



UNITED NATIONS OFFICE OF THE HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR  
HUMAN RIGHTS  
UNITED NATIONS DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME



**SEMINAR ON GOOD GOVERNANCE PRACTICES  
FOR THE PROMOTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS  
Seoul  
15 – 16 September 2004**

**Jointly organized by the Office of the United Nations High  
Commissioner for Human Rights and the United Nations  
Development Programme**

**Panel 3: Strengthening democratic institutions and participation**

**Empowering women through participation and legislation\***

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\* The views expressed in this paper do not necessarily reflect those of the OHCHR or UNDP.

## **Advocacy for Women's Rights – Women Affairs Technical Committee (WATC)**

### **Presentation Abstract**

#### **Summary**

1. The Women Affairs Technical Committee (WATC), a non-governmental organization, is a coalition and networking body for the women's committees, which are the women sections of the political parties. They represent the women within six different political fractions. These organisations have local organisations, and are therefore considered to be the Palestinian women's movement grass-root network. In addition six women's centres are members of the coalition. The women centres are focused on applied gender research, legal counselling, legal literacy and projects to document the current situation of Palestinian women.
2. WATC aims to empower Palestinian women and advocate their rights in the different regions. It aims specifically at increasing women participation focusing on elections, legislation and decision making.
3. WATC started its work in the aftermath of the first Palestinian election in 1996 on lobbying for a gender sensitive law process and women representation in decision-making units. It focuses mainly on elections (general, local and within organizations and political parties); legislation facilitating democratic practices and women's participation on the decision-making level.
4. WATC coordinates and cooperates with governmental and non-governmental organizations, political, official groups and leaders in order to form different lobbying and pressure groups to achieve laws and legislation that promote equality for women. As such the women's movement does not represent a clear cut category but is connected both to political parties and human rights groups.
5. It recruits legal specialists and gender advisers, and provides workshops to different institutions and their own member organisations on issues concerning women participation. WATC has drafted a model law on the family law, representing the ideas of the different member organisations and used the model in the discussion of the drafting of the Palestinian family law. WATC has also been co-operating with women in other parts of the Arab World, on issues like elections. It cooperates with Palestinian human rights groups, on issues like the criminal law.

#### **Results**

6. The Quota system to promote more women into political institutions, which was previously not supported by all women group, is now supported by women groups in all political parties, which has changed in the meantime.
7. Sixty women have been elected to village councils since 1998.

8. Separate efforts are made to establish and strengthen work between Palestinian and Israeli women in order to be represented in peace negotiations or develop their own initiatives.
9. On the legal system, lobby and networking is on-going regarding elections law, constitutional law and family law.
10. Networking bodies have been established between women organizations and other civil society organizations, namely human rights organizations.

### **Lessons Learned**

11. The combination of the women movement and the cooperation with research centres, law experts and human rights activist provide a coalition influencing human right and citizen rights in general. The non-governmental position creates an independent platform where they can promote societal changes beyond the Palestinian Authority itself. Common questions on gender equality and women's rights can create cooperation between women from different political fractions and a common platform.

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