



## **Recognizing the Remarkable: A Statement by Zonta International on Women's Leadership and Decision-Making**

On International Women's Day, Zonta International recognizes the remarkable contributions of women who lead, innovate and drive change across all sectors of society—often without recognition, adequate resources or equal access to power. While progress to increase women's leadership has been made, it remains uneven, fragile, delayed and is often easily reversed without sustained commitment.

Women's determination demonstrates a truth we can no longer ignore: the world is more stable, more prosperous and more just when women share equally in decision-making

In 2025, notable advances were made across the globe:

- Mexico elected its first female president, leading a cabinet comprised of 50% of women.
- Across Europe, 12 countries now have women serving as heads of state or government.
- Rwanda continues to demonstrate global leadership, with women holding more than 60% of parliamentary seats.
- Women's participation in science, technology, engineering and mathematics has also continued to rise, reflecting increased recognition of women's contributions to research, innovation and economic growth.

Yet we cannot become complacent. According to UN Women, at the current pace, gender equality in the highest positions of power will not be achieved for another 130 years.

- Women hold only 22.9% of cabinet positions globally, with just nine countries reaching parity.
- Women remain largely concentrated in social positions, while economic, security and infrastructure ministries continue to be dominated by men. Globally, women represent only 27.2% of national parliamentarians.
- While six countries have achieved parity, 21 states have fewer than 10% women legislators, including some with no women represented at all.
- At the local level, women comprise 35.5% of elected representatives worldwide.

These figures underscore the uneven and unstable nature of progress—and the many women whose leadership remains unsupported or unseen. They also highlight a deeper systemic truth: many of today's governing structures were designed for a world that no longer exists. Global challenges, from climate change to technological disruption, demand leadership that reflect the full diversity of those affected.

Balanced participation and equal leadership in decision-making are core commitments of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and are reinforced by Sustainable Development Goal 5.5. Evidence consistently shows that women's leadership strengthens governance, improves social outcomes and advances inclusive development. Women leaders drive policies that expand access to essential services, address inequality and strengthen communities.

Zonta International affirms that women's equal participation in leadership and decision-making is essential to achieving gender equality, social justice and sustainable development. Increasing awareness, access and opportunity for women in leadership is essential but representation alone is no longer enough. Women must also have authority, safety and institutional support to lead effectively. Equal leadership is not symbolic recognition; it is a structural requirement for societies that aim to be resilient, sustainable, prosperous and peaceful.

Zonta International's commitment to equity in leadership is reflected in the organization's programs and awards. The Amelia Earhart Fellowship, established in 1938, has supported women pursuing doctoral studies in aerospace engineering and space sciences, empowering generations of women to assume leadership roles in research, science, technology and innovation. The Zonta Young Women in Leadership Award supports and elevates young women who are shaping their communities through civic engagement, advocacy and public service. In 2024, Zonta International further strengthened its commitment through the introduction of the Zonta Women in Business Leadership Award, recognizing women advancing equity and excellence in corporate and entrepreneurial decision-making spaces, and the Zonta Women in STEM Award, recognizing women driving innovation and leadership across scientific and technical fields.

This International Women's Day, Zonta International calls on governments, businesses, civil society and global institutions to move beyond symbolic commitments and recognition and to enact structural change that enables women to lead and thrive at every level. Ensuring women's leadership is not an act of celebration, it is an act of responsibility. A world that recognizes the remarkable is a world that equips every woman with the power, safety and authority to shape the decisions that define the future. When women lead equally, societies do not simply improve; they transform. Join Zonta in building a better world for women and girls.