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International Poll Finds Large Majorities in All Countries Favor Equal Rights for Women

Widespread Support for Government and UN Action to Prevent Discrimination

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College Park, MD—According to a new poll of nations from around the world, there is a widespread consensus that it is important for "women to have full equality of rights" and most say it is very important. This is true in Muslim as well as Western countries.

In nearly all countries most people perceive that in their lifetime women have gained greater equality. Nonetheless, large majorities would like their government and the United Nations to take an active role in preventing discrimination.

The poll is being released in advance of International Woman's Day (March 8), a date recognized by the United Nations and observed around the world. This year also marks the 60th anniversary of the UN General Assembly's adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, whose second article declares that all are entitled to the same rights and freedoms, regardless of race, language, religion, sex or other status.

The poll of 14,896 respondents was conducted by WorldPublicOpinion.org, a collaborative research project involving research centers from around the world and managed by the Program on International Policy Attitudes (PIPA) at the University of Maryland. Interviews were conducted in 16 nations including most of the largest countries: Azerbaijan, China, Egypt, France, Great Britain, India, Indonesia, Iran, Mexico, Nigeria, the Palestinian territories, Russia, South Korea, Turkey, Ukraine, and the US. The nations included represent 58 percent of the world population.

In nearly every nation polled large majorities say that it is important for "women to have full equality of rights." On average, 86 percent say women's equality is important, including 59 percent who say it is very important.

Those saying equality between men and women is important include large majorities in Muslim nations: 78 percent in Iran, 90 percent in Egypt, 83 percent in the Palestinian territories, 85 percent in Azerbaijan, 91 percent in Indonesia, and 91 percent in Turkey.

Men and women differ strikingly little on this question. Across all countries 84 percent of men as well as 88 percent of women say equality is important. However, a larger percentage of women say that equality is very important (women 64%, men 54%).

"The idea that women should have equal rights is fairly new," said Steven Kull, director of WorldPublicOpinion.org. "It is quite extraordinary that there is now such a global consensus

across all cultures not only that women should have equal rights but also that it is the responsibility of the government to prevent discrimination."

Most people perceive women as gaining greater equality. On average 71 percent say that during the course of their lifetime women have gained greater equality of rights, with 29 percent saying that they have gained much more equality and 42 percent saying say they have a little more equality. The perception that women had gained greater equality is the majority position in every nation except Nigeria and the Palestinian territories. In the United States, nearly four out of five (79%) say that women have won greater equality.

Despite this perception of progress very large majorities in nearly all nations polled say that "the government should make an effort to prevent discrimination against women." Only small minorities endorse the position that "the government should not be involved in this kind of thing."

On average, 80 percent say the government should try to prevent discrimination, while 15 percent say the government should not be involved in this kind of thing.

A majority—albeit a more modest one—also says that their government should do *more* to prevent discrimination against women. On average, 53 percent feel that the government should do more, 24 percent that the government is doing enough, and 15 percent that the government should not be involved.

However there is substantial variation between countries. In 11 of the 16 nations surveyed, the most common view is that governments should be doing more to prevent discrimination against women. In five countries the most common view is that governments are either already doing enough to prevent discrimination or that they should not get involved, but in only three is this a majority position: Egypt (82%), India (63%) and the United States (52%).

There is also robust support for the United Nations playing a role in furthering women's rights. In 14 of the 16 publics polled most favor such UN efforts and reject the view that this would constitute "improper interference in a country's internal affairs." On average, 64 percent approve of UN efforts to further the rights of women, while 28 percent say this would be improper interference.

The two exceptions are Egypt, where most of those polled (70%) think the United Nations should not get involved in efforts to improve women's rights, and the Palestinian territories, where views are evenly divided.

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