

WOMEN JUDGES BREAK DOWN BARRIERS TO WOMEN'S ACCESS TO JUSTICE

ROME, November 20, 2018 – “The quality of justice for women improves when women are not only consumers of justice, but also providers of justice,” remarked IDLO’s Director-General Irene Khan, launching a new report during IDLO’s annual Partnership Forum.

The report, *Women Delivering Justice: Contributions, Barriers, Pathways*, amplifies the importance of women’s leadership in the justice sector and reaffirms their professional participation in decision making bodies as a human right as well as a means of improving justice for women.

The report notes that although there is growing realization about the importance of strengthening women’s participation in the public sphere, including in governance, the justice sector is lagging behind in many countries. World Bank data show that women hold the position of Chief Justice in only 26 out of 153 countries. According to the OECD, women hold only 33.6 percent of judgeships in Supreme Courts globally. Actual numbers in many countries are way below the global average.

The report sets out the multiple values of enhancing women’s participation in the justice sector. Evidence from national contexts show that gender diversity in the justice sector can serve as a powerful remedy against trust-deficiencies that plague many conflict-affected environments. More women in the judiciary and the legal systems improve the effectiveness of the institution and generate public confidence.

Citing a growing body of empirical research, the report shows that women judges play an important role in breaking down many of the barriers that women face in accessing justice. Being more aware than men of gender-specific justice needs across a spectrum of issues, including sexual and gender-based violence, women judges have spearheaded landmark legal decisions in a number of countries which have not only produced tangibly better outcomes for women but also shifted public policy.

Despite the positive contribution that women make to the justice sector, IDLO’s research shows that the pathways for judicial promotion are blocked by many legal, political and social obstacles, including gender biases.

While the report cautions against a “battle of the sexes” and a tunnel focus on raw numbers and quotas, it acknowledges the power of having a critical mass of women on the bench. The deep-seated stereotypes that women encounter can only be countered with greater representation. Policy recommendations conclude that political will and broad-based mobilization can help spark the momentum needed.

The report calls on States to take concrete measures to address gender inequality and discrimination in the justice sector, both through the identification and the removal of legal and practical barriers to women’s equal participation, and through proactive steps to actively encourage and advance women’s equal representation.

“This report is a reminder that the rule of law cannot prevail if the very institutions charged with dispensing justice turn a blind eye to gender inequality and discrimination within themselves,” said Ms. Khan. “Closing the gender gap in the justice sector is essential if institutions are to be truly effective, inclusive and accountable.”

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About IDLO and the Partnership Forum:

The International Development Law Organization (IDLO) is the only intergovernmental organization exclusively devoted to promoting the rule of law. IDLO works to enable governments and empower people to reform laws and strengthen institutions to promote peace, justice, sustainable development and economic opportunity. Its programs, research and policy advocacy cover the spectrum of rule of law from peace and institution building to social development and economic recovery in countries emerging from conflict and striving towards democracy.

Held annually in conjunction with IDLO's Assembly of Parties, the Partnership Forum is a platform for interactive dialogue to stimulate innovative thinking and facilitate partnerships on rule of law, peace and development.

The Forum's objective is to stimulate and strengthen dialogue among policy makers, academia and development practitioners around IDLO's mission to create a world where everyone lives with dignity and under the rule of law. In particular it focuses on the strides made and obstacles encountered in advancing Goal 16 towards just, peaceful and inclusive societies, access to justice and the rule of law. The outcomes of the Forum's dialogues will feed into the global Task Force on Justice deliberations and the United Nations High-Level Political Forum in July 2019.

For further information about IDLO's Partnership Forum, please visit: <https://www.idlo.int/assembly-partnershipforum-2018>

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