

# INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S WEEK

## More women needed in decision making

THE new Parliament of the United Republic of Tanzania was sworn in to take up office for the period of five years in December 2005. The first official business session was held last month, in the capital Dodoma.

Throughout the history of political thought and practice, politics has been constructed in imbalanced terms, with the haves especially males as principal actors. Other groups in society have been placed in a very inferior and marginalised position.

Globally, women are not very active in formal political leadership. For instance, women hold only 10 per cent of the world's parliamentary seats. In fact, in many countries women were only granted suffrage rights within the past 40 years.

Even in those countries where women won suffrage rights several decades ago, their participation in representative institutions as elected members is still very marginal. Although women won suffrage rights in the United States of America more than 75 years ago, they only constitute 10 per cent of the congress, and only one out of the 50 governors is a woman.

The Tanzanian MPs increased in 2005 to 324. This includes the 232 constituency MPs elected

**TANZANIANS join the rest of the world to mark International Women's Week which started to be observed on March 1. The celebrations climaxes tomorrow at the International Women's Day (IWD). Correspondent DEUS KIBAMBA looks at the position of women in decision making both at globe level and in Tanzania....**

on 14 December 2005 from all over the country—mainland and Zanzibar. Of the 324, there are 75 Special seats for Women guaranteed by law.

The other categories of MPs include 10 presidential nominations and 5 members elected by the Zanzibar House of Representatives.

Tanzania has attained the target of having women occupying at least 30 per cent of the seats in Parliament. This is the first time ever. Gender activists must have been heard at last. This is in accordance with a declaration of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) to which Tanzania is a signatory, requiring member states to attain 30 per cent of Women representation in decision-making posts by the end of 2005.

In 1997, SADC member states undertook not to discriminate women and targeted to increase their allotment in parliaments and other decision making bodies since all had signed and ratified the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms

of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). This was a commitment to a number of other frameworks including the Nairobi Forward Looking Strategies, the Africa Platform of Action and the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.

This target has now been raised to 50 per cent by SADC as a result of lobbying by feminist activists and their supporters. The African Union also has fixed its target at 50 per cent women representation at all levels of politics and decision making structures.

Judging from the 2005 parliamentary results, the Tanzanian parliament currently has 97 out of a total of 323 seats in the new Parliament occupied by women. Of the sworn in women MPs, 17 were elected from the constituencies, an increase from 12 in 2000 and only 8 in 1995.

Of these, 75 are from the Special Seats group, up from 48 in 2000, and three appointed by the president, up from only two in 2000. Two others are from the Zanzibar House of Representatives.

With the 30.3 per cent of women representation in Parliament, Tanzania becomes the third SADC member country to have achieved the 30 per cent benchmark, after the Republic of South Africa and Mozambique.

Outside SADC, Tanzania's neighbour Rwanda is far ahead with close to 50 per cent women in the country's parliament. South Africa and Mozambique are at the same level as Rwanda.

Presently, there are 319 MPs and the President is entitled to appoint four more to make up the total of 323. According to the constitution, the President may not appoint less than 2 women MPs out of the four remaining vacant slots.

If the President decides to nominate women into all the four remaining slots, the percentage of women in the Parliament would stand at 31.26, compared to only 21.5 per cent in 2000.

President Jakaya Kikwete has formed his cabinet, which is slightly expanded from his predecessor's with a total of 29 full Ministers, some of whose portfolios are



**DR Migiro**

new based on the emerging needs of the 2006 government.

Mr Kikwete's cabinet has 6 ministers and 10 deputy ministers who are women. This makes a total of 16, about 27 per cent women in the cabinet, which is also an impressive record in this country. This is a major increase from 2000 cabinet in which, out of the 27 Ministers and 17 Deputies there were only 4 full women Ministers and the same number of women deputies.

Beyond the increased number of women in the parliament and Cabinet, 2006 is a special year for one more reason. Women have been nominated into strategically powerful positions of the cabinet and the Parliament.

Among the Ministries headed by Women are Finance whose Minister Zakia Hamdani Meghji becomes the first Woman into the portfolio since independence; as well as Dr Asha-Rose Mtengeti Migiro who breaks the record to become the Foreign Affairs Minister.



**MRS Meghji**

Other key Ministries led by women include Education, Legal and Constitutional Affairs and President's Office, Public Service Management. Furthermore, the appointment of women to deputize in key ministries such as Water, Health, and President's Office - Regional Administration and Local Government, Science, Technology and Higher Education, Planning and Empowerment, Lands and Housing and Labour, Employment and Youth development is a sign of great trust that given the chance, women can deliver. The election of a Woman into the position of Deputy Speaker has also been lauded in gender circles.

The president has also named his list of Permanent Secretaries and their deputies. Out of the 40 Permanent Secretaries and Deputies, 11 are women making up to 27.3 per cent. It will be important to enact a law that makes it compulsory to have a 50:50 ratio in



**DR Nagu**



**MRS Sitta**

Tanzania's key decision making positions. Generally speaking, there has been some improvement in balancing leadership team by gender in the post 2005 elections. What is important now is to work towards the 50:50 ratio goal in all positions of decision making.

However, we should go beyond the numbers by having women who are capable of delivering. Women's performance should be assessed on the same basis as men's. It should never be the case that women leaders are expected to perform higher than their male colleagues, as has been true in the past. Performance standards



**MS Ghasia**



**MS Simba**

should be the same for women and men MPs, Ministers, Permanent Secretaries, Directors, Commissioners and other leaders.

In addition, the government should ensure that more women get into decision making positions, and that those in power get full support from their male colleagues at all levels of government. On the other hand, gender activists in civil society should continue to advocate for gender and pro-poor objectives, while providing support to women and men leaders who are truly progressive, committed and accountable to the people