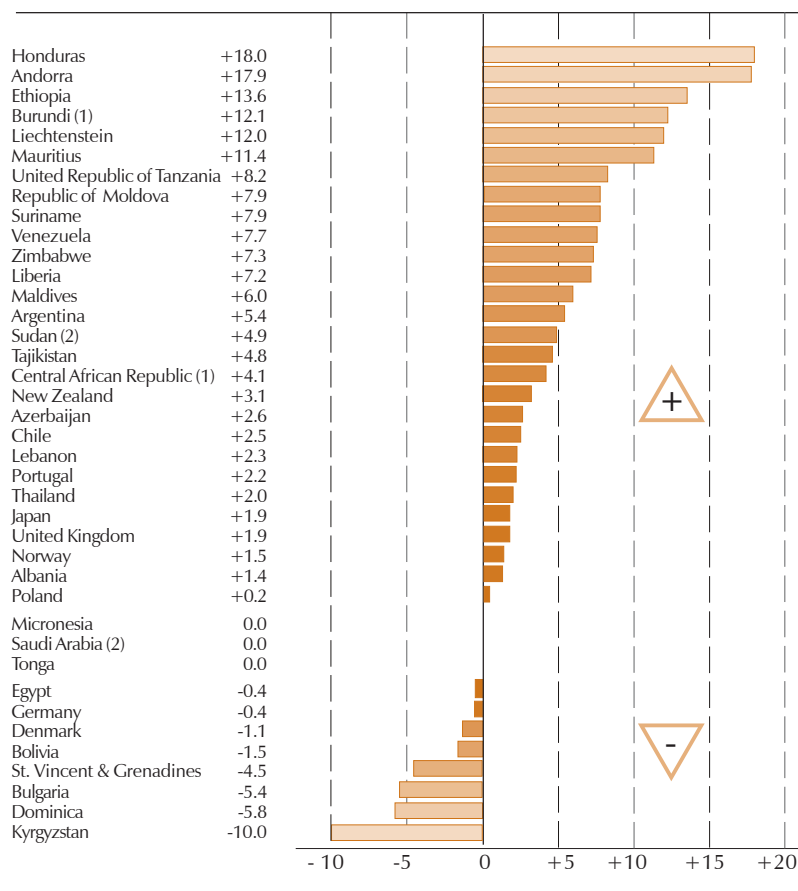
The greatest setback happened in Kyrgyzstan, where the proportion of women in parliament dropped from 10 per cent to zero. This can be explained in part by the change in the country's institutional structure. Kyrgyzstan moved from a bicameral parliament to a unicameral parliament. With incumbent parliamentarians vying for fewer parliamentary seats, women faced an even bigger challenge.

The number of parliaments with no women increased during 2005. In the parliamentary renewals in Micronesia, Saudi Arabia and Tonga, no women gained seats in parliament, although one woman won a by-election in Tonga in May 2005. A total of nine countries, mainly Pacific Island States and Arab States in the Gulf region, had no

**Table 1: Parliamentary Renewals in 2005: Where do women stand?**

**A. Progress and setbacks of women in the lower or single House of national parliaments holding general elections or appointments in 2005 \***

The figures reflect the difference (in percentage points) between the percentage of women in parliaments in 2005 to those of the previous legislature.



\* Note: Table excludes Afghanistan and Iraq because of lack of comparable data.

(1) Comparison between the parliament elected in 2005 and the previously appointed transitional assemblies. (2) In Saudi Arabia and Sudan both assemblies were appointed in 2005. In Saudi Arabia women do not have the right to vote nor stand for election. (3) As the results for the December 2005 parliamentary elections were not announced at the time of printing, this figure reflects the results of the previous election for the transitional assembly held in January 2005.

