

The World of Parliaments

Quarterly Review of the Inter-Parliamentary Union

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IPU ready to provide its expertise in the reconstruction of institutions in Iraq



Among the parliamentarians in attendance in Santiago were 24 Presiding Officers of Parliament. From left to right : Mr. Mohammed Naji Otari (Syria), Mr. Jorge Chapper (Uruguay), Mr. Amusaa Mwanamwambwa (Zambia), Mr. Kandy Nehova (Namibia), Mr. Reuven Rivlin (Israel), Mr. Abdelwahed Radi (Morocco), Mr. Ouattara Famabaré Natchaba (Togo), Mr. Roch Marc Kaboré (Burkina Faso), Mr. Klaus Wanger (Liechtenstein), Mr. Sergey Zhalybin (Kazakhstan), Mr. Anders B. Johnsson (IPU Secretary General), Mr. Vadim Popov (Belarus), Mr. Neil Andrew (Australia), Mr. Raranath Ranabhat (Nepal), Mrs Ingrida Udre (Latvia), Mr. Sergio Pérez (President of the IPU), Mrs Isabel Allende and Mr. Andrés Zaldívar (Chile), Mr. Roberto De Almeida (Angola), Mr. Guy Nzouba-Ndama (Gabon) and Mr. Rory Kiely (Ireland).

The representatives of 117 national parliaments, including 24 Presiding Officers, who met in Santiago (Chile) from 6 to 12 April 2003 to attend the 108th Inter-Parliamentary Conference, adopted four resolutions, including one on Iraq. In the latter resolution, the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) stressed that it was ready to provide its expertise in the reconstruction of institutions in Iraq.

In a meeting in London with the Foreign Secretary of the United Kingdom, Mr. Jack Straw, the President of the IPU, Chilean Senator Sergio Pérez discussed the possible involvement of the IPU in supporting the UN's work geared to the development of democratic institutions in Iraq. "I hope that the IPU will be able to play a significant role in assisting the interim Government in Iraq", the Foreign Secretary told him.

The Chairman of the IPU British Group, Mr. John Austin, supports this initiative. In a letter sent to Mr. Straw, Mr. Austin emphasised that the IPU could offer its experience in the field. He also underscored that MPs had a valuable role to play in assisting new parliaments on the road to democracy.

As for the participation of the US Congress in the IPU, Mr. Austin also asked Mr. Straw to bring this question up, "at appropriate times in meetings with the President, Secretary of State and others". □

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Parliaments to oversee trade negotiations at the WTO conference in Cancún

Concerned at the lack of progress in the Doha Round of multilateral trade negotiations, conducted under the auspices of the World Trade Organization (WTO), a parliamentary Steering Committee composed of representatives of some 20 national parliaments and regional assemblies met at the Headquarters of the Inter-Parliamentary Union in Geneva to consider ways of enhancing the transparency and democratic accountability of the WTO.

The Committee endorsed the initiative of the IPU and the European Parliament to hold a special parliamentary session in Cancún, Mexico, at the time of the fifth WTO Ministerial Conference, where government representatives will gather for a mid-term review of the current round of trade negotiations, including the implementation of the Doha Development Agenda.

The parliamentary session in Cancún will take place on 9 and 12 September as a parallel event to the Ministerial Conference and will focus on some of the most controversial areas of current trade negotiations, such as agricultural export subsidies, intellectual property rights and access to essential pharmaceutical products, and trade in services. While leaving the job of actual negotiations to governments, members of parliaments intend to exercise their right of overseeing government action in this field.

In February this year, the MPs adopted a declaration in Geneva in which they insisted that "further trade liberalisation should take into account national development policies within an equitable rules-based trading system. The accession of new countries to the WTO is crucial to enable it to become a truly universal organisation. Our goal is to promote trade that benefits people everywhere, enhances development and reduces poverty".

"We want the IPU to wield real influence"

Belgian MP Geert Versnick was actively involved in drawing up the blueprint for IPU reform. He sums up the issues at stake for us.

Q : Why is the IPU reform important?

