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Women's representation at the international level: empirical analysis of the implementation of arts. 7 and 8 of the CEDAW

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1. Introduction: the GEM project and its aims¹

Gender equality is a fundamental human right and a prerequisite for achieving sustainable development. Despite significant progress in recent decades, women remain underrepresented in diplomatic and other leadership positions at the international level, facing systematic barriers and gender-based discrimination.

The project “Gender Equality in the Mirror (GEM): Clothing the Invisibility of Women at International Level” deals with women’s participatory rights in human rights law and investigates whether and to which extent articles 7 and 8² of the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) have been implemented by providing the first comprehensive analysis of measures adopted by Member States of the CEDAW. Based on this, the project aims to understand the role of affirmative action and other legal measures and policies in accelerating participatory equality.

Against this background, the project focuses on three key areas: a. legal provisions adopted at the domestic level for domestic representation; b. legal provisions adopted at the domestic and international level for international representation; c. soft law and interpretive mechanisms from human rights monitoring bodies. This approach aims to provide a comprehensive picture of women’s participatory rights, considering constitutional and legal provisions and their practical implementation.

Based on the analysis of the mentioned documents, a database was created, accompanied by two tools for navigation. The first is an interactive map showing the global evolution of CEDAW implementation and offering country-specific information. The second is a graphical tool that provides a comparative overview of women’s participatory rights and CEDAW committee’s recommendations in this area.³

In addition, an empirical investigation was undertaken to assess the concrete implementation of women’s participatory rights at the international level, where limited research, reports, and

¹ The present working paper is one of the outputs of the research project “Gender Equality in the Mirror (GEM): Clothing the Invisibility of Women at International Level” funded by the SNSF (No. 100011_200462/1). Thanks are due to Dr Anca Alexandra David for research assistance.

² Art. 7, CEDAW: “States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in the political and public life of the country and, in particular, shall ensure to women, on equal terms with men, the right: (a) To vote in all elections and public referenda and to be eligible for election to all publicly elected bodies; (b) To participate in the formulation of government policy and the implementation thereof and to hold public office and perform all public functions at all levels of government; (c) To participate in non-governmental organizations and associations concerned with the public and political life of the country”; art. 8, CEDAW: “States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to ensure to women, on equal terms with men and without any discrimination, the opportunity to represent their Governments at the international level and to participate in the work of international organizations”.

³ Both tools can be freely accessed at the following link: <https://www.womenandparticipation.org/index.php/resources/gem-tools>.

recommendations from human rights bodies are available. Interviews were conducted with international judges, members of human rights bodies, and diplomats. The focus was on areas where women are traditionally underrepresented, aiming to uncover regulatory, political, and societal barriers that hinder women's representation and identify best practices. Notably, one interview was conducted with a member of the Convention for the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) committee, traditionally composed predominantly of women. This provided an opportunity to examine the existence of biases that characterize women's representation at the international level.

The interviews revealed obstacles beyond legal frameworks that hinder gender equality, highlighted connections between gender equality at domestic and international levels, and offered valuable insights into good practices implemented in various countries.

The paper aims to offer an overview of the main insights that one can draw from the conducted empirical analysis. In addition, it offers some brief considerations on whether and to which extent the recently adopted CEDAW Committee's General Recommendation No. 40 has addressed the issues mentioned in the interviews and incorporated some of the views and solutions proposed by the respondents.

2. Methodology

The interviews focused on three international domains where women face significant underrepresentation.

The first is International Justice. Institutions such as the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea (ITLOS) were examined. The Statute of the ITLOS, included in Annex VI of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS),⁴ does not reference gender equality in judicial appointments. Traditionally male-dominated, the tribunal currently includes five women out of twenty-one members. Insights from the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) were also included based on the experiences of an interviewee who held various international positions.

