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CONSTITUTIONS, ELECTORAL LAWS AND OTHER LEGAL INSTRUMENTS  
RELATING TO POLITICAL RIGHTS OF WOMEN

Memorandum by the Secretary-General

1. The Secretary-General has the honour to circulate herewith the annual memorandum on progress achieved in the field of political rights of women<sup>1/</sup> prepared in pursuance of Economic and Social Council resolution 120 A (VI) of 3 March 1948.
2. In preparing the present memorandum the Secretary-General has also been guided by Economic and Social Council resolution 587 B (XX) of 3 August 1955 by which the Council requested him to include in this report information on all the States which are Members of the United Nations and/or the specialized agencies and/or Parties to the Statute of the International Court of Justice, and to include information available to him on States non-members of these organizations or not parties to the Statute of the International Court of Justice in an annex to the report.
3. In accordance with a request of the Commission on the Status of Women, made at its tenth session,<sup>2/</sup> the Secretary-General has included in the present memorandum information on the eligibility of women for election.
4. Since the publication of the last memorandum (A/3145 and Add.1) circulated for the eleventh session of the General Assembly which presented the information available as of 1 October 1956, the following developments relating to women's political rights have been brought to the attention of the Secretary-General:

<sup>1/</sup> For previous reports, see documents A/619 and Add.1, A/1163, A/1342, A/1911, A/2154 and Add.1 and 2, A/2462, A/2952 and Add.1, A/3145 and Add.1.

<sup>2/</sup> E/2850, para. 30.

In Ghana which became an independent State on 6 March 1957, the Ghana (Constitution) Order in Council of 22 February 1957 provides that every citizen, without distinction of sex, who fulfils the conditions prescribed by the Order, is entitled to be registered as an elector for the election of Members of Parliament, and shall be qualified to be elected.

In Haiti, the Act of 25 January 1957 assures to Haitian women the exercise of all political rights and exempts married women from marital authority in the exercise of such rights. A Decree issued under the Act provides that all Haitians who are over 21 years of age and possess civil and political rights shall be electors within the meaning of the Electoral Laws.

In Laos the revised Constitution, adopted 29 September 1956, provides that nationals of either sex, who are of age and in possession of civil and political rights shall be electors under the conditions prescribed by law, and that deputies to the National Assembly shall be elected by universal suffrage in accordance with the provisions of the Electoral Law.<sup>3/</sup>

In Viet-Nam the Constitution promulgated on 26 October 1956 provides universal suffrage in national elections and eligibility for election of all persons who fulfil the conditions established by law.<sup>4/</sup>

The text of the relevant provisions of the legal instruments referred to are given below.

5. In addition, the following tables are included in the present memorandum:
- I. Countries where women may vote in all elections and are eligible for election on an equal basis with men;
  - II. Countries where the right to vote and the eligibility of women are subject to restrictions not imposed on men;
  - III. Countries where women have no voting rights and are not eligible for election;
  - IV. Countries in which action has been taken since 1945 extending full or limited voting rights to women;
  - V. Dates on which women were first granted the right to vote;
  - VI. Countries where women may vote on equal terms with men but where suffrage grants originally involved limitations on the ground of sex;

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<sup>3/</sup> According to information received from the Embassy of Laos to the United States of America, the right to be elected extends equally to men and to women.

<sup>4/</sup> According to information received from the Embassy of Viet-Nam to the United States of America, the law makes no provision for disqualification on the grounds of sex.

- VII. Countries where women have been granted the right to vote but have not had an opportunity to participate in an election;
- VIII. Countries which have signed, ratified or acceded to, the Convention on the Political Rights of Women.

GHANA The Ghana (Constitution) Order in Council, 1957, made on 22 February 1957

Section 20. (1) There shall be a Parliament in and for Ghana which shall consist of her Majesty the Queen and the National Assembly.

(2) The National Assembly shall consist of a Speaker and not less than 104 Members to be known as Members of Parliament; but the number of Members may be increased from time to time by the creation of further electoral districts under the provisions of sections 33, 70 and 71, but in any event the total number of Members shall not exceed 130.

Section 24. Subject to the provisions of section 25 of this Order,<sup>5/</sup> any person who

- (a) is a citizen of Ghana;<sup>6/</sup> and
- (b) is of the age of twenty-five years or upwards; and
- (c) is able to speak and, unless incapacitated by blindness or other physical cause, to read the English language with a degree of proficiency sufficient to enable him to take an active part in the proceedings of the Assembly;

shall be qualified to be elected as a Member of Parliament, and no other person shall be qualified to be so elected or, having been so elected, shall sit or vote in the Assembly.

