GENDER PROOFING THE ELECTION SYSTEM
AND THE TALKS FORA

1 EXTENDING PARITY

1.1 We appreciate the concentration on achieving accommodation between
different political traditions and different political parties but we would like to
draw the attention of both governments and all political parties to the need to
secure parity of esteem for women in the election process.

1.2 We draw attention to a number of statements which are made in the Framework
Documents issued by the two governments. The statements in these
documents refer to "protection for parity of esteem", "equitable and effective
political participation", "proportional composition of political fora", "checks and
balances in the political structure".

1.3 While we approve of attempts to achieve parity of esteem and parity of
representation we wish this to be applied to parity of esteem and parity of
representation for women.

1.4 Accordingly we would make the following proposals in relation to each system
of election being considered. When the system of election is determined we
would press for the suggestions which we have made on gender proofing that
system to be taken on board.

2 INDEX/LIST SYSTEM

2.1 Party lists should be published in advance of the election in the order in which
candidates are to be slotted into seats.

2.2 Each political party's list should be composed of equal numbers of men and
women and the listed names should be alternately male and female to ensure
equal numbers of men and women being slotted into seats.

2.3 In the event of the parties not determining the order of selection in advance,
when the number of seats for each party is known, calculated on the proportion
of the votes achieved, each party should select men and women alternately and
in equal numbers to fill their quota of seats.

2.4 In the event of the parties declaring that they are unable to persuade sufficient
women candidates to stand, the parties should alternate women and men on
their lists until the number of women standing is exhausted; and choose
alternately men and women for their quota of seats until no further women
candidates remain.
3 STV MULTI-CONSTITUENCY SYSTEM

3.1 Candidates should be chosen in dialogue between party headquarters and constituency branches, with party headquarters giving clear leadership and direction on equal opportunity selection to each constituency branch. Party headquarters should retain the right to review the selections in order to ensure equal opportunity and balance across Northern Ireland.

3.2 Where a party is running more than one candidate in a constituency its constituency team should be composed equally of men and women.

3.3 The number of strong constituencies which each party has, i.e. in which it is likely to win a seat/seat, should be equally divided between men and women candidates in the party thus allowing women as well as men to get elected in "safe" seats.

3.4 When all its constituency candidates are added together the party should have equal numbers of men and women running for seats.

4 DUAL SYSTEM

4.1 The points raised under the two previous models should be applied to each side of the dual system.

5 PRE-ELECTION PREPARATION

5.1 All political parties should take action now to encourage and positively recruit women to put themselves forward for selection so that they have prepared themselves with sufficient women on board to ensure equal representation.

5.2 Clear criteria for selection should be agreed by each political party in advance of its candidate selection process. These criteria should be equality proofed i.e. should be checked to ensure that the conditions set do not directly or indirectly discriminate.

5.3 Candidate selection committees in every party, whether these are established at party headquarters or at constituency branch, should be trained in the process and content of selection, with particular attention given to guidance on equal opportunities.

5.4 In any legislation, regulations or guidelines for election the Government should lay out terms to include parity of esteem and representation for women. They should remind political parties that selection for employment requires that equality legislation is complied with.

5.5 We draw attention to the following 1996 case in Britain concerning women only shortlists in which the tribunal indicated that selection of candidates for a shortlist is considered to be engagement in a profession or trade. We caution that if a list of candidates is drawn up and is wholly or mainly composed of men a presumption of direct and indirect discrimination against women could arise.
5.6 The government should address and publish urgently the working arrangements for any general forum and its committees and key party talks fora. Working arrangements should not directly or indirectly discriminate against women or those with caring responsibilities.

5.7 Working hours should be clear and limited to reasonable times. Disciplined working practices should be maintained throughout all structures to ensure that key talks are not held at impossible times.

5.8 A childcare centre should be established alongside the political forum for the use of elected representatives, men and women, and those who wish to make representation to the forum. Child and dependent care allowances should be the first priority in determining expenditure for representatives.

5.9 Each political party should ensure that women and men receive clear information on working arrangements well in advance of candidate selection procedures. Throughout the duration of the forum and talks each party should comply with the time limits agreed so as to ensure that accessibility is maintained.

5.10 Each party should make similar working arrangements for its own preparatory and debriefing meetings.

6 DETAILED NEGOTIATIONS ON THE FUTURE

6.1 As well as ensuring that women have full equal opportunity with men on selection lists to take part in any general forum or general assembly, parties should ensure that women are equally represented in the key political talks. Delegations from each party to key meetings to negotiate future arrangements should include equal numbers of women and men.

6.2 Any committees established under key political talks or for general or particular business under the general forum should include equal numbers of women.

6.3 Any chairs of such committees should also be equally distributed to women and to men.

7 INCLUDING ALL VOICES

7.1 Women are concerned to ensure that everyone is fully involved in determining future arrangements in this society. Women are particularly conscious that they have not been included to date and wish to have this injustice redressed.

7.2 It also has to be said that many women choose not to be represented through the current arrangement of political parties in Northern Ireland but nevertheless remain active at all levels of society contributing to policy development. We draw the attention of the governments and the political parties to the need to develop arrangements and structures which interface with the political forum and feed into the talks process and through which others can make valuable contribution to discussions on progress in this society.
8 WOMEN’S VOTING STRENGTH

8.1 We draw attention to the voting strength of women which we believe has not been fully expressed in elections before. As well as encouraging women to take their rightful place in the party political system, in making representations to and in interacting with that system, women will be encouraged to use their votes effectively.

8.2 Women will be most encouraged to cast their votes in favour of those parties which give voice to their needs and which ensure that women are fully represented in their structures, including representing the party in future political talks.

19 March 1996