The second is Human Rights Treaty Bodies. Despite the UN Secretary-General's prioritization of gender equality⁵ and Article 8 of the UN Charter mandating it, women still remain underrepresented in UN treaty bodies.⁶

⁴ United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, opened for signature December 10, 1982, UN Doc. A/CONF.62/122 (1982).

⁵ The Secretary-General launched the system-wide strategy on gender parity on 13 September 2017: on this, see www.un.org/gender/sites/www.un.org.gender/files/gender_parity_strategy_october_2017.pdf; see, also, Secretary General of the UN, *Improvement in the Status of Women in the United Nations System*, Report submitted to Seventy-eighth session of the General Assembly, 18 July 2023.

⁶ On this, see Elisa Fornalé, "Embracing Gender Parity at International and European Levels", in Sara De Vido and Micaela Frulli (eds.), *Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence: A Commentary of the Istanbul Convention* (Edward Elgar, Cheltenham-Northampton, 2023), 62-73; only few treaty bodies have displayed a significant representation of women: the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (90%) and three other treaty bodies (above 50%) (the Committee on the Rights of the Child, the Subcommittee on Prevention of Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment and the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities); as concerns the other six treaty bodies, representation of women falls to an average 31% ; see Human Rights Committee, *Current Levels of Representation of Women in Human Rights Organs and Mechanisms: ensuring Gender Balance*, Report submitted to the Forty-seventh session of the General Assembly, 21 May 2021.

The third is Diplomacy. The number of female ambassadors and permanent representatives remains low. In 2023, only 20,54% of ambassadorships were held by women.⁷

In total, interviews were conducted with three (3) judges and one (1) registrar of ITLOS, nine (9) members of UN bodies, and eleven (11) diplomats. Some respondents have held positions across multiple domains.

The analysis of the interviews is structured around six main themes⁸:

1. “Women’s appointment in the addressed institution”: This section focuses on formal and informal appointment procedures in the interviewees’ countries of origin and at the international level.
2. “Women’s appointment at the international level in general”: This part examines general appointment procedures, their impact on women’s participation, and the relationship between domestic and international representation.
3. “Women’s participation in the interviewee’s country of origin”: this part includes a description of women’s participation in public, cultural, economic, and social life at the domestic level.
4. “Personal experiences”: In this section, the interviewees describe their career paths and the challenges they faced as women.
5. “Challenges for women at the domestic and international levels”: This section highlights the difficulties women encounter in pursuing international careers.
6. “Proposed solutions”: based on their experiences, the interviewees propose solutions to address women’s underrepresentation including policies like affirmative action.

The structured approach allows for a comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing women’s participation and the strategies needed to promote gender equality in international arenas.

3. Analysis of the interviews

3.1. International judges

Moving the focus to the interviews, international judges form the first category of analysis. Regarding the appointment of the ITLOS judges, its statute lacks specific regulations on the selection of the candidates submitted by the State parties. Candidacies are submitted by the State parties and judges are subsequently elected at a meeting convened by the Secretary-General of the UN. As a result, each signatory state has full discretion over its selection process.

3.1.1. Women’s appointment in the addressed institution

All the interviewees emphasized that in their countries, the selection process is not transparent, controlled by the government and the Minister of Foreign Affairs, sometimes aided

⁷ On this, see Karen E. Smith and Marta Kozielska, *Strengthening the Representation of Women in Diplomacy: Challenges and Policy Solutions*, LSE IDEAS Project Report, June 2024, available at: <https://www.lse.ac.uk/ideas/Assets/Documents/Project-Reports/2024-05-24-WiD-WEB-FIN.pdf>.

⁸ It must be noted that not all the interviewees gave insights on all the themes; this accounts for the absence of some of these themes in the analysis of some categories of respondents.

by an advisory body. The absence of public calls and the purely political nature of the process negatively impact women's representation. This is because, women often lack visibility in these selections, particularly given that public international law still remains a male-dominated field.