Section 69. (1) Voting for the election of Members of Parliament shall be by secret ballot on the basis of adult suffrage.

- (2) Every citizen of Ghana, without distinction of religion, race or sex, who
  - (a) is not less than twenty-one years of age; and
  - (b) is subject to no legal incapacity as defined by Act of Parliament on the grounds of non-residence, unsoundness of mind, crime, or corrupt or illegal practices or non-payment of rates or taxes; and
  - (c) either owns immovable property within, or has, for a period of not less than six months out of the twelve months preceding the date of

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<sup>5/</sup> Section 25 lists the disqualifications for election to Parliament. It makes no provisions for disqualification on the grounds of sex.

<sup>6/</sup> Pursuant to section 1 (1) of the Order "citizen of Ghana" means any person who, by the law of Ghana, has the status of a citizen of Ghana and, pending the enactment of such a law, means a British subject or a British protected person.

an application to be registered, resided within, the electoral district in respect of which application is made, shall be entitled to be registered as an elector for the election of Members of Parliament.

HAITI Act of 25 January 1957

Having considered articles 4, 52 and 57 of the Constitution;

Considering that the Constitution now in force provides that the full and complete exercise of all political rights shall be guaranteed to women within a period not to exceed three years from the next general municipal elections;

Considering that general municipal elections were held two years ago and that the franchise should be granted to Haitian women, both for the purpose of voting and for the purposes of eligibility, without restriction or reservation; ...

.....

Article 1. The full and complete exercise of all political rights is henceforth guaranteed to every Haitian woman who has attained the age of twenty-one years, provided that she fulfills the other conditions prescribed by the Constitution and the legislation.

Article 2. A married woman who by law possesses and is qualified to exercise the political rights shall not require any marital authority for the purpose of exercising the said rights.

Article 3. All enactments or legislative provisions which are inconsistent with this Act are hereby repealed... .

Decree of 1 March 1957

Having considered the Election Acts of July 1930 to October 1956;

Having considered the Act of 25 January 1957 to grant to Haitian women the enjoyment and exercise of political rights;

.....

Article 1. All Haitians, without any distinction based on sex, who have attained the age of twenty-one years and who enjoy and have the full exercise of their civil and political rights, shall be entitled to vote.

/...

LAOS Constitution of the Kingdom of Laos. Text revised and adopted by the National Congress at its meeting held on 29 September 1956.

Article 5. All citizens of both sexes having reached their majority and enjoying civil and political rights shall be entitled to vote, subject to the conditions prescribed by law.

Article 24. The National Assembly shall be composed of deputies elected every five years by universal suffrage in accordance with the provisions of the electoral law.

VIET-NAM Constitution of the Republic of Viet-Nam, promulgated on 26 October 1956

Article 5. All citizens, without any distinction based on sex, are born equal in dignity, rights and duties. They shall act towards each other in a spirit of fraternity and solidarity.

.....

Article 18. In accordance with the procedures and conditions prescribed by law, every citizen has the right to vote and to take part in the conduct of public affairs, either directly or through his representatives.

Article 19. Every citizen has the right to hold public office, according to his abilities and on a basis of equality.

Article 30. The President of the Republic shall be elected by universal and direct suffrage with secret ballot, in an election in which all electors throughout the country may participate.

The procedure of the presidential election shall be laid down by legislative provisions.

.....

Article 49. The deputies shall be elected by universal and direct suffrage with secret ballot, according to the procedures and conditions prescribed by the electoral law.

Article 50. A person shall be eligible to the National Assembly if he:

1. has possessed Viet-Nameese nationality uninterruptedly since his birth, or acquired Viet-Nameese nationality within the last five years, or recovered Viet-Nameese nationality within the last three years; this three-year time

/...

limit shall not apply to persons who recovered Viet-Namense nationality before the date of the promulgation of the Constitution;

2. enjoys the rights of citizenship;
3. attained the age of twenty-five years before the date of the elections;
4. fulfils all the other conditions laid down in the electoral law.