Geert Versnick : IPU reform is very important because we want the Organisation to wield real influence. We have proven it by adopting a resolution on the war in Iraq. The new Assembly, which replaces the present Conference, will meet twice a year and will be composed of a "Standing Committee on Peace and International Security", a "Standing Committee on Sustainable Development, Finance and Trade", and a "Standing Committee on Democracy and Human Rights".

Q : Just what is the reform?

G.V. : The new structure will help the IPU become more topical. These committees will have a president and several vice-presidents who will be able to react more quickly to issues of concern worldwide and to be in touch, especially via today's technological means. Naturally, any decisions taken by this Bureau will have to be approved by the Organisation as a whole, during the Assemblies. Some decisions taken by the Bureau may be contested by some IPU member parliamentarians, and I think that this is a good thing. It is important that there should be a real debate within the IPU, like the one we have had here in Santiago on the emergency supplementary item relating to the war in Iraq. This tension and the negotiations that made it possible to work out a resolution on this point caught the interest of the journalists in attendance and were given wide coverage in the national press and by the international news agencies accredited in Santiago.

Q : Does this mean that the IPU must take political stands more often in order to be present on the world political scene?

G.V. : I believe that a meeting of parliamentarians that cannot take political positions amounts to a travel agency. And we do not want to be a travel agency. The IPU is the world organisation of national parliaments and we want to be an association of political leaders mindful of their duties towards the voters they represent.

Belgian MP Geert Versnick was the moderator for a round table on "Parliaments and the WTO" that took place at WTO Headquarters in Geneva, in conjunction with a public Symposium on challenges to be met by the Cancún Conference. From left to right: Mr. John Dupraz (Swiss MP), Mr. Supachai Panichpakdi (WTO Director-General), Mr. Geert Versnick, Mr. Michel Hansenne (Euro MP), and Mr. Ricardo Meléndez-Ortiz, Executive Director of the ICTSD (Centre for Trade and Sustainable Development).



Photo WTO/C. Velásquez

Should parliamentarians have a bigger stake in international politics, and particularly in Iraq ?

At a time when military spending is on the rise and the world is becoming an increasingly dangerous place, should parliamentarians have a bigger stake in international politics? The answer is yes, says the Inter-Parliamentary Union, which has recently produced a number of handbooks for MPs to be better informed and more incisive when they come to deal with sensitive dossiers. In Santiago de Chile, the IPU and the DCAF (Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of the Armed Forces) brought out a handbook for parliamentarians on parliamentary oversight of the security sector.

"Because security is central to people's well-being, it is essential that their views find expression in the nation's security policy. That policy has to incorporate the underlying values and principles relating to security which the State seeks to foster and protect. There is thus a clear need for the people's elected representatives in parliament to work closely with the government and the security sector" said Senator Sergio Pérez of Chile, the President of the IPU. "The joint IPU/ DCAF handbook is a very useful tool which offers an entirely practical approach to helping to build a safer world." added Swiss MP Paul Günter. Philipp Fluri, Deputy Director of DCAF, recalled that "The idea of democratic parliamentary control of the armed forces is also gaining ground within NATO and the OSCE".

Parliamentary oversight of the armed forces is a necessity. Agence France Presse quotes the latest report by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI): military spending in the world climbed by 6% in 2002 to 794 billion dollars, amounting to 2.5% of world GDP and 128 dollars per capita. Worldwide, military spending dropped sharply in the 1989-1998 decade after the end of the Cold War, but it rose in 2002 for the fourth consecutive year. And everybody knows that rising military expenditure means war, destruction and suffering.

If they cannot prevent wars, parliamentarians, who have an ear to public opinion, can at least work to promote peace and help rebuild democratic institutions in conflict-torn countries. That is what they intend to do in Iraq, where the IPU is ready to provide its expertise in the reconstruction of this country, currently

occupied by a US-led coalition. One of the parties to the conflict, the United Kingdom, represented by Foreign Secretary Jack Straw, is in favour of this. In London Mr. Straw said to President Pérez "I hope that the IPU will be able to play a significant role in assisting the interim Government in Iraq". Democracy would thus resume its rightful place, thanks to parliamentary diplomacy. □

L.B.