While some countries have made progress in increasing women's visibility, such advancements often depend on politically supportive leaders who are usually men, rather than on structured strategies. Overall, gender considerations are rarely prioritized in these highly political processes, particularly where political affiliations also play a significant role.

In contrast, the selection of judges for the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) follows a more structured international procedure. However, no specific rules ensure women's representation. A former ECtHR judge interviewed noted that the weak point of the selection procedure is at the national level, where the process remains opaque and often driven by political connections and negotiations rather than merit. The interviewee observed that when political bargaining occurs, men tend to dominate. Additionally, a negative trend in women's representation at the ECtHR was linked to a lack of political will to promote gender equality.

3.1.2. Women's appointment at the international level in general

Despite some progress in other international bodies, such as the International Criminal Court (ICC), and improvements at the domestic level, interviewees stressed the need to intensify efforts to enhance women's representation. One interviewee highlighted a strong connection between women's visibility at the domestic level and their chances of being selected for international positions, stressing that, increased domestic visibility creates more opportunities for international roles.

3.1.3. Personal experiences and challenges for women at the domestic and international levels

It was noted that all interviewees faced significant career challenges and recounted similar experiences among other women. A common issue is the lack of institutional support for women with children, especially in developing countries. More so, women often need to prove their competence more than their male counterparts and navigate environments historically designed for male professionals. Furthermore, women judges frequently face scrutiny based on their appearance and are criticized accordingly. A former ECtHR judge shared that she received direct threats and endured more public attacks from the media and political parties than her male counterparts.

3.1.4. Proposed Solutions

A holistic approach to ensuring women's participation emerged as a key recommendation. Strengthening participation requires not only improving selection processes by making them public and transparent but also supporting women throughout their careers. This includes providing assistance with family responsibilities and childcare. Furthermore, lasting change requires involving men in addressing these issues and fostering their understanding of the challenges women face.

3.2. Members of UN Treaty Bodies

This section includes insights from nine interviewees who serve on the following UN treaty bodies: Human Rights Committee (CCPR), Committee for Migrant Workers (CMW), Committee for Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR), Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). Some interviewees have held multiple international appointments in UN treaty bodies or other international bodies. Additionally, two have been appointed to special procedures or missions.⁹

3.2.1. Women's appointment in the addressed institution

UN treaty bodies, such as the Human Rights Committee (CCPR), Committee on Migrant Workers (CMW), Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR), and Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), require member states to nominate candidates, who are then elected at the international level. None of the interviewees reported formal national rules favoring women's selection, despite improvements in women's representation. In countries like the Netherlands, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Slovenia, open calls are issued by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. However, only the Netherlands consistently prioritizes female candidates. Political will and strong advocacy networks appear to be the most significant factors influencing women's representation. Mexico's feminist foreign policy also fosters women's inclusion in international bodies.

3.2.2. Women appointment at the international level in general

Interviewees identified stereotypes about gender roles as a major barrier to women's appointments in UN treaty bodies. They noted that women were more likely to be nominated for roles associated with "care" or women's issues. One respondent emphasized that human rights bodies have seen notable improvements in women's representation compared to the broader field of international relations. However, top positions remain male-dominated due to entrenched power structures.

3.2.3. Women's participation in the interviewee's country of origin

Concerning the condition of women in the states of origin of the respondents, several positive developments were described in Global South and Global North countries. The interviewees highlighted disparities between domestic and international representation, with conditions at the international level reflecting those at the domestic level.

Representation in political institutions has significantly improved in most national contexts, although significant variations exist among the analyzed countries. For instance, Mexico amended its constitution and introduced the principle of gender parity, which applies to all political institutions at the national and sub-national levels. Gender representation has also been considered satisfying in Slovenia, Switzerland (although some sectors of the administration, such as the Department of Foreign Affairs, are still male-dominated) and the Netherlands, whereas Bosnia and Herzegovina and Egypt show less progress.