**B. Women in parliaments after the 2005 elections or appointments**

% (Women MPs/Total MPs)

Country	Total seats filled	Total women	% Total women	Quota
Norway	169	64	37.9	Yes*
Denmark	179	66	36.9	No
Argentina	257	93	36.2	Yes**
New Zealand	121	39	32.2	Yes*
Andorra	28	9	32.1	No
Germany	614	195	31.8	Yes*
Iraq (3)	275	87	31.6	Yes**
Burundi (1)	118	36	30.5	Yes**
United Republic of Tanzania	319	97	30.4	Yes°
Afghanistan	249	68	27.3	Yes°
Suriname	51	13	25.5	No
Liechtenstein	25	6	24.0	No
Honduras	128	30	23.4	Yes**
Republic of Moldova	101	22	21.8	No
Portugal	230	49	21.3	Yes*
Ethiopia	546	116	21.2	No
Bulgaria	240	50	20.8	No
Poland	460	94	20.4	Yes*
United Kingdom	646	128	19.8	Yes*
St. Vincent & Grenadines	22	4	18.2	No
Tajikistan	63	11	17.5	No
Venezuela	167	29	17.4	Yes**
Mauritius	70	12	17.1	No
Bolivia	130	22	16.9	Yes**
Zimbabwe	150	25	16.7	No
Chile	120	18	15.0	No
Sudan (2)	450	66	14.7	No
Azerbaijan	115	15	13.0	No
Dominica	31	4	12.9	No
Liberia	64	8	12.5	Yes**
Maldives	50	6	12.0	No
Thailand	500	53	10.6	No
Central African Republic	105	11	10.5	No
Japan	480	43	9.0	No
Albania	140	10	7.1	No
Lebanon	128	6	4.7	No
Egypt	442	9	2.0	No
Kyrgyzstan	75	0	0.0	No
Micronesia	14	0	0.0	No
Saudi Arabia (2)	150	0	0.0	No
Tonga	30	0	0.0	No

\* Voluntary quota adopted by one or more political party.

\*\* Legislated political party quota.

° Seats or mandates reserved for women.

♦ All-Women Shortlists used by the Labour Party in 30 constituencies

**Table 2: Women Candidates versus Women Elected in 2005**

► Statistics are presented for elections to the lower or single house for which data was received from the Parliament.

	► CANDIDATES				► CANDIDATES ELECTED				► QUOTA	► SUCCESS RATE (%)	
	Men	Women	Total	% Women	Men	Women	Total	% Women	Electoral Quota	Men	Women
<b>Mixed Electoral System</b>											
New Zealand	482	175	657	26.6	82	39	121	32.2	Yes*	17.0	22.3
Andorra	122	48	170	28.2	19	9	28	32.1	No	15.6	18.8
Germany	2631	1017	3648	27.9	419	195	614	31.8	Yes*	15.9	19.2
Tajikistan	195	36	231	15.6	52	11	63	17.5	No	26.7	30.6
Japan	1560	207	1767	11.7	437	43	480	9.0	No	28.0	20.8
<b>Plurality or Majority Electoral System</b>											
Central African Republic	829	80	909	8.8	94	11	105	10.5	No	11.3	13.8
Dominica	37	4	41	9.8	27	4	31	12.9	No	73.0	100.0
Ethiopia	1574	271	1845	14.7	430	116	546	21.2	No	27.3	42.8
Mauritius	582	63	645	9.8	58	12	70	17.1	No	10.0	19.0
United Kingdom	2831	721	3552	20.3	518	128	646	19.8	Yes❖	18.3	17.8
<b>Proportional Representation Electoral System</b>											
Burundi	303	88	391	22.5	82	36	118	30.5	Yes**	27.1	40.9
Denmark	648	299	947	31.6	113	66	179	36.9	No	17.4	22.1
Liechtenstein	41	19	60	31.7	19	6	25	24.0	No	46.3	31.6
Poland	8046	2612	10658	24.5	366	94	460	20.4	Yes*	4.5	3.6
Portugal	1984	947	2931	32.3	181	49	230	21.3	Yes*	9.1	5.2

\* Voluntary quota adopted by one or more political party. ❖ All -Women Shortlists used by the Labour Party in 30 constituencies.  
\*\* Legislated political party quota.



women in their national parliaments as of December 2005. The lack of women in parliament in a large number of Pacific Island States may be explained by the absence of support networks and financial assistance for aspiring women candidates, and by a traditional culture which does not encourage their political participation.