Interview with Mr. John Austin, Chairman of the IPU British Group

"The IPU can be useful in Iraq or hopefully in Saudi Arabia"

Q : What do you think of the proposal that the IPU President, Senator Sergio Pérez, made to the British Foreign Secretary, Mr. Jack Straw, concerning the IPU's possible involvement in the development of democratic institutions in Iraq?

John Austin : I think that Senator Pérez raised an important issue with Jack Straw. I think that the Foreign Secretary responded positively. He recognised that other parliaments have helped in the reconstruction of Europe. I have been involved here in the United Kingdom in an organisation that is working with the newly emerging democracies of Central and Eastern Europe in capacity building of newly elected parliamentarians in various countries. I think the Foreign Secretary recognised that parliamentarians from other legislatures can be of help. Moreover, I have written to him in connection with the IPU.

Q : How do you think that can be done concretely ?

J.A. : I have been involved with Eastern Europe in a whole range of seminars about good governance, accountability, holding the executive to account and parliamentary procedures. As Speaker Martin said, we do not have all the answers, we may have something to learn from the newer democracies and I think that is certainly true in the United Kingdom. Now we have devolved government to Wales and Scotland. In Scotland, they are not doing things exactly as Westminster does, they are doing it in a different way. Actually, their approach to pre-legislative scrutiny is better than ours ! It is the exchange that is enriching ! One of the organisations I have been involved with here is a Dutch-based East-West parliamentary practice project that has brought together a team of parliamentarians from different countries with different patterns, different procedures. We have organised a series of seminars in Russia, in Albania, not saying this is the way to do it, but saying this is a way of doing it and talking through the issues about being a responsible parliamentary democracy. And surely the IPU is best suited to do this in Iraq and, hopefully, in Saudi Arabia. Now that the Saudis are members, hopefully they will be moving towards a more parliamentary process.



"I hope that the IPU will be able to play a significant role in assisting the interim Government in Iraq", commented the British Foreign Secretary, Mr. Jack Straw, to the IPU President, Chilean Senator Sergio Pérez, on 21 May 2003 in London.

Parliamentarians active on the international political scene

The President of the CSCM Coordinating Committee, French MP Rudy Salles, asserts:

"The next CSCM must lead to the creation of the Parliament of the Mediterranean"

In Santiago, the IPU Council appointed French MP Rudy Salles as President of the Coordinating Committee of the CSCM process, for a two-year term. Mr. Salles explains his priorities to us.

Q : You have been appointed CSCM Coordinator. What are your goals?

Rudy Salles : Our goal is to relaunch the CSCM process – a fine idea launched some ten years ago and aimed at establishing a Parliament of the Mediterranean. Unfortunately, this idea has been at a standstill for some time, above all because of the Middle East problem. I would like to relaunch this process, for I believe that in a difficult situation we should not stand idly by. We should try to move ahead, and bring together around a table women and men who have something to say, who can agree on many subjects, but who can also disagree. And we must have the courage to face these disagreements. We parliamentarians do this in our parliaments all the time.

Q : Does this mean that the IPU Committee on Middle East Questions and the CSCM will divide up the work?

R.S. : The IPU was wise enough to set up the CSCM and the Committee on Middle East Questions and to avoid mixing the two up. The Committee on Middle East Questions deals with matters relating to the Middle East and we must be very close to its members to talk with them and determine how we can assist them. But our mandate within the CSCM is the Mediterranean, the related problems and also the promotion of the Mediterranean, an extremely positive aspect. We must put all of the questions on the table in order to see all the problems, such as the pollution issue. When we see the pollution caused by the Prestige in the Atlantic, imagine such a terrible accident in the Mediterranean, which moreover is a closed sea. It would be even worse! This is a subject we could cover in our work. I am going to consult the member parliaments to see what they expect from the CSCM, so as to sum everything up with the two rapporteurs, a Moroccan MP and a Greek MP, who will be working with me. In this way, we can prepare an exhaustive report for the next Assembly in Geneva, in autumn



Mr. Rudy Salles (right), President of the Coordinating Committee of the CSCM process.