⁹ Special procedures and missions are independent human rights experts and groups that are mandated to report and advise on human rights from a thematic or country-specific perspective; on this, see <https://www.ohchr.org/en/special-procedures-human-rights-council>.

In general, all the interviewees pointed to the need to improve the conditions of women at the national level, both in the public and private spheres. As for the latter, it has been often maintained that women are generally worse off than in the public sector.

3.2.4. Personal experiences

Many interviewees shared personal experiences of harassment, discrimination, and inadequate recognition in their careers. Some reported threats or inappropriate behaviour. Others described societal pressures to prioritize household and childcare duties, leading to feelings of guilt and inadequacy when pursuing international careers. This pressure is compounded by workplace judgments and a lack of institutional support, especially in childcare.

Several respondents noted that membership in UN treaty bodies is not a full-time position, requiring frequent travel and meetings, which presents challenges for women with families. Additionally, the remuneration and job conditions were criticized as insufficient, particularly for women balancing career and family responsibilities.

3.2.5. Challenges for women at the domestic and international levels

When asked about the challenges that women face at the international level in general, the interviewees mentioned several issues, many of which resonate with their personal experiences. Firstly, they emphasized that stereotypes still play a central role in determining the condition of women at the international level. As international law and international structures are still male-dominated, women face several barriers, starting from the appointment procedures, as seen above. This context, in turn, accounts for a lack of support as concerns childcare: women having an international career are not sufficiently supported when they have children, and the burden of childcare is supposed to be borne by them.

Consequently, many respondents underscored that many women in this area feel inadequate and guilty and suffer from pressure and judgments targeted against them in their workplaces. Connected to this atmosphere characterized by the presence of many prejudices, women are frequently judged by their appearance and undervalued unless they become very assertive. It has also been observed that attacks in the media against women in international positions are frequent and are likely to discourage women from pursuing an international career.

A last significant element that was mentioned, is the lack of an intersectional perspective regarding women's participation at the international level: one respondent indeed criticized the lack of diversity in women's appointments and the very limited representation of indigenous women. Interestingly, a respondent urged to look not only at the challenges women face but also at the opportunities that already exist for women to establish themselves at the international level. In this regard, she described what she referred to as "women's solidarity", i.e. the emergence of spontaneous networks of women that engage in supporting other women's careers with no other interest but the improvement of women's condition. In the case of the respondent, this solidarity was critical to her final appointment.

3.2.6. Proposed Solutions

The interviewees proposed two key strategies to improve women's access to international roles. The first strategy makes a proposal for creating better conditions for women to compete

for international positions and pursue an international career. Under this strategy, interviewees recommended: the introduction of open and transparent selection procedures; the creation of permanent positions in UN treaty bodies; improved remuneration and strengthened international women's networks and solidarity initiatives to support women's careers. More importantly, interviewees further proposed allowing NGOs, in addition to states, to nominate candidates, following the model of special procedures, as well as expanding feminist foreign policies to hold states accountable for their nominations.

The second strategy makes a case for national-level policies. Putting this strategy into action, interviewees recommended implementing education and mentoring programs for women; conducting research and data collection on gender issues to raise awareness and combat stereotypes; and, most importantly, providing economic and childcare support for mothers pursuing international careers.

Opinions on affirmative action were mixed. Some interviewees expressed concerns about its effectiveness and the potential conflict with merit-based selection. Others supported softer measures, such as prioritizing equally qualified female candidates. Several respondents advocated for stronger affirmative actions, emphasizing the need for gender parity (50-50 representation) in all UN treaty bodies.

All interviewees agreed that achieving gender equality requires strong political will. Without such commitment, policies and measures aimed at improving women's representation are unlikely to succeed. Effective change, they argued, must address both structural barriers and societal attitudes that limit women's opportunities at the international level.

