

Belize has biggest gender gap for women in politics

MOU hopes to change things

On March 8, International Women's Day, UNDP Belize Assistant Resident Representative, Francisco Roquette and Ann-Marie Williams, Executive Director of the National Women's Commission publicly signed a Memorandum of Understanding in an effort to support improvements in women's political participation in Belize.

UNDP Belize and the National Women's Commission have launched a collaborative initiative to: analyze the political and policy context of Belize with special emphasis on developments and issues related to gender; update previous research on the situation of women in Belize; expand the analysis of socio-economic cultural and political obstacles to women's political participation; and foster a national dialogue on the issue. Essentially, the situation analysis of the publication: *Women in Politics: Seeking Opportunities for Leadership in Belize* which was produced by the National Women's Commission a decade ago, will be expanded.

"The initiative will be guided by an Advisory Committee comprised of representatives from national and international organizations including: The National Women's Commission, UNDP, UNFPA, the Women's Department, the Organization of American States, Embassies of the United States of America, Brazil, Costa Rica and Mexico, the British High Commission, United Democratic Party, the Opposition People's United Party, Vision Inspired by the People, a third Party, the Women's Issues Network of Belize, RSV Media, and the University of Belize.

According to a release put out by United Nation Development Programme, Belize is among the countries with the largest gender gap for women in politics.

The release states: "Thirty years after independence, the majority of women in Belize continue to face significant challenges in moving towards parity with men at almost every level of political leadership and decision-making. There is no female participation in the House of Representatives and no female ministers. This

places Belize in joint last position (131st) on the Gender Gap Index for the political empowerment of women, along with Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Brunei (Ref. The Global Gender Gap Report 2010).

“With the proportion of seats held by women in national parliament being a critical indicator of Millennium Development Goal (MDG) 3, Belize is certainly not on course to achieve this goal by 2015.