2003, to know what project and what timetable to choose.

Q : Have you already thought about holding the next Conference on Security and Cooperation in the Mediterranean?

R.S. : Yes, our idea is to hold a new CSCM (Editor's note: the Fourth CSCM). But there is one condition: we are not going to hold a CSCM for nothing! We must have a CSCM that leads to something, that is to the establishment of the Parliament of the Mediterranean. For years now, we have met to take stock of what was done the previous year, i.e. we have not moved ahead. We must go beyond this stage. I am aware that this will not be easy. At the first meeting of the Coordinating Committee, we sensed a number of potential clashes between the participants, then, 24 hours later, after we had discussed, things started moving again and now all the participants want to move ahead rapidly. I find this encouraging. My goal is to set up this organisation so that we can end up with the establishment of this parliament, enabling us to work to improve the living conditions of the Mediterranean people. The Mediterranean must be a link between us all, because we all need each other.

"Syria supports any proposal to further peace"

The President of the People's Council of the Syrian Arab Republic, Mr. Mohammed Naji Otari, attended the 108th Inter-Parliamentary Conference. He feels that "the IPU is an important organisation for it brings all MPs together. It represents the democratic processes that help to promote peace and security throughout the world". Interview



Photo IPU/Jesus Inostroza

Mr. Finn Martin Vallersnes chaired a meeting of the Committee on Middle East Questions, which heard Knesset members and a Palestinian delegation in Santiago.

Q: You are the Speaker of the People's Council of the Syrian Arab Republic. What do you think of the IPU CSCM process and of the idea floated by Mr. Rudy Salles to organise a new Conference on Security and Cooperation in the Mediterranean?

Mohammed Naji Otari : We support any motion that can help to achieve cooperation and security, whether in the Mediterranean or elsewhere. But we have an important issue : the relationship between democracy and development. The greatest obstacle to the development we seek is the question of the occupation of Arab territories by Israel. This makes it a priority to liberate our land, specifically the Golan Heights. Another issue is to have an independent Palestinian State, with Jerusalem as its capital. These issues are essential in the Mediterranean.

Q : The IPU also has a Committee on the Middle East Questions. Is this body important for you ?

M.N.O. : At the beginning, I said that the IPU relies on international legitimacy and principles. The UN has adopted many resolutions on the liberation of the occupied territories. Yet nothing has been done until now and Israel still receives special treatment, implying double standards. We find that the question of liberating Arab territories under occupation and full Israeli withdrawal from these territories is the main platform for any kind of dialogue. We cannot have a dialogue with someone who is occupying our land. The Israelis should withdraw and implement the UN decisions.

“The door of the Committee on Middle East Questions remains open to all MPs of the countries concerned”

In Santiago, the IPU Committee on Middle East Questions elected a Norwegian MP, Mr. Finn Martin Valler-

snes, as its President. It further expressed its regret that the elections to the Knesset held in Israel on 28 January 2003 had led to the cancellation of a meeting between members of the Knesset and members of the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) that the IPU had planned to hold at its Headquarters in Geneva in December 2002. The new Committee President intends to relaunch that initiative, with the support of the Swiss Inter-Parliamentary Group and that of the Manifesto-Movement for a Just and Lasting Peace in the Middle East.

Q : What are your priorities as the new President of the Committee on Middle East Questions ?

Finn Martin Vallersnes : My priority is to continue the good dialogue between the Israelis and the Palestinians, if possible in the presence of their neighbours. This year we also had the Egyptian and the Jordanian delegations present. Moreover, it is important to determine the possibilities on which we could focus from year to year. This year, the focus was on the role of the quartet, and the extent to which parliamentarians be working to ensure that the governments implement the road map. So we are going to follow that up in the autumn in Geneva. I think this is one of the main possibilities we have these days to take a few steps forward. I think that parliamentarians are a very important part of the total network that has to work together.