3.3. Diplomats

This group of interviewees consisted of eleven female diplomats from various continents.¹⁰

3.3.1. Women appointment in the addressed institution

None of the respondents reported formal rules favoring women's representation in their countries' appointment processes. South American diplomats highlighted open and merit-based selection processes. However, even in the most open and merit-based systems, the success of female representation in foreign services largely depended on the political will of governments and the heads of foreign affairs departments, especially for top diplomatic positions.

Some countries, such as Canada, Namibia, and Chile have adopted Feminist Foreign Policies (FFP) or affirmative action policies to promote gender equality in their foreign affairs departments. Diplomats from the Global South, on the other hand, acknowledged progress in women's representation but noted persistent challenges. In particular, it was noted by a greater majority of interviewees that while more women have entered foreign services in recent years, ambassadorial positions still remain predominantly occupied by men.

3.3.2. Women's appointment at the international level in general

¹⁰ North America, South America, Africa, Asia.

Most of the discussions during the interview sessions focused primarily on domestic selection processes but also touched on international appointments, emphasizing two key issues. The first issue concerns the barriers to international appointments. It was noted that international appointments often followed political dynamics inaccessible to women, who are seen as “outsiders”.

The second key issue identified relates to role and influence. Several interviewees stressed the need to assess not just the number of women in international roles but their actual power and influence. It was emphasized that even when women secure such positions, they may lack real influence, serving as token appointments rather than having substantive roles. In addition, when appointed, women in leadership positions sometimes face external pressures that limit their ability to advocate for gender equality. This is also due to financial barriers to access to international positions and the need for political backing, which have been described as the main obstacles for women pursuing truly influential positions.

3.3.3. Women’s participation in the interviewee’s country of origin

Interviewees noted improvements in women’s representation over the past decades, driven by stronger political will and supportive policies. In some Global South countries such as Ghana and Thailand, it was noted that progress varied by sector. For instance, Ghana has seen greater female representation in administration and the private sector, while in Thailand, women are predominant in business but underrepresented in politics. Conversely, Namibia has relatively strong female representation in political institutions but limited female participation in the private sector.

3.3.4. Personal Experiences

Many diplomats reported experiencing harassment, violence, and hate speech. They also faced stereotypes and skepticism, especially regarding their roles as mothers. Early in their careers, they encountered sexist comments and felt the need to prove themselves more than their male counterparts. Discrimination in promotions was also cited, with men often advancing faster despite equal qualifications. Several emphasized the importance of mentorship and support from other women in overcoming these challenges.

3.3.5. Challenges for women at the domestic and international levels

Women in diplomacy often face barriers both during and after their appointments. Appointment of women in diplomacy is still limited, even though an increasing number of countries are developing a gender-sensitive foreign policy.

As concerns the challenges after the appointment, the respondents maintained that women are frequently assigned “softer” roles, while men dominate positions in areas such as economics, trade, and peace and security. Societal expectations around childcare and family responsibilities further complicate their careers. Women often feel judged for prioritizing their careers and face societal pressures that men do not. Additionally, the “tall poppy syndrome,” whereby men undermine successful women, was highlighted as a persistent issue. Age bias was also mentioned as compounding gender discrimination.

A significant challenge is the perception that certain areas of diplomacy are “gender-neutral” and do not require a gender lens, perpetuating male dominance in these sectors.

3.3.6. *Proposed Solutions*

As for the solutions proposed to improve the current situation, firstly most diplomats agreed that enhancing women's domestic political participation is crucial for advancing their international careers. Domestic success builds networks and capacity, creating pathways to international appointments. However, one interviewee cautioned that this correlation holds only if power dynamics change. Women who conform to existing power structures may reinforce inequalities rather than challenge them.

Secondly, many interviewees stressed the importance of equipping women with the skills needed for international diplomacy. Designing gender equality policies in foreign affairs departments, modelled on existing successful examples, was seen as essential. Transparent and impartial selection processes, along with better advertising of international positions, were also recommended.