## Positive results for States emerging from conflict

In 2005 elections were held to restore parliaments in four countries emerging from conflict: Afghanistan, Burundi, Iraq and Liberia. In all of these countries the percentage of women parliamentarians increased. In Afghanistan, Burundi and Iraq, constitutional drafting processes led to the introduction of electoral quotas and other mechanisms aimed at ensuring a certain level of women's participation in parliament and in governmental structures. Women now comprise more than 30 per cent of representatives in Iraq, and 27 per cent in Afghanistan. In Burundi, the proportion of women in parliament jumped from 18.4 per cent to 30.5 per cent. In Liberia, guidelines were developed for political party candidacies in elections which specified a 30 per cent quota for women on party lists. However, political parties did not follow them as there were no sanctions for non-compliance. As a result, only 12.5 per cent of the candidates elected were women.

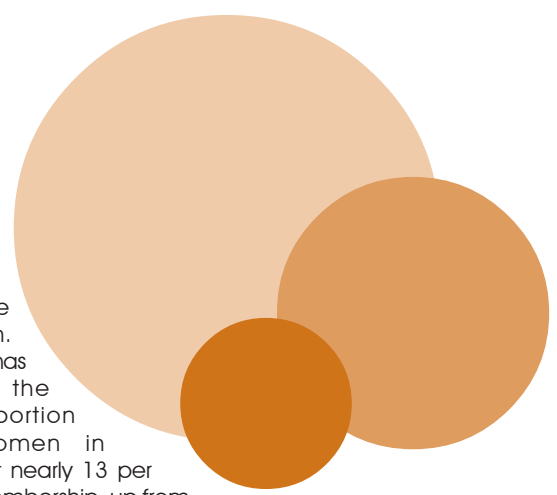
All four examples highlight the importance given to including women in post-conflict State-building. Despite the vast differences between the countries, they share certain commonalities – the intersection between domestic women's movements and the international community in supporting the election of women to parliament. These results confirm as well the trend whereby women parliamentarians in States emerging from conflict tend to fare better than they had prior to the conflict. Some post-conflict countries have been referred to as "fast track countries" because in a relatively short time, often in one election cycle, the percentage of women in parliament increased dramatically. In Rwanda, for instance, the proportion of women parliamentarians went from 17.1 per cent in

1988, to 25.7 per cent during the transition period, to 48.8 per cent in 2003; in Mozambique, it went from 16 per cent in 1982, to 25.2 per cent in 1994, to 30 per cent in 1999; in Sierra Leone, it went from 1 per cent in 1982 to 14.5 per cent in 2002; in Guatemala, it passed from 3.2 per cent in 1978 to 12.5 per cent in 1995. Such results can be linked to a growing recognition of women's role during conflict periods, their inclusion in peace processes, the existence of a constitutional drafting process, which offers avenues for change and in some cases the introduction of electoral quotas for women.

## Women running for election in 2005: A good success rate

Table 2 provides a snapshot of the number of women candidates in 15 countries who contested elections and were successful in 2005. In six of those countries, special measures were implemented (for example, political parties voluntarily applied gender quotas to promote the candidacies of women). In the case of Burundi, the Constitution guarantees women's participation in politics by setting out that 30 per cent of the members of parliament and government must be women. Consequently, candidate lists submitted by political parties must include at least one woman among five candidates. As a result, 30.5 per cent of those elected were women.

