



10 DOWNING STREET

THE PRIME MINISTER

16 December 1983

Dear Ms Harman.

Thank you for your letter of 24 November about public appointments, pointing out that only 15% of the members of Departmental advisory committees are women. You asked whether I had any proposals to review the procedures whereby Ministers appoint to public bodies.

Every effort is made by Ministers to ensure that a good field of candidates, regardless of sex, is considered for appointments on the basis of their qualities, ability of experience and availability for the appointment to be made. I welcomed last year helpful reports by the Equal Opportunities Commission on this subject, and stressed that faster progress would depend on increasing the number of women known to be suitable and ready to accept public appointments. The Government is encouraging this process. As you may know, the Public Appointments Unit in the Management and Personnel Office of the Cabinet Office maintains a central list of people who are willing to be considered for public appointments. The Unit is keen to expand that list; they wrote not long ago to some 300 representative organisations including women's organisations, and they take every opportunity to make it clear that women candidates would be particularly welcomed. I am pleased to say that the number of women on the PAU list, although it is still less than 17%, is increasing.

Ministers are not of course required to refer to the Public Appointment Unit's list when making appointments, but they are

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all alerted to the desirability of increasing the proportion of women appointees. There are some constraints on making quicker progress. There are still some fields where relatively few women have the necessary expert qualifications. Second, in many cases (particularly where there are statutory requirements for the representation of outside interests on committees) Ministers will make appointments from nominations put forward by outside organisations, who may themselves suggest few women.

It follows from the variety of ways in which appointments are made that there is no single step that could be taken to secure a significant increase in the number of women appointed. But I fully endorse your view that it is desirable to increase women's contribution to public affairs through membership of public bodies and that the present proportions allow no room for complacency.

The then Lord Privy Seal discussed last year with the Equal Opportunities Commission the scope for increasing women's representation on public bodies. By agreement with the Commission, the 1983 edition of the Government's booklet "Public Bodies", to be published shortly, will for the first time show men's and women's appointments separately for a wide range of nationalised industries, advisory committees and other non-departmental public bodies. I am sure that this will be helpful.

Yours sincerely
Rajendra Khatwa

Ms. Harriet Harman, M.P.