

**“Developing the Capacity of Women Legislators to Effectively Contribute to Governance
in Southern Sudan”
OPENING REMARKS
WDN/IRI Conference
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Good morning, it is a pleasure to be here representing the International Republican Institute (IRI) and the Women’s Democracy Network (WDN).

IRI is a nonpartisan nonprofit organization established in 1983 that is dedicated to advancing democracy worldwide. In partnership with political and civil society activists, IRI’s Africa division promotes free, transparent elections; increases the ability of political parties to recognize and effectively champion the needs of constituents; encourages women, youth and minorities to engage in the political process; and helps further government accountability to the electorate.

The [Women’s Democracy Network](#) was established in March 2006 to create a global network of women interested in political and civic activism. IRI accomplishes this goal by linking these women with their peers in other countries who share similar struggles, providing mentorship from experienced women who are leaders in their fields, and through trainings designed to target their identified needs. Currently, WDN is active in 36 countries and has established 10 country chapters which consist of groups of women united to address specific issues facing their country.

The general elections of 2010 in Sudan marked a historic turning point in the future of women in the South. Southern Sudan now ranks among the top ten African countries in terms of women’s representation in parliament, and that is a statistic that you should be very proud about.

Legislators carry an honorable burden. Constituents depend on you to legislate effectively on laws and policies that are going to deliver on your promises of peace and prosperity for all citizens in Southern Sudan. However, as women legislators, you carry a specific burden. You have a further responsibility to ensure that the women’s voices of Southern Sudan of your electorate are heard, and that their perspectives are taken into consideration at all levels of the legislative process.

In response, IRI and WDN have worked together to organize this conference, and we thank the Government of South Sudan for making it possible. We are so pleased to have so many high-ranking government officials in attendance today, and I thank you for evidencing your interest in your country.

The objectives of this conference are three-fold: first, to provide you with the skills to be effective legislators. The skills you learn at this conference should make a genuine impact on the policies you formulate and implement. During this conference, you will have the unique opportunity to learn from experienced legislators from the United States, Nigeria, Uganda and South America who will share their best practices on how to maximize your legislative work so

that your presence is felt. I am pleased to introduce you now to our trainers: the Honorable Leslie Waters, former state legislator, and current Vice Mayor, from Seminole, Florida, the United States; the Honorable Christine Bako, Member of Parliament in Uganda; the Honorable Florence Akinwale, Member of the Parliament in Nigeria; and the Honorable Nazli Howa, Deputy Director of the South African Human Rights Commission.

Another benefit of this conference is that we will learn to identify opportunities to co-opt gender issues into the various areas of your legislative work. Our trainers will provide us with specific strategies and tips to insert a gender component in nearly all legislative activity – floor debates, committee work, oversight, and constituent outreach.

On the final day of the conference, we will work together to produce a set of strategies for the effective functioning of the Southern Sudan Legislative Assembly women’s caucus and the upcoming legislative assembly to guide you in your work.

Following completion of this conference, our hope is that you feel empowered to make a genuine impact on the lives of your fellow women in Sudan and the issues important to them.

We look forward to working with you and to a successful conference.