

Women's groups: A force for political change

There are at least two ways in which women's groups can be an important force for political change. First, these groups often provide support to women who have been elected to political office. Second, they conduct their own advocacy efforts on behalf of women, children and families.

Across the world, women's groups and networks are providing examples of how grass-roots mobilization can advance human rights, especially for the most vulnerable.

Afghanistan: Women's groups have provided significant support in mobilizing women to participate in the presidential and parliamentary elections and in monitoring the electoral process. They have also organized workshops for women refugees in order to expand their awareness of their rights.

Australia: Women's groups, along with other groups in civil society, played an important role as advo-

cates for the rights of children in immigration detention. They have lobbied for changes in domestic law and social policy and for improved services to enhance the ability of refugee families to rebuild their lives.

Morocco: In 2004, the advocacy and awareness-raising efforts of women's rights activists associated with the organization Printemps de l'Égalité (Spring of Equality) helped persuade government leaders to support a landmark family law that is meant to address women's inequality, protect children's rights and safeguard men's dignity.

Mozambique: A campaign against child marriage by several local women's groups contributed to the passage of a new family law in 2004 that raised the legal age of marriage without parental consent from 16 years to 18 years, and with parental consent from 14 years to 16 years.

Rwanda: In 2002, women parliamentarians and community leaders collaborated during the drafting of a national convention to support women's educational opportunities, small business loans provided by rural banks and the creation of a commission to lobby on behalf of vulnerable young people.

Tajikistan: The Tajikistan League of Women Lawyers drafted a national law on violence, which is currently pending approval by the president. The drafting of the law was a difficult task, but the League organized 32 workshops across the country for more than 1,100 participants, and eventually succeeded in obtaining the cooperation of local authorities, law enforcement and judicial bodies, ministries and other national institutions.

See References, page 88.