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Strengthening Women's Resilience and Leadership in ASEAN: AIPA Conducts Workshop to Develop Plan of Action on Promoting Women's Political Participation

[Jakarta, October 10, 2023] – Today, the ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Assembly (AIPA), with the support from the Government of Canada through the Canada Fund for Local Initiatives (CFLI), the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), and the Governments of UK and the Republic of Korea through the Regional Project “*Empowering Women for Sustainable Peace: Preventing Violence and Promoting Social Cohesion in ASEAN*” implemented by UN Women kicked off the first Plan of Action workshop to promote women's participation in politics to strengthen women's resilience and leadership in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) member states.

The workshop brings together 29 parliamentarians and legislative experts from seven ASEAN Member States, as well as representatives from the ASEAN Secretariat and the ASEAN Committee on Women. Participants at the two-day workshop will take stock of women's involvement in decision-making processes in the ASEAN political sphere to begin the process of drafting a *Plan of Action on Promoting Women's Political Participation*.

While ASEAN countries have made commendable progress in enhancing women's representation in parliaments over the past two decades, there is still room for improvement. Despite a nine percent increase in the past two decades (from 12 to 21 percent in 2023), the regional average is still well below the global figure of 26 percent and ASEAN Member States fall short of the global target of 30 percent.

Increasing women's substantive representation in parliaments across ASEAN is crucial to driving policy and legislative changes that promote gender equality and contribute to the achievement of the ASEAN Vision 2025 and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Drawing upon the support of global champions for gender equality and women's empowerment, AIPA has engaged, CFLI, UN Women, and USAID to address this disparity.

“By strengthening women's resilience and leadership, we are fostering an environment where women can actively contribute to decision-making processes. AIPA firmly believes that empowering women politically will lead to a more inclusive and prosperous ASEAN region. As the AIPA Secretary General and a woman leader, I am proud that our male allies are also committed to advocating for gender equality and ensuring that women's voices are heard, valued, and included”, said Siti Rozaimeryanty Dato Haji Abdul Rahman, Secretary General of AIPA.

“Women's full participation in leadership and decision-making provides them with the opportunity to shape their future economic and productive lives and contributes to an improved quality of life for all. Supporting women's political participation throughout ASEAN is not solely an issue of gender equality, it is a fundamental element of democratic societies that are inclusive and sustainable,” said H.E. Vicky Singmin, Ambassador of Canada to ASEAN. “AIPA's work to create a Plan of Action will support the next generation of women political leaders by creating an enabling



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environment and providing them with the opportunities, knowledge and confidence they need to contribute to their local, regional and national governments.”

“There is a lot of momentum to advance women’s political participation and leadership across all countries in the Southeast Asia region. However, despite progress, the impact has been uneven. It is important to recognize and break down barriers preventing a wider diversity of women’s representation in policy and decision-making positions to ensure that they better reflect the population they aim to serve, particularly the most marginalized.”, said Jamshed Kazi, UN Women Country Representative of Indonesia and Liaison to ASEAN.

“When women are involved in political decision-making, a transformative ripple effect occurs. Policies become more comprehensive, addressing a broader spectrum of needs, from healthcare and education to social welfare and economic empowerment,” said Kate Rebholz, Deputy Chief of Mission for the U.S. Mission to ASEAN. “Once drafted, the Plan of Action will send a resounding message that ASEAN values diversity and inclusivity in its governance structures and believes women’s perspectives are crucial in solving complex and shared challenges.”

A second workshop is planned for February 2024 to finalize the *Plan of Action on Promoting Women’s Political Participation*. Through this cooperation, AIPA, CFLI, UN Women, and USAID, seek to increase and strengthen representation of women at the policy-making tables across ASEAN member states to generate more gender-responsive and inclusive laws and policies for the region.