The table also illustrates that in most instances there is a substantial pool of women candidates seeking election, much greater than the number of seats to be filled. This suggests that women were not deterred from entering politics, and that political parties had a sufficient number of women candidates to field in the elections. The table also suggests that when women do stand for election, they have just as much chance to win as men, if not more. Dominica had a 100 per cent success rate for women candidates and in all but five instances the success rate of women was higher than that of their male counterparts. This may be attributable in part to the higher number of male candidates contesting elections, but it also highlights the fact that women do indeed stand on a competitive basis with men.



The electoral system was another determining factor. In 2005, women were elected in higher proportions under proportional electoral systems than under majoritarian or plurality (first-passed-the-post) electoral systems. The proportion of women elected under proportional representation systems was 26.9 per cent, as opposed to 16.7 per cent in majoritarian or plurality electoral systems. Mixed systems saw a return of 19 per cent.

## Measures to improve women's participation in politics: Are quotas the answer?

Of the 39 countries that held elections in 2005 for lower or single houses of parliament, 15 implemented special measures such as voluntary quotas (adopted by one or more political parties in New Zealand, Norway, Poland and Portugal), legislated political party quotas (Argentina, Bolivia, Burundi, Honduras, Liberia and Venezuela), and reserved seats or mandates (Afghanistan and the United Republic of Tanzania). The average ratio of women parliamentarians in countries that used quotas in elections during 2005 was nearly double that of those without such special measures: 26.9 per cent as opposed to 13.6 per cent.

In the United Kingdom, before the elections, all political parties hotly debated the use of "all-women shortlists". This is a practice whereby a number of local constituency parties must select their candidates from a list of female aspirant candidates. Only the Labour Party endorsed this practice, which was in large part responsible for the highest number of women ever being elected in the United Kingdom - 128, surpassing the previous high of 120 in 1997.

For some, quota mechanisms are an effective way to secure women's participation in the face of pervasive obstacles. This was true, for example, in Bangladesh, where there had been a provision reserving 10 per cent of the seats in parliament for women. The expiry in 2000 of this provision saw a dramatic decrease in the number of female legislators elected in 2001. Although no election was held in Bangladesh in 2005, the number of seats held by women in the country's parliament increased with the addition of 45 parliamentary seats reserved for women, the result of a law enacted to increase the size of the parliament. These reserved seats were filled in September 2005 and were allocated to political parties in direct proportion to their overall share of the national vote they

received in the 2001 election. This allocation has resulted in the highest proportion ever of women in parliament, at nearly 13 per cent of the membership, up from 2 per cent previously. This example highlights the positive effect quotas can have in terms of bolstering women's presence in parliament, but also demonstrates that quotas need to be accompanied by other measures in order to provide a supportive political culture.

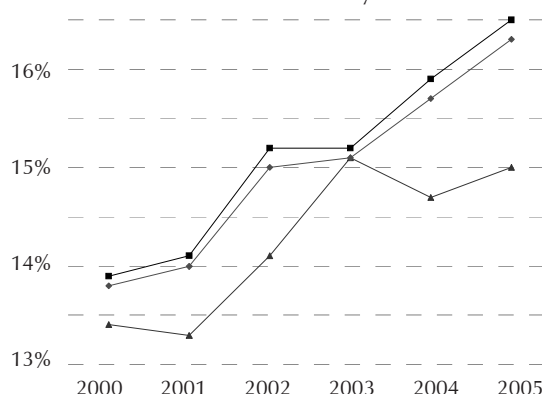
And indeed, women also fared well in the elections in several countries where no special measures existed. In Liechtenstein, for example, six of the 19 female candidates won election, a success rate of 31.6 per cent. This marks an increase of 12 percentage points in the female participation rate among parliamentarians over the result of the previous election, in which three women had been elected. This is all the more noteworthy given the fact that women obtained the right to vote in 1984 and that the first woman was elected to parliament only in 1986. This change is part of a growing trend whereby, as a result of sustained national and international lobbying and political will, women are faring well in elections and gaining more credibility as effective politicians over a short period of time. The same can be said for Mauritius, where an intense public debate on the question of women in politics has led to a significant increase in the number of women elected.

