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DROP IN NATIONAL ASSEMBLY GENDER REPRESENTATION

The results of the 2015 National Assembly elections confirm that representation of women in parliament is steadily declining. Only 5.11% of federal legislators in the 8th National Assembly will be women, down from 9% in 2007 and 7% in 2011.

Female representation in a country's highest law making body has become the international yardstick for gauging that society's appreciation for the importance of women's political participation. Nigeria is not only below global and regional averages of 22.1% and 22.4% respectively, we are even below our own 35% minimum standard set in 2006 in the National Gender Policy (NGP).

For most Nigerians, the desired dividends of democracy include an improvement in living standards and conditions as well as equity and social justice. The most effective and efficient means of realizing these objectives is to ensure that women are more broadly represented because evidence shows that women support a redistributive agenda - particularly increased expenditure on social services and children's education.

However, in spite of the dismal representation of women in parliament, there is still an opportunity for Nigeria to improve its ranking on gender inclusiveness. **We call on the incoming state and federal administrations to adhere to the NGP and ensure 35% representation in all executive councils and other appointments.** Nigeria is home to extraordinarily accomplished and capable women in every sector and the incoming administrations would do well to tap into this resource. Taking a long-term view, now is the time for political parties to take internal stock and develop strategies to attract and retain women within their structures and for women to join the political parties in droves.

Finally, to all the women who participated in the 2015 elections, we applaud you. Paraphrasing former US President Theodore Roosevelt, "*Credit belongs to the woman who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood*".

Signed:

Nigerian Women Trust Fund

www.nigerianwomentrustfund.org