



## Economic and Social Council

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### Commission on the Status of Women

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Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly entitled “Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century”

### **Statement submitted by WePower — Women’s Electoral Power for the Advancement of Women’s Leadership in Israel (R.A.), a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council\***

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

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\* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



## Statement

The low representation rate of women candidates and those being elected in the political arena needs an alternative approach to challenge this issue, faced all over the world including in Israel.

WePower, an Israeli non-partisan NGO hopes to increase the number of women in the local political and governmental sphere and seeks an alternative approach and a different model to achieve a higher rate of representation, by creating a large coalition of local and national NGOs. The Coalition 'Local 2018' has set aside many areas in pursuit of this vision. The "Local 2018" Coalition, aims to run social campaigns, such as "No Council without Women"; obtain the commitment of heads of political parties and local political factions to promote gender equality; raise awareness, recruit local women candidates and support and empower the women through the challenges of election. WePower aims to work alongside many different supporters and organizations to achieve our aims of gender equality.

Equal representation of women in local politics and governance is important for democracy and vital to achieve gender equality in all aspects of people's lives. New and alternative approaches and models to strengthen women's participation in elections are needed to change the low representation rate of women in local governance, and to increase the active participation of women in municipal processes.

WePower, a leading non-profit, non-partisan Israeli NGO proactively promoting women's leadership in the highest echelons of decision-making and in elected positions, aims to advance women's leadership and gender mainstreaming in all levels of society, especially in the political and public arenas and change the under-representation in Israel's political and public arenas, both at the national and local levels:

- In today's Knesset (Parliament), just 27.5 per cent of our parliamentarians are women.
- Only 13 per cent of the 3,600-elected local council member representatives are women.
- Out of the 257 heads of local councils (mayors), only six are women (2 per cent).

WePower provides women from widely diverse backgrounds with a theoretical and practical understanding of gender-equality in the political landscape, and an array of experiences and training, tools for leadership development, strategy and communication skills, networking, and support.

### **WePower's mandate is to:**

- Locate potential women leaders, and encourage and motivate them to pursue representative and leadership roles;
- Train women for leadership and provide them with tools, support, knowhow and mentoring;
- Advocate for gender-conscious legislation, and for the commitment of the government to women's status and leadership equality issues;
- Raise public awareness of the critical significance of narrowing the gender gap; and,

- Provide a networking platform for graduates and women activists throughout Israel.

In 2017, WePower has taken an unprecedented initiative, to create and lead an ad-hoc coalition to change the gender gap upcoming Israeli municipality elections, in partnership with the major women's organization in Israel. The coalition's name is simply "Local 2018". Over 25 organizations have joined hands to work together towards the advancement of women in Israel, including: WIZO, Na'amat, the Israel Women's Network, Equal, the Dafna Fund, Itach Ma'aki, the Rackman Centre, TAFI, Women Against Violence, the Women Council Members Association, Shatil, Mossawa, Your Voice, and many more.

The coalition coordinated by WePower has organized joint activities designed to influence the results of the upcoming elections in October 2018, to increase the number of women represented at the decision-making tables in the Israeli local councils.

Local 2018 has set forth the following priorities for its joint efforts, to increase the level of women's representation in the public sphere:

- raising awareness of the need to make significant inroads by promoting additional capable women in the public sector;
- recurring women candidates who are both committed to gender equality, and have real chances of winning in the elections; and,
- training, empowering, and supporting women candidates throughout the electoral process.

### **Why is now the time to act?**

The municipal elections, to be held in Israel in October 2018, are approaching quickly. These elections occur in Israel only once every five years and thus we have a very short window of opportunity to increase awareness of the prevailing gender imbalance and work intensively to create real change throughout Israel. This is a critical time during which we must act decisively to increase the number of women submitting their nominations for the municipal elections and political party lists. This, in turn, will create significantly increased opportunities for women, to gain access to decision-making positions in the local councils and make significant inroads into palpable improvements in the level of gender equality.

### **The "Local 2018" Coalition's Vision:**

Local 2018 organizations are committed to increasing women's presence on every party list and in every faction, to create more positions for women in the 2018 local elections. To reach this goal, the Coalition has set forth five core areas of activity to be pursued vigorously:

- Fundraising (for women candidates and Local 2018 members).
- Taking advantage of and exhausting all legal tools and means, to ensure that more women are required to be included in political parties.
- Running social campaigns, such as "No Council without Women," and campaigns to prevent violence against women and their social exclusion.
- Leveraging political connections and working with the heads of political parties and factions to integrate more women into party lists.

- Sponsoring conferences and peer study groups, conducting surveys, and creating infographics and other critical information for partners and candidates.

Critical Participation Number: Our goal is to reach approximately 3,000 women in all municipalities across the country, both those who already serve as council members (in their 1st or 2nd term) and additional women who are activists in the local councils. Local 2018 will help locate these potential candidates from different areas throughout the country, hold meetings with the leaders of the political parties, sponsor conferences and peer group studies, launch a social campaign, encourage potential candidates and lead a voting campaign.

**Key Critical Stages:**

- Obtaining the commitment of heads of political parties and local political factions, by having them sign a declaration stating that they will promote gender equality and set aside 50 per cent of the positions in municipal councils, committees, and directorships for women;
- Campaigning for women activists and council members, encouraging them to run and increasing the number of women who join the lists of candidates with real potential in the upcoming elections; and
- Raising public awareness of the level of women's representation on the campaign lists presented for the elections and, prior to the elections, encouraging voting exclusively for gender-balanced lists.

All around the world, women are under - represented in the local governance. "Local 2018" coalition- is a new and alternative way to approach this issue.

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