Quotas are not the only explanation of women's progress in the political field. They provide for a quantitative leap, but to attain the goal of effective gender equality in politics, quotas need to be accompanied by a series of other measures, which range from awareness-raising to the training of women and the development of gender-sensitive environments.

In addition to that, other elements which contribute to women's growing presence in parliament need to be factored in, including socio-economic development, political will, cultural evolution, and international assistance and support.

**Table 3: World Average of Women in Parliaments, 2000-2005**

► Situation in December of each year\*



**16.3%**  
△  
Both Houses combined



2000 2001 2002 2003 2004 2005

■ Lower or Single House	13.9%	14.1%	15.2%	15.2%	15.9%	16.5%
▲ Upper House or Senate	13.4%	13.3%	14.1%	15.1%	14.7%	15.0%
◆ Both Houses combined	13.8%	14.0%	15.0%	15.1%	15.7%	16.3%

\* The percentages do not take into account parliaments for which data is not available.

## 2005: An important step towards universal suffrage for women

The long struggle for full political rights for women in Kuwait finally met with success when the all-male Kuwaiti parliament granted women the right to vote and stand for election on 16 May 2005. It is estimated that this will result in a majority female electorate for future polls - 195,000 of the estimated 339,000 voters registered during 2005 were women. Women will be able to participate in the parliamentary elections in 2007 and the local elections in 2009. This victory is indicative of an embryonic but largely positive trend regarding women's political participation in the Arab region. The struggle for the granting of political rights to women continues in Saudi Arabia, where an election law published in August 2005 did not explicitly ban women from voting in the 2005 municipal elections. In the end, though, women were excluded, officially because of "time constraints" and logistical considerations (such as the fact that only a fraction of Saudi women possess photo identity cards).

## Where do we stand: Trends and comparative approach

### Women in Parliament: Averages in global and historical perspective

Ten years ago, 11.3 per cent of all legislators in upper, lower and unicameral houses of parliament were women. The parliament of

Sweden had the highest proportion of women (40.4%) and women were not at all present in a total of 12 parliaments. In almost two-thirds of the world's single or lower chambers, the proportion of women was less than 10 per cent. Only in five countries did women constitute over 30 per cent of the legislature. In this respect, it could be said that women's presence in parliament was, more often than not, "tokenistic".

Today, women make up 16.3% of all legislators across both houses of parliament, an increase of 50 per cent over 10 years. The proportion of parliaments whose female membership is less than 10 per cent has decreased significantly from 63 per cent in 1995 to 32 per cent (60 of 187 parliaments) in December 2005. In 20 countries, over 30 per cent of parliamentarians are women.

