



SUSTAINING THE PARTICIPATION OF WOMAN IN ELECTIONS: By Henriette Visser – ACA Media Representative

OPENING REMARKS

Honoured colleagues, delegates, members of the IEC. I thank **God** and you for this kind invitation and the opportunity to address you on the topical issue of woman's participation in elections.

INTRO

The role of woman in politics in general and in elections in specific, is a very relevant topic indeed with it coming into focus both locally and internationally in recent times. Nationally the celebration of Woman's day earlier this month reminded us of the major role woman had played in bringing about change in South Africa and maintaining stability whilst going through the transition phase.

Internationally too, the role of woman is being re-evaluated. While Americans seem happy enough to allow woman like Condoleza Rice to take up high-profile government positions, it would seem that the voting public isn't ready to inaugurate a woman as their Commander and Chief yet, as was proven when Obama defeated Hillary Clinton in the Democratic Party's race to choose its candidate for the US presidential election.

ACA'S STANCE ON QUOTAS

The **African Christian Alliance – of Afrikaner Christen Alliansie (ACA)** believes that woman have an important role to play in building our new democracy and we pledge our cooperation to any efforts to empower and uplift woman in so long as it doesn't undermine our Christian beliefs.

As a matter of principle, the ACA cannot and will not endorse or condone any campaign or legislation which seeks to enforce a quota system, since the ACA doesn't support any kind of job reservation or preferential treatment of any group. Have we learnt nothing from our jaded past? Reserving any position and giving preferential treatment to any one group over another (even under the guise of making amends for past injustices) is sure to plant the seeds of resentment and inequality – which we are all desperately trying **NOT** to repeat! Two wrongs don't make even one right.

Although the ANC has had success in getting more woman into government using the quota system, the ACA is inclined to agree with a report by the **UN's Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues** that states that (and I quote) "...While quotas ensure woman a presence in parliament, there is no guarantee that woman will be able to use their power effectively." (End quote). The report goes on to say that quotas and skills training should be used simultaneously to empower woman.

This is much more in line with our view which has always held that **the best qualified, available person**, having the right qualifications, skills and experience should be appointed to any position, be it in government or the private sector. If you don't follow this employment policy, you are likely to run into the same problems as Eskom did with their AA policies. Now they have to recruit people at an outrageous cost in other countries who are paid in foreign currency like dollar or Euro. I just wonder what Eskom's AA and EE targets look like after this exercise.

The ACA further qualifies its position in that it will **ONLY support the candidature** of true Christians, whether male or female, as we believe these people understand the heart of civil service, which is to SERVE OTHERS and not the self.

Although opposed to a quota system, the ACA has an outstanding record in as far as gender parity is concerned. Since its inception in 2005 the ACA has won 2 seats in local government, one in the **Metro Municipality of Thswane (Pretoria)** which is held by a white man, and the other one in the **Municipality of Madibeng (Brits)** which has been filled by a black woman. Since then the ACA has also contested a number of bi-elections and **+ - 95%** of ACA candidates standing in those elections, were woman.

EMPOWERING WOMAN MEANS EDUCATING WOMAN

The **African Christian Alliance** believes that the only way to truly empower woman, and sustain their involvement in elections is to educate them. We propose engaging woman in two ways, namely as voters and as candidates.

Woman as voters

Should the ACA come to power we will improve the lives of woman at grassroots level by:

1. reinstating the death penalty for crimes such as rape and
2. root out corruption in government departments so that child grants will actually be paid to the caregiver. If the child lives with his grandmother, the grant should not be paid to its mother who has moved to the city.

The ACA would support and contribute to initiatives that seek to:

- ◆ Ensure the maximum number of female voters is registered timeously.
- ◆ Implement voter's registration campaigns that target woman specifically.
- ◆ Enhance voter education in such a way as to reach both woman living in urban as well as rural areas.
- ◆ Facilitate woman voting by ensuring that polling stations are accessible to them and open long enough to allow them to vote.
- ◆ Monitor and root out efforts to intimidate woman at polling stations.
- ◆ Reduce the prevalence of family voting; and
- ◆ Assures the secrecy of the ballot.

The ACA believes that while it is the responsibility of ALL political parties to accomplish this, government – NOT THE ANC – should foot the bill for such initiatives as these will build and develop SA's democracy. The ACA - and we are convinced other parties too - would be more than willing to provide the services and skills needed to formulate and run such programs.

Woman as candidates

As already mentioned, the **African Christian Alliance** has an excellent record when it comes to supporting woman candidates for elections. Before allowing a candidate to run in any election under the ACA banner, we will ensure that such a candidate is:

- ◆ A committed Christian,
- ◆ Qualified and/or experienced,
- ◆ Not party to any form of corruption and self-enrichment, and
- ◆ A person of integrity who is willing to serve those whom * elected him/her. Let me add here that the **ACA has never believed in floor-crossings and won't accept candidates from other parties crossing over us either.**

The ACA is a small party and still in its infancy, but we believe that we have a lot to offer female voters and candidates.

WOMAN IN BIBLE AS LEADERS

Finally, for those who might wonder how we could dare to bring Christianity into a discussion on woman's participation in electorals, let us turn the ultimate source of truth: **the Bible.**

Christianity doesn't oppose woman's participation in politics. **Deborah** is a case in point. As a Judge, she ruled over the nation seeing that Israel didn't have a formal king or ruler at the time.

Esther is yet another example of a woman intervening in the politics of the day and in doing so saved her people from terrible persecution.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion let me share with you a **personal story.** I remember when I was a young girl, I opened a conversation with my mother about the election of PW Botha that had just taken place. My grandmother was present at that occasion and immediately silenced me, saying that politics is not for woman. "It's a dirty business," she said "and woman were better off concerning themselves with the business of raising children, cooking and keeping their husbands happy." We certainly have come a long way since then. **At the ACA we believe that politics is NOT a dirty business and woman should definitely get involved in it. However, when candidates without good Biblical values are elected to power, they often besmear public office, making it dirty indeed.**

I thank you.
Be Blessed