

Indonesian Women still reluctant to enter Politics

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By the election 2009 for Indonesia's parliament, the percentage of female legislators reached its highest level in history. However, many parties, and particularly women's rights activists, have not yet seen any significant changes to the country in terms of gender equality and female empowerment.

Indonesia holds elections for legislators at the district, prefecture and national levels. These elections are conducted every 5 years. Data from the KPU Indonesia (*KPU, Komite Pemilihan Umum*: Electoral Commission) shows that the percentage of female legislators with the 2009 parliament's election increased to 18% from 11% in the 2004 election. The ratio women voters and men are 53%-47%, 49.8%-50.2% in 2004 and 2009 year, respectively. The 2009 election results help broaden the perspectives regarding women's political representation in legislative bodies.

Since the reform passed, the issue of representation of women has changed and become a part of the policy agenda. Policies to encourage participation and representation of women in the political process have been formalized in two regulatory revisions. One of the policies for 2004 election was that a party should pay attention to gender equality and justice as well as recognize the representation of women in management. Additional policies for the 2009 election was that a party should recruit at least 30% of women for its management level. This of course will ultimately improve the function of a genuine democracy.

Evaluation of two elections (2004 and 2009) shows the dynamics related to the representation of women both at the level of regulation and competition in the political space available.

Of course, increasing the quantity of female legislators will not yield anything better results, if it is not followed by an improvement in their quality. A legislature has functions such as making some rules/constitutions; drafting state budgets; and other authorities granted by the Constitution. These are powerful tools which can be used to help improve gender equality in this country. If the quantity of female legislators increases, they can make rules that are sensitive to gender. In addition, they can oversee the implementation and create a budget that's at least advantageous for women. The reason is in general men and women have different mindsets. In Indonesia, the disparity between men and women starts from the elementary school level, particularly in remote areas. Women are still suffering discrimination there.

As a result, as they grow up, women continue to be seen as second-class citizens. This

has to be stopped. And the government must change its discriminatory outlook. Otherwise, the country will not be able to produce high level women.

Although many high level Indonesian women also think about the problems of women and want to go into the legislature / executive branch, they do not want to join a particular party. This is because the image of the party in Indonesia is corrupt along with other not so positive perceptions.

Actually, young people have no interest in politics because they know that politics are not clean. Subsequently, they do not want not to join in. Young people are more focused on jobs, studies or other activities than politics. In the last elections (2009 and 2004), the ratio of people who did not vote (*Golput, golongan putih*: white group) increased, especially among young people. To overcome this problem, many government agencies are launching many campaigns on the importance of women's involvement in politics. The campaigns will target women at many levels from college students, company employers, teachers to housewives. Hopefully, they will garner knowledge on politics and eventually develop an interest in it.

Indonesia has as its target a 30% ratio for female legislators as stipulated in the law. It will be hard for us to reach 30% in the next period, but the percentage from the current level should be increased. Although the number of female politicians has gradually increased, many gender equality problems remain.