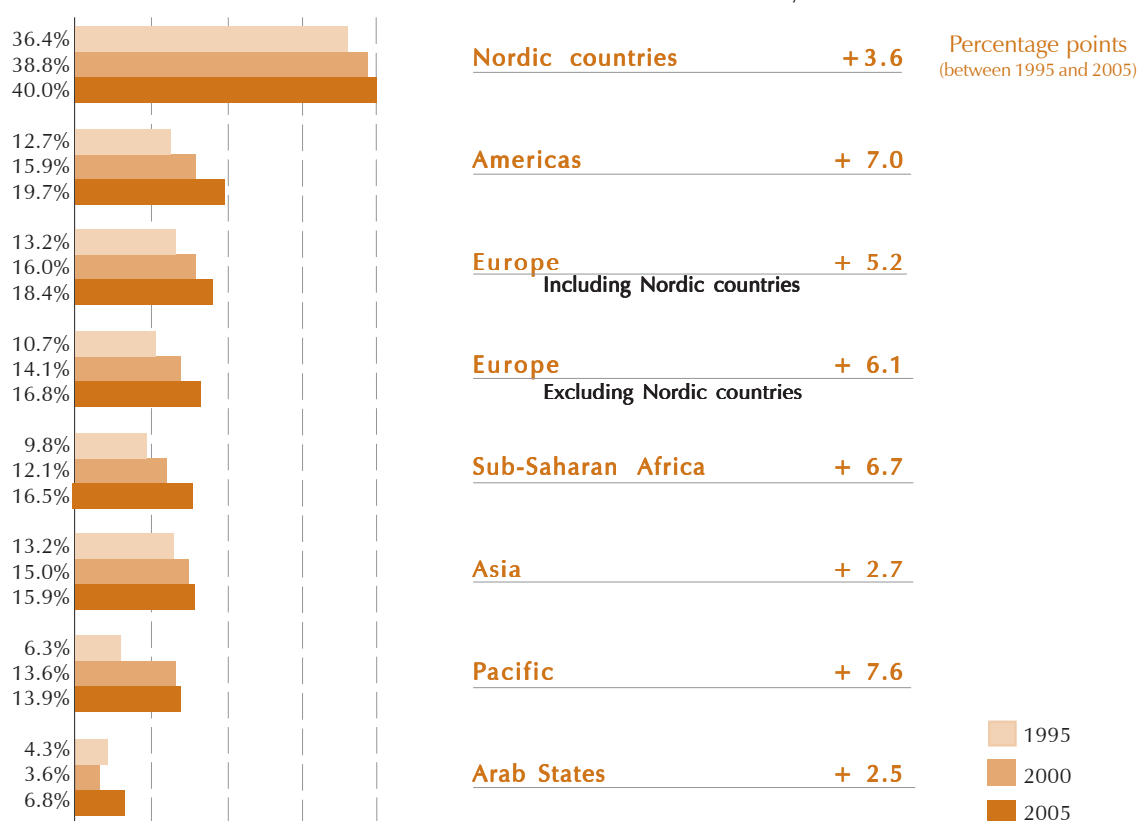
### Regional change in comparative perspective: The Americas forge ahead

Since 1995, all regions of the world have seen an increase in the percentage of women in parliament (table 4). The Nordic countries have consistently held the lead, with the highest average of 40.0 per cent being reached in October 2005, representing a 3.6 percentage-point increase over 10 years.

The countries of the Americas had one of the highest increase in terms of percentage points (7 percentage points) between 1995 and 2005. This growth rate is significant, and means that in December 2005 the average ratio of women parliamentarians in the Americas has, for the first time, almost reached 20 per cent. The

**Table 4: Regional Averages of Women in Parliaments : 1995, 2000 and 2005**

► Situation for both Houses of Parliament combined in December of each year\*



\*The percentages do not take into account parliaments for which data is not available.



implementation of special measures such as electoral quotas in the majority of those countries means this growth should be sustained, if not improved, in the future.

Although the regional proportion of women in parliament is lowest in the Arab States, there has been a positive trend in their presence in parliament over the last decade. In December 2005, the regional average stood at 6.8 per cent for both houses of parliament, nearly double the 2000 average of 3.6 per cent. Much of this progress is attributable to the implementation of different types of quotas in some countries of the region, including Djibouti, Iraq, Jordan, Morocco and Tunisia. In the Pacific Region, 13.9 per cent of all parliamentarians are women, accounting for a 7.6-percentage-point increase over 10 years. However, the average drops to 3.2 per cent when Australia and New Zealand (with rates of 24.7% and 32.2%, respectively) are excluded from the calculation, thereby highlighting the under representation of women in the parliaments of Pacific Island States. Five out of those 12 States have no women in parliament.

In between these extremes, the proportion of women parliamentarians hovers between 15 and 18 per cent in the other regions. Important progress has been made in Sub-Saharan Africa, where on average there has been a gain of nearly seven percentage points in the past 10 years. In Asia, growth has been slow, with an increase of just 2.7 percentage points over the 10-year period.