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TABLES  
CONTAINING INFORMATION CONCERNING COUNTRIES WHICH  
ARE MEMBERS OF THE UNITED NATIONS AND/OR THE  
SPECIALIZED AGENCIES OR PARTIES TO THE STATUTE OF  
THE INTERNATIONAL COURT OF JUSTICE

TABLE I

Countries where women may vote in all elections and  
are eligible for election on an equal basis with men

(69 countries)

Albania	Finland	Nicaragua
Argentina	France	Norway
Australia	Federal Republic of Germany	Pakistan
Belgium	Ghana	Panama
Bolivia	Greece	Peru
Brazil	Haiti	Philippines
Bulgaria	Honduras <sup>7/</sup>	Poland
Burma	Hungary	Romania
Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic	Iceland	Spain <sup>8/</sup>
Cambodia	India	Sweden
Canada	Indonesia	Thailand
Ceylon	Ireland	Turkey
Chile	Israel	Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic
China	Italy	Union of South Africa
Colombia	Japan	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
Costa Rica	Republic of Korea	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland
Cuba	Laos	
Czechoslovakia	Lebanon <sup>7/</sup>	
Denmark	Liberia	United States of America
Dominican Republic	Luxembourg	Uruguay
Ecuador <sup>7/</sup>	Mexico	Venezuela
El Salvador	Nepal	Viet Nam
Ethiopia	Netherlands	Yugoslavia
	New Zealand	

<sup>7/</sup> Voting is compulsory for men, optional for women.

<sup>8/</sup> There are no general elections for the National Legislative Assembly. /...



TABLE II

Countries where the right to vote and the eligibility  
of women are subject to restrictions not imposed on men

(5 countries)

<u>Egypt:</u>	Women may vote in all elections on an equal basis with men but their eligibility for election is subject to certain requirements not imposed on men. <sup>9/</sup>
<u>Guatemala:</u>	Women may vote in all elections and are eligible for election subject to the requirement of literacy which is not applicable to men.
<u>Monaco:</u>	Women may vote and be elected in local elections only.
<u>Portugal:</u>	Women may vote in all elections and are eligible for election subject to higher educational requirements not imposed on men or, when fulfilling the same tax qualifications as those prescribed for men, must be heads of families.
<u>Syria:</u>	Women may vote in all elections subject to educational requirements not imposed on men, and are not eligible for election.

TABLE III

Countries where women have no voting rights  
and are not eligible for election

(11 countries)

Afghanistan	Paraguay
Iran	San Marino
Iraq	Saudi Arabia <sup>10/</sup>
Jordan	Switzerland
Libya	Yemen <sup>10/</sup>
Liechtenstein	

<sup>9/</sup> According to information supplied by the Permanent Mission of Egypt to the United Nations, legislative provision has been made for the eligibility of women who fulfil certain conditions. The text of the measure is not yet available to the Secretary-General.

<sup>10/</sup> No electoral rights for men or women.

TABLE IV

Countries in which action has been taken since 1945  
extending full or limited voting rights to women

(35 countries)

Albania	Constitution of 1946
Argentina	Act of 1947
Belgium	Act of 1948
Bolivia	Constitution of 1945 (municipal elections only); full rights by Presidential Decree of 21 July 1952
Bulgaria	Constitution of 1947
Burma	Constitution of 1947
Cambodia	Constitutional Amendment of 1956
Chile	Act of 1949
China	Constitution of 1947
Colombia	Constitutional Amendment of 25 August 1954
Costa Rica	Constitution of 1949
Egypt	Constitution of 1956
El Salvador	Electoral Act of 1946 <sup>11/</sup>
Ethiopia	Constitution of 1955
Ghana	Order in Council of 22 February 1957
Greece	Act of 7 June 1952
Haiti	Constitution of 1950 <sup>12/</sup>
Honduras	Presidential Decree of 24 January 1955
Indonesia	Provisional Constitution of the Republic of the United States of Indonesia of 1949
Israel	Election Ordinance of 1948
Italy	Constitution of 1947
Japan	Constitution of 1946
Korea	Act of 1948
Laos	Revised Constitution of 1956

<sup>11/</sup> Subject to conditions not required for men. Full voting rights granted to women by the Constitution of 1950.

<sup>12/</sup> See Table VI.

