

## **LAUNCH OF NATION- WIDE PUBLIC CONSULTATIONS ON AFFIRMATIVE ACTION BILL (AAB)**

A clear approach adopted by the Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs (MOWAC) and its partners has been to support and encourage women both at the National and Local levels to fulfill government's promise of 40% quota of representation of women in key decision making positions using the Affirmative Action directive.

To pursue the above agenda, MOWAC in collaboration with its stakeholders and support from International IDEA have launched nation wide public consultations with the aim of developing an Affirmative Action Legislation (AAL) on the 11<sup>th</sup> October, 2011 at M plaza in Accra.

The launch will be followed by public consultations in all 10 regions in the country to educate and interact with the public to solicit their input for the drafting of the AAL thus ensure public ownership of the process. This project is expected to begin on the 19<sup>th</sup> October and end on the 17<sup>th</sup> November, 2011.

The Ministry also held a dialogue session prior to the launch at Koforidua between 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> May, 2011 where discussions focused on measures to accelerating women's participation and representation in governance and leadership positions. Out of this session, an Affirmative Action Working Committee was set up to facilitate the AAB drafting process.

In a welcome address at the launch, the Minister of Women and Children's Affairs Mrs. Juliana Azumah Mensah said that to a large extent, women's participation and representation in decision-making is the foundation on which women's empowerment and other related issues can be built. She added that this cannot be achieved and sustained without ensuring their participation in quality education which will improve their economic and social status. Thus the empowerment of women for gender equality is the "most effective way to combat poverty, hunger and disease".

To this effect, she said the Ministry and its partners have not relented in efforts to encourage and support more women to contest in elections at Parliamentary and District Assembly levels. The Minister assured the gathering of the Government's commitment to introducing major policy and legislative reforms aimed at a minimum of 40% representation of women at all levels of governance and also ensure acceptable performance in the next parliamentary elections next year.

According to Mrs. Azumah-Mensah, the journey has just begun and every body should join the campaign to ensure that the country has an Affirmative Action Law by 2013.

Delivering a keynote address, Dr. Christina Amoako-Nuama (*a senior advisor to the president*) said since independence, significant efforts have been made in the use of Affirmative Action in the areas of education, health, work, security and political representation. She noted that although education has seen improvement, gender equity in the area of decision-making still remains a big challenge.

Dr. Christina Amoako-Nuama was of the view that real workable solutions should be canvassed to achieve consensus besides legislation. She gave an example as imposing laws that would grant nursing mothers some privileges in the workplace. She was however quick to add that such measures should involve both the public and private sectors to ensure we do not make it unattractive to hire young women.

Again she said, right from the home, the girl-child should be inculcated with the values of positive attitude in her outlook of life and also be oriented to rise against gender barriers in attaining her goals as an individual. She also mentioned our Co-educational institutions as most often embarrassing for young girls and went further to recommend that the nation should be looking at supplying free sanitary pads for our young girls in schools. She however cautioned our queen mothers to ensure that people do not turn this process into money making ventures at the detriment of the students if such policies become reality.

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Dr. Amoako-Nuama called for a review of existing laws, customs, traditions and practices including harmful socio cultural practices most of which are institutionalized and put in place measures to safeguard the rights of women and other marginalized groups. She added that, Affirmative Action policy that has broad based support and cooperation of all concerned and which is backed by law will bring about the needed results for our sustained development and in fulfillment of our internationally agreed obligations.

She commended MOWAC, Civil Society and Development Partners for taking this initiative and called for support of all including men in the process of developing Ghana's Affirmative Action Bill so that together we can build a better Ghana for all.

She however remained hopeful that with the support of stakeholders and Affirmative Action measures, Ghana will bring the needed change that we so desire.

2<sup>nd</sup> November, 2011