Thirdly, childcare support and flexible work arrangements were also highlighted as critical for enabling women to pursue international careers. These measures would help level the playing field, allowing women to compete equally with men.

Lastly, regarding quotas and affirmative action, the opinions were mixed. While a greater majority of diplomats interviewed supported these measures in theory, doubts were raised about their practical implementation in diplomacy. Some suggested quotas could serve as guidelines or minimum standards for states to follow.

Ultimately, all interviewees emphasized that political will, domestically and internationally, is essential for promoting women's representation. Without genuine commitment, even the best policies will fail to achieve lasting change. Women in leadership positions were also called upon to advocate for gender equality actively.

4. Concluding remarks on the interviews

The analysis of the interviews shed light on the current state of women's participation at the international level, moving beyond the legal frameworks to explore real-world dynamics. Several key insights and lessons emerge:

First, while notable progress has occurred domestically over the past decades, the situation at the international level still falls short of the desired and legally mandated standards for women's participation.

In certain sectors, such as diplomacy, improvements are uneven despite the adoption of feminist foreign policies by several states. Many areas of diplomatic activity remain male-dominated, with women either underrepresented or lacking influence. Other institutions face similar challenges. For instance, some regions have seen regressions in women's participation in international justice, while representation in UN treaty bodies remains constrained by stereotypes that restrict women to certain roles.

These shortcomings are caused by a varied set of institutional, societal, and cultural barriers that still hinder women's international careers. Gender biases, stereotypes, male-dominated environments, opaque selection processes, and insufficient welfare support for women are the primary obstacles.

Addressing these issues requires a multidimensional approach. Proposed solutions include shifting societal attitudes and dismantling gender stereotypes (cultural and societal change); implementing support systems for women with families, such as childcare and flexible work arrangements (welfare policies); establishing clear, merit-based, and impartial recruitment procedures (transparent selection processes); ensuring that governments uphold commitments to gender equality (political accountability) and enforcing both soft and hard affirmative action measures to promote women's representation (institutional reforms).

Ultimately, the success of these measures hinges on strong political will. Many interviewees emphasized that increasing women's representation in influential political positions is essential, as this fosters broader support for gender equality. Strengthening women's participation at the domestic level through similar measures is crucial for creating a pipeline of qualified candidates for international roles.

5. The contribution of the CEDAW Committee's General Recommendation no. 40

This last section offers a brief analysis of the recently adopted CEDAW Committee's General Recommendation no. 40 (GR 40),¹¹ which specifically focuses on the issue of equal and inclusive representation of women in decision-making systems. The aim is to verify whether and to which extent this document addresses the issues raised by the interviewees, as well as which solutions it proposes.

5.1. Key themes and challenges

The GR 40 is structured as follows: Part I introduces the focus of the GR; Part II describes the challenges the world is experiencing today, which are transforming contemporary societies; Part III lists seven pillars that should guide reforms to improve women's representation at the domestic and international level; Part IV offers an overview of the legal international legal framework concerning women's representation in decision-making processes; Part V lists the general and specific state obligations in this area; Part VI focuses on mechanisms for state accountability; lastly, Part VII specifies the action required from the international community.

The General Recommendation No. 40 underscores that societies all over the world are undergoing a process of transformation due to a growing number of challenges that significantly affect women's conditions. It consequently requires that the participation of women in all decision-making processes be ensured to avoid discrimination in this area but also as their involvement is essential to build a "collective intelligence" to face the mentioned pressing challenges.¹² The soft law document identifies challenges and transformations in five main areas – peace, political stability, economic development, climate change, technological advancements (including artificial intelligence) and the transformation and sustainability of the multilateral system and governance.

¹¹ CEDAW Committee, *General recommendation No. 40 on equal and inclusive representation of women in decision-making systems*, available at: https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CEDAW%2FC%2FGC%2F40&Lang=en.

¹² Paras. 4-10.

