



31/03/98
PRESS STATEMENT
NO EMBARGO

NI Women's Coalition proposes electoral system for new Assembly

The Northern Ireland Women's Coalition is lobbying other Talks participants to back an electoral system designed to build political diversity into the New Northern Ireland Assembly.

"A system that combines proportional representation with a regional top-up list, like we had in the Forum elections, will allow the widest range of perspectives in the new Assembly," said Kate Fearon, a member of the Women's Coalition Talks Team. "That can only be healthy for democracy."

"Women tend to fare better under the kind of system we are proposing. They find it hardest to get elected under a first-past-the-post system, as we have in the case of Westminster."

"Of course, no system can guarantee seats for women. However, opinion polls show that people want more women in politics. It is vital that we create the conditions that will allow this to happen as quickly as possible."

She noted that some of the larger parties say that having several small parties in the Assembly might be inefficient or unstable.

"We disagree completely," she stated. "Our experience of working at the Talks has been that the negotiations have been enhanced by the variety of views represented. The smaller parties do represent significant sections of the population. They have also been able to bring new ideas to the table that have, at times, moved the Talks along."

"The Women's Coalition and other smaller parties have also brought an element of stability to the Talks. Such a stabilising role will be a crucial contribution in the period after a settlement."

While the Women's Coalition cannot comment on other parties' negotiating positions, she noted that a number of other parties also favour a mixed system.

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