TABLE IV (continued)

Lebanon	Legislative Decree of 4 November 1952 amending the Elections Act of 10 August 1950 <sup>13/</sup>
Liberia	Constitutional Amendment of 1945
Mexico	Constitutional Amendment of 1947 (municipal elections only); Constitutional Amendment of 1953 (all popular elections)
Nepal	Act of 30 March 1951
Nicaragua	Constitutional Amendment of 20 April 1955
Panama	Constitution of 1946
Peru	Constitutional Amendment of 18 August 1955
Syria	Legislative Decree of 1949 <sup>14/</sup>
Venezuela	Constitution of 1947
Viet Nam	Constitution of 1956
Yugoslavia	Constitution of 1946

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<sup>13/</sup> Full voting rights granted to women by amendment of 18 February 1953  
to the Elections Act.

<sup>14/</sup> Subject to conditions not required for men.

TABLE V

Dates on which women were first  
granted the right to vote <sup>15/</sup>

Albania	1946
Argentina	1947
Australia	1902
Austria	1919
Belgium	1921
Bolivia	1952
Brazil	1932 <sup>16/</sup>
Bulgaria	1947
Burma	1935 <sup>17/</sup>
Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Républic	1917
Cambodia	1956
Canada	1918
Ceylon	1931
Chile	1949
China	1947
Colombia	1954
Costa Rica	1949
Cuba	1934
Czechoslovakia	1919
Denmark	1915
Dominican Republic	1942
Ecuador	1929

<sup>15/</sup> This table indicates the year in which women were granted the right to vote in national elections. Information relating to countries where the grant was not in the first instance on an equal footing with men or where grants of municipal franchise preceded the grant of franchise on a national scale can be found in A/2692, Table VII, and in Table VI of the present memorandum.

<sup>16/</sup> In the State of Rio Grande do Norte, women had voting rights previous to 1932.

<sup>17/</sup> Burma achieved independence in 1947; its Constitution of the same year provides for equal franchise for men and women, which had been previously also granted in the Government of Burma Act, 1935. Some categories of women, however, had voting rights since 1922. /...

TABLE V (continued)

Egypt	1956
El Salvador	1946
Ethiopia	1955
Finland	1906
France	1944 <sup>18/</sup>
Federal Republic of Germany	1919
Ghana	1957 <sup>19/</sup>
Greece	1952
Guatemala	1945 <sup>20/</sup>
Haiti	1950
Honduras	1955
Hungary	1920
Iceland	1915
India	1935 <sup>21/</sup>
Indonesia	1949
Ireland	1918
Israel	1948

18/ Decree of Provisional Government 1944; right subsequently confirmed in the 1946 Constitution.

19/ Ghana, comprising the former non-self-governing territories of the Gold Coast and the former Trust Territory of Togoland under United Kingdom administration, became an independent State on 6 March 1957. The Ghana (Constitution) Order in Council, 1957, provides for equal franchise for men and women which had already previously been granted in the Gold Coast under the Election (Legislative Assembly) Ordinance, 1950. In Togoland, the Togoland under United Kingdom Trusteeship (Plebiscite) Order in Council, 1955, provided for equal franchise for men and women in the plebiscite to be held under United Nations auspices in 1956 to determine whether Togoland should be united with the Gold Coast.

20/ Subject to educational qualifications not applicable to men.

21/ Between 1919 and 1935, by provincial legislation of seven of the provinces of India (which at that time included India and Pakistan, subsequently in 1947 set up as two independent Dominions) certain categories of women in those provinces gained voting rights. In 1935, the Government of India Act provided a wider measure of enfranchisement. Under the present Constitution of India, equal voting rights are established.

TABLE V (continued)

Italy	1945
Japan	1946
Republic of Korea	1948
Laos	1956
Lebanon	1952 <sup>20/</sup>
Liberia	1945
Luxembourg	1918
Mexico	1953
Nepal	1951
Netherlands	1917
New Zealand	1893
Nicaragua	1955
Norway	1913
Pakistan	1935 <sup>22/</sup>
Panama	1946
Peru	1955
Philippines	1937
Poland	1919
Portugal	1945 <sup>23/</sup>
Romania	1946
Sweden	1921
Syria	1949
Thailand	1932
Turkey	1934

22/ Between 1919 and 1935, by provincial legislation of seven of the provinces of India (which at that time included India and Pakistan, subsequently in 1947 set up as two independent Dominions), certain categories of women in those provinces gained voting rights. Under the Government of India Act, 1935, as adapted by Pakistan (Provisional Constitution) Order, 1947, voting rights in provincial elections were granted to certain categories of women. By Acts of 1951 and 1952, full right to vote and to be elected in provincial elections was granted to women. The present Constitution of Pakistan establishes equal voting rights for men and women.