Decision-making processes in all these domains show structural women's underrepresentation and even patterns of exclusion of women.¹³ For example, in diplomacy, GR 40 notes that in 2023, women comprised only 20.54% of ambassadors and 39% of heads or deputy heads of missions. It also points out that women are often assigned to less strategic embassies.¹⁴ Similar underrepresentation exists in peace and security decision-making.¹⁵ The report underscores the absence of objective criteria and mechanisms for achieving gender parity in international appointments, aligning with concerns raised by interviewees.¹⁶

5.2. Proposed Solutions

GR 40 offers both general principles and specific recommendations to improve women's participation.

The general principles, or as called by the Recommendation, the pillars of equal and inclusive representation of women, are: the introduction of the principle of parity; the focus on young women; the endorsement of an intersectional perspective; the employment of a comprehensive approach to this issue, which means considering the interconnectedness of all dimensions of participation; the importance of access to power in parallel to access to decision-making processes; the importance of combating stereotypes that affect women's participation; the support for women's civil society organisations.¹⁷

Among these pillars, the principle of parity is of particular interest as it represents a significant innovation to the CEDAW committee's soft jurisprudence. This is indeed the first time the committee upholds it explicitly and anchors it to articles 7 and 8 of the Convention. Accordingly, targets under 50% representation of women are considered incompatible with the CEDAW, as they "convey a message that inequality between women and men is justifiable".¹⁸ According to the committee, parity should be considered as a "legal principle and permanent and universal feature of good governance" that should be achieved through permanent measures, i.e. measures that are "not intended to be removed once women's historical disadvantages have been redressed".¹⁹ Endorsing the parity principle as a non-negotiable content of the CEDAW – more specifically spelled out in other sections of the GR 40 – moves in the direction supported by the interviewees, many of which have underlined the fact that women constitute more than half of the population and should thus be fairly represented. This principle informs the entire text of the GR40 and is reaffirmed multiple times. In addition, the focus on access to influential positions in decision-making processes directly addresses the issue of women's effective power in the international arena raised by several respondents.

As for the specific obligations and recommendations, many of them reflect suggestions from the interviews. To begin with, the Committee urges states to dismantle gender stereotypes, which directly and severely affect selection procedures for roles at the international level,²⁰ as mentioned by numerous interviewees. It also emphasizes the importance of women role-

¹³ Para 4-10.

¹⁴ Para. 53.

¹⁵ Para. 58.

¹⁶ Para. 56.

¹⁷ Paras. 14-21.

¹⁸ Para. 14.

¹⁹ Para. 15.

²⁰ Paras. 30-31 and 55.

models and mentoring, which many interviewees credited for their career development. Additionally, the GR40 recommend that states promote education for women and provide support, including childcare, for those pursuing international careers.²¹

The GR 40 proposes measures to improve effective women's representation both at the domestic and international levels. In the international context, GR 40 endorses feminist foreign policies. Furthermore, it calls for transparent and institutionalized procedures for the selection for positions in the foreign affairs departments and international organizations, which include publicizing vacancies, detailed job descriptions, and criteria emphasizing gender parity.²² In this regard, it requires states to ensure parity for the membership of all UN bodies and mechanisms, at all levels in international organizations, and in the area of peace and security decision-making. Finally, it also calls for the development of monitoring mechanisms. systems to track states' progress in promoting women's representation.

While interviewees expressed mixed views on affirmative action and quotas, GR 40 strongly endorses such measures. It emphasizes that quotas are not merely redress measures but should be permanent features of decision-making systems to ensure structural equality.

5.3. Conclusion

GR 40 provides a comprehensive framework to address women's underrepresentation in decision-making, echoing many of the concerns and solutions proposed by interviewees. It underscores that achieving gender equality requires not only legal and policy reforms but also a fundamental shift in societal attitudes, supported by strong political will and structural changes.

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²¹ Paras. 34-35, 55 and 61.

²² Paras. 57 and 72.

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