### Growing number of parliaments with a critical mass of women

The number of parliaments where 30 per cent or more of members are women has increased four-fold in the past 10 years. In 1995, women held over 30 per cent of the seats in the legislatures of just five countries. In 2005 there were 20 parliaments that had reached the BPFA target of 30 per cent, the threshold considered by many as a critical mass for women to have a significant impact on the workings of a parliament.

This year, Burundi and the United Republic of Tanzania joined Rwanda, Mozambique and South Africa in the group of African countries which have achieved the BPFA target. The other countries which

have reached the target include the five Nordic countries, Austria, Belgium, Germany, the Netherlands and Spain in Europe; Argentina, Costa Rica, Cuba, and Guyana in the Americas; and New Zealand in the Pacific. Half of the countries are developing countries, thus demonstrating that they can fare as well as developed ones in this sense. One quarter of the countries are post-conflict countries (Burundi, Iraq, Mozambique, Rwanda and South Africa).

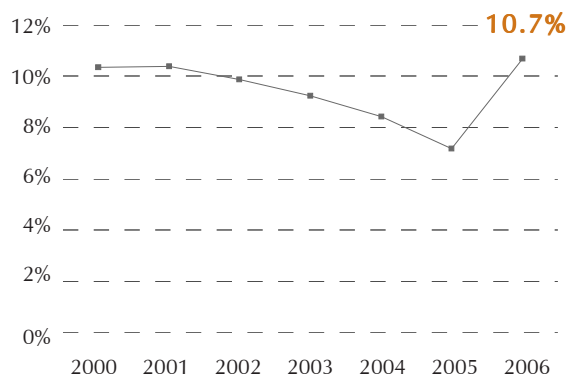
### Women in top positions of power

The number of women presiding officers of parliament reached a high in January 2006 (see table 5). Women currently preside over 28 of the 262 parliamentary chambers (10.7%). Despite this relatively low figure, this constitutes some progress. Only 7.2 per cent of presiding officers were women in January 2005. A third of the parliaments headed by women are found in the countries of the Caribbean, where women have presided over some parliaments over the past six years. Europe, too, fares well, with 10 women presiding officers. In 2005, women presided over a parliamentary chamber for the first time in Albania, Burundi, New Zealand and Zimbabwe. New Zealand is an interesting example, as nearly all the top positions are currently held by women, including that of Prime Minister, Governor-General, and presiding officer of parliament.

A quick look at the number of women heads of State or women holding the highest positions of government at the end of 2005 reveals a positive trend. In New Zealand, Helen Clarke assumed her third term as Prime Minister after forming a new Government in October 2005. In Europe, a record number of women held the top political offices, for example in Estonia, Finland, Ukraine, and Germany, where Angela Merkel became the country's first female Chancellor in November. The first elected female African head of state - Liberia's Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf - won a runoff election in November 2005. All told, 10 countries had women heads of state or government in 2005. The year 2006 also begins on a positive note, with the election of Michelle Bachelet as first woman president in Chile and the re-election of Tarja Halonen as the President of Finland.

**Table 5: Women Presiding Officers of Parliaments, 2000-2006**

#### ► Evolution since 2000 (January of each year)



#### ► Situation as of 1 January 2006: 28 (10.7%)

##### Unicameral: 10 women Presiding Officers

Albania; Dominica; Estonia; Georgia; Greece; Hungary; Iceland; Latvia; New Zealand and Saint Kitts and Nevis.

##### Bicameral: 18 women Presiding Officers

(7 women in Lower Houses; 11 women in Upper Houses)  
Antigua and Barbuda (House of Representatives and Senate); Austria (Federal Council); Bahamas (Senate); Belgium (Senate); Belize (House of Representatives); Bolivia (Chamber of Deputies); Burundi (National Assembly); Colombia (Senate); Grenada (Senate); Jamaica (Senate); Japan (House of Councillors); Lesotho (National Assembly); Netherlands (Senate); South Africa (National Assembly); Trinidad and Tobago (Senate); Uruguay (Chamber of Representatives) and Zimbabwe (Senate).