23/ Subject to special educational or tax-paying qualifications, not applicable to men.

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TABLE V (continued)

Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic.	1917
Union of South Africa	1930
Union of Soviet Socialist Republics	1917
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	1918
United States of America	1920 <sup>24/</sup>
Uruguay	1932
Venezuela	1947
Viet Nam	1956
Yugoslavia	1946

TABLE VI

Countries where women may vote on equal terms with men, but where suffrage grants originally involved limitations on the ground of sex

The only changes in the information given under this heading in the consolidated memorandum issued in August 1954 (A/2692) are the following:

HAITI: Women were granted the right to vote in . . . . . 1950

This right was restricted to municipal elections.

Women were granted the right to vote in all elections on equal terms with men in . . . . . 1957

PERU: Women were granted the right to vote in . . . . . 1933

This right was limited to municipal elections.

Women were granted the right to vote in all elections on equal terms with men in . . . . . 1955

<sup>24/</sup> By virtue of the 19th amendment to the Constitution adopted in 1920, women throughout the United States obtained voting rights both in federal and state elections. The provisions of the United States Constitution apply also to Alaska and Hawaii. Women also have equal voting rights with men in Guam (Civil Regulations 1936), Puerto Rico (Electoral Law 1935) and the Virgin Islands (Organic Act 1936). Previous to 1920 women, by reason of state laws, already possessed these rights in the following states: Arizona, 1912; Arkansas, 1917; California, 1911; Colorado, 1894; Idaho, 1896; Illinois, 1913; Kansas, 1912; Massachusetts, 1918; Michigan, 1918; Montana, 1914; Nebraska, 1917; Nevada, 1914; New York, 1917; North Dakota, 1917; Oklahoma, 1918; Oregon, 1912; Rhode Island, 1917; South Dakota, 1918; Texas, 1918; Utah, 1895; Washington, 1910; Wyoming, 1869 as a territory, 1890 as a state. /...

TABLE VII

Countries where women have been granted the right to vote but  
have not had an opportunity to participate in an election

(5 countries)

- Colombia: No elections have taken place since the passing of the constitutional amendment granting women full voting rights on 25 August 1954.
- Ethiopia: No elections have taken place since the promulgation of the new Constitution on 4 November 1955.
- Ghana: No elections have taken place since Ghana became an independent State on 6 March 1957.<sup>25/</sup>
- Haiti: No elections have taken place since the adoption on 25 January 1957 of the law granting women the right to vote in national elections.
- Laos: No elections have taken place since the adoption of the Revised Constitution on 29 September 1956.

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<sup>25/</sup> See footnote 19/ to Table V. In the Gold Coast, women participated in elections for the Legislative Assembly in June 1954. In Togoland, women participated in the plebiscite held in May 1956.



TABLE VIII

Countries which have signed, ratified or acceded to, the  
Convention on the Political Rights of Women as of 1 August  
1957

The following changes have occurred in the information given under this heading since the issuance of the memorandum A/2952 (Table IX) as supplemented by the memorandum A/3145 and Add.1:

Signature

Haiti

23 July 1957

Ratification and Accessions

Canada (Accession)

31 January 1957

France (Ratification)

22 April 1957

Nicaragua (Accession)

1 January 1957

RESERVATIONS TO THE CONVENTION ON THE POLITICAL RIGHTS  
OF WOMEN AND OBJECTIONS TO THE RESERVATIONS

The following changes have occurred in the information given under this heading since the issuance of the memorandum circulated in 1955 (A/2952):

Canada:<sup>26/</sup>

"Inasmuch as under the Canadian constitutional system legislative jurisdiction in respect of political rights is divided between the provinces and the Federal Government, the Government of Canada is obliged, in acceding to this Convention, to make a reservation in respect of right within the legislative jurisdiction of the province."

Norway:<sup>27/</sup>

The reservation to Article III of the Convention was not maintained on ratification of the Convention.

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<sup>26/</sup> See Table VIII.

<sup>27/</sup> Norway ratified the Convention on 24 August 1956 (A/3145/Add.1).

ANNEX

There is no change in the information given in the Annex to the 1955 Memorandum on Constitutions, Electoral Laws and other Legal Instruments relating to Political Rights of Women (A/2952).

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