



IMPACT STORIES

## ‘READY FOR THE LISTS’, SAY URUGUAYAN WOMEN

 **UN WOMEN**  **FUND FOR GENDER EQUALITY**

Photo © Courtesy of Cotidiano Mujer

“Women must have a say in matters that affect their countries, communities and families. After all, they are half of the population, so women’s equal participation in decision-making is a question of justice and democracy”. With such words UN Women Goodwill Ambassador Emma Watson addressed a group of women’s rights advocates gathered in Uruguay’s capital city of Montevideo to discuss strategies for increasing women’s voice and agency across political platforms.

The acclaimed British actor’s first country visit as UN Women Goodwill Ambassador came at an opportune moment as Uruguay was gearing up for national presidential and legislative elections, where a quota law pledging 30 per cent women’s political representation was to be applied for the first time in the country in October 2014.

Her presence and public support culminated two years of efforts by the organization Cotidiano Mujer, a grantee of UN Women’s Fund for Gender Equality (FGE), together with partner organizations CIRE (Ciudadanías en Red) and CNS Mujeres, to raise public awareness of the need for women to actively participate in political life, and to call for Uruguayan citizens to vote for the parties effectively implementing the quota law.

Cotidiano Mujer has been organizing workshops to build a common agenda for women from civil society and from all political parties, building the capacities of female politicians and drafting a bill to broaden the existing quota law, collecting at least 5,000 signatures in support of the text.

Seeking to expand the quota law to the goal of full parity (50-50 gender representation), the project has mobilized more than 600 women across the country in support of parity.

In the past legislature, women accounted for only 13.1 per cent of the Uruguayan Parliament. This figure placed Uruguay in 103<sup>rd</sup> place in the world ranking of women in parliament by the Inter-Parliamentary Union and UN Women, much below the world average (21.8 per cent) – which is all the more noteworthy in a region recognized for relatively high levels of female political representation.

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**A series of awareness raising ads featuring public figures, workshops for women politicians, and a visit from UN Women Goodwill Ambassador Emma Watson to Montevideo have played their part in creating momentum for the participation of women in decision-making in Uruguay.**

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“Personally, by taking part in this project, I’ve found myself again,” says Marta Piñeiro, who attended the workshops as a political and social activist from the Department of Rivera, in the north of Uruguay. “And it was the same for all of us... we were reminded that we are realistic, but not pessimistic; that a better life for women also depends on our commitment and obstinacy; that this change is playing out on every street and every corner, and that we want to be part of this

change, so we can look our mothers, our grandmothers and our daughters in the eye. The future depends on us, women.”

A series of 11 video commercials featuring public figures raising awareness of the importance of having more women in decision-making positions in Uruguay was strategic in bringing this topic to public attention and putting it high on the political agenda.

“Recently, Uruguay has made headlines around the world by passing laws and measures considered progressive. However, on some basic issues we are still a long way from the headlines. We are more likely in the sidebars,” starts one of the ads starring well-known Uruguayan actor and journalist Christian Font. The ads aired for four months before the elections on various TV channels across the country, as well as via social networks.

Cotidiano Mujer coordinator Lilián Celiberti says an important impact of this project is that “The organization and visibility of the country’s female politicians was strengthened and it encouraged them to submit their nominations for the elections... [Ms. Watson’s visit] increased the opening in the dialogue on women’s political participation and the quota law that is now becoming more of a ‘parity debate’ widely permeating public opinion.”

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- Lilián Celiberti, coordinator of Cotidiano Mujer

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The 26 October 2014 elections saw 25 women elected to Parliament, including 16 in the House of the Representatives (16 per cent) and nine in the Senate (29 per cent). The quota law had a stronger impact in the Senate, where the proportion of female Senators doubled compared to the 2009 elections. The ministerial appointments following the elections also brought in a record number of women, representing almost 40 per cent of the Uruguayan cabinet (5 out of 13 ministries) – more than double the previous government and the highest number in the country’s history.

This clearly demonstrates a higher political commitment to gender equality in the political sphere.

### UN WOMEN’S FUND FOR GENDER EQUALITY

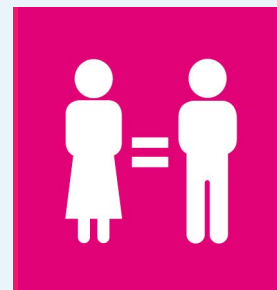
The Fund for Gender Equality is a grant-making mechanism within UN Women dedicated to the economic and political empowerment of women worldwide.

Since its launch in 2009, the Fund has delivered grants of USD 56.5 million to 96 grantee programmes in 72 countries. Guided by UN Women’s mandate, the Fund supports civil society organizations based on strategic priorities to advance women’s rights and gender equality in their countries.

In 2015 the Fund will launch a third global call for proposals to support the post-2015 agenda.

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However, the number of elected representatives is still low. “Sixteen per cent of female Deputies remains a low percentage, not being representative of women’s place in Uruguayan politics and society,” asserted Cotidiano Mujer in a public statement following the elections. While the 2009 quota law mandates political parties to include at least one woman for every three candidates, the usual practice has been for only one woman to be placed third on the list. Because of the electoral system and the high number of political parties that received votes, many parties were only assigned two seats in Parliament, leaving most of the women out.

“The electoral results confirm the importance of having affirmative action mechanisms to address the resistances that are still present in Uruguayan political system for the incorporation of women in the eligible positions within the lists,” says Ms. Celiberti.

Far from relaxing after the elections, Cotidiano Mujer is already strategizing with newly elected female parliamentarians to establish legislative commitments including a new participation law to ensure equal representation, and will soon target local agendas with a view to departmental elections in May 2015.