

**Leading journos recommend women to organize as pressure groups
to increase their participation and numbers in politics**
*Political parties should reserve organizational positions for women and
create a roadmap for dealing with women-centric issues*

NEW DELHI, May 10, 2014. There is a need for women to organize themselves as pressure groups to be able to carve a niche in the political sphere, opined the three leading journalists - Ms. Navika Kumar, Ms. Nistula Hebbar and Ms. Smita Sharma - representing the fourth estate of democracy. Participation of women was dismal in legislatures as they have not been able to stress the need to be heard.

At a panel discussion on **'Women & Politics: Elections Today & Tomorrow'** organized by **FICCI Ladies Organisation (FLO)**, these journalists shed light on why women have been left behind in the political arena both as leaders and voters when they have excelled in private and public sectors in the last few decades.

In 1911, women were allowed to vote in just two countries in the world. Today, a century later, that right is virtually universal and a fundamental right. But how many women actually step out and exercise their electoral rights? How are women issues placed in the manifestoes of political parties? How many women candidates are actually fielded by political parties to contest elections? What is happening to the women reservation bill?

These were some of the questions that were largely focused on during the panel discussion.

The panelists suggested that women leaders must be identified who can represent the cause of women in the Parliament. Political parties must become more sensitive towards women and should reserve 33% for women in organizational posts or give them party tickets. It was also highlighted that the national parties should clearly draw out a roadmap for women-related issues and deliver results.

Ms. Navika Kumar, Political Economy Editor, Times Now, said that the country is set to welcome the new government with the ongoing general elections reaching its climax on May 16, where women comprised 49% of the voting population. But there are only 11.6 per cent women parliamentarians in the country. She feels that women have been kept out deliberately from the realms of legislature as it was felt that do not substantially contribute to the greater cause.

Ms. Nistula Hebbar, Senior Assistant Editor, The Economic Times, underlined that women who enter and will enter politics must bear in mind that they have a transactional approach. And must be ready to face the adversities as they will have to fight for creating a space in the sphere, which is male-dominated.

The mindset of the people needs to change said **Ms. Smita Sharma, Associate Editor Foreign Affairs, Network 18**. The perception that women are not good politicians and cannot be leaders need to be replaced with the idea that women were an equally important part of the political system. She added to succeed in politics there was a need to engage with women at the lowest levels and bring about politic awareness among them, so that they form their opinions and actively participate in politics.

The moderator **Mr. Ashutosh Sinha, Senior Business Journalist**, said that cultural attitudes that see women as less

able and worthy to lead, the challenge of raising sufficient campaign funds and inadequate support from political parties were some of the challenges that need to be addressed to create an enabling environment for active women participation in politics.

In her address, **Ms. Neeta Boochra, President, FLO**, highlighted the grim numbers of women participation in politics the world over. Women make up less than 10 per cent of world leaders, only 21 countries out of 193 UN Member States have women at the helm, less than 15 Diplomatic Missions in India have Women Ambassadors or High Commissions out of 155 Missions in India and only 11.6 per cent are women Parliamentarians, in the country.

Women continue to be largely under-represented as political leaders, as voters and elected officials despite representing 50% of the world's population. The true benefits of democracy can be reaped only when women are fairly represented in the political landscape of countries.

FICCI MEDIA DIVISION