Q : Do you think that Syria could also join the meetings of the Committee ?

F.M.V. : I am aware that the Syrians and the Lebanese have been invited to these meetings earlier. They have chosen not to be present, as far as I know, but I think it is important to keep the door open for them. This way, if they want to join the meetings, they will be most welcome.

Q: Do you think there might be a meeting in Geneva between the Israeli and the Palestinian delegations ?

F.M.V. : We have an invitation from the Swiss Inter-Parliamentary Group and we are working with the IPU Secretary General to arrange this. We will certainly try to continue the initiatives that have been taken by our predecessors, and I value the initiative taken by the Swiss very highly.

***Interview with the Speaker of the Knesset,
Mr. Reuven Rivlin***

"We have contacts all the time with anyone who is prepared to talk to us"

Q : The negotiations between the Israelis and the Palestinians are difficult. What is your position ?

Reuven Rivlin : We are talking and negotiating all the time. Some people say we are talking because we are doomed to live together. I say that to live together properly we have to talk to them [the Palestinians]. But you should only talk to someone you understand and trust. Because if I do not trust you I will not believe you, and if I do not believe you, I will not accept any compromise with you. So we have to believe in someone. Take Abu Mazen (editor's note: the Palestinian Prime Minister, Mahmud Abbas). We know Abu Mazen very well... For the last two years, he has been saying that we cannot use terror anymore because the whole world is against us and it is not

getting us anywhere. So I have a duty to give him a chance. And we will do so. Because with Arafat we have signed the Oslo agreements, which led us to disaster. For example, Abu Mazen can start fighting terror in a constructive way, on the radio, on television, in the schools and kindergartens.

Q : Do you have contacts with the Palestinian Legislative Council ?

R.R. : We have contacts all the time with anyone who is prepared to talk to us. Talking is very important. And to do what Abu Mazen has done is much more important. Here, you are trying to find a new horizon, in order to express a new vision

Q : If the IPU invites MPs from the Knesset to come and meet the members of the Palestinian Legislative Council in Geneva, would you accept the invitation ?

R.R. : Of course.

Q : You would agree to meet with the representatives of the PLC at IPU Headquarters in Geneva ?

R.R. : Yes, why not ? Every time we are invited to any kind of dialogue, we are ready to talk. But you will have to convince me that I can trust the other person. Because once I talk to him and he makes me a promise I know he cannot keep, my trust is gone. I talk to Mr. Saeb Erekat every day. He is an enemy but we have to talk because we have to get on with our everyday lives. We cannot ignore the needs of our people.

IPU and DCAF launch Handbook on oversight of security forces

The Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) and the Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces (DCAF) launched in Santiago a handbook for parliamentarians on parliamentary oversight of the security sector, in the presence of the President of the IPU Council, Chilean Senator Sergio Pérez, the Chairman of the Chilean Senate Defense Committee, Fernando Flores, the Defence Chief of Staff, General Juan Carlos Salgado, Swiss MP Paul Günter, the Deputy Director of DCAF, Philipp Fluri, and the IPU Secretary General, Anders B. Johnsson.



From left to right : General Juan Carlos Salgado, Senator Fernando Flores and IPU President, Chilean Senator Sergio Pérez.

"People's views must find expression in the nation's security policy"

Because security is central to people's well-being, it is essential that their views find expression in the nation's security policy. That policy has to incorporate the underlying values and principles relating to security which the State seeks to foster and protect. There is thus a clear need for the people's elected representatives in parliament to work closely with the government and the security sector. Yet although they work for the same end, their roles are and should be fundamentally different. In Chile, relations between society and the armed forces have improved over the years. Today's international community will find in Chile an atmosphere of mutual respect and cooperation, which we hope will be further consolidated in the future. We are confident that this handbook will help to ensure that all the key players in the security arena steer their cooperative endeavours towards the common good of each and every citizen.

Mr. Sergio Pérez, Chilean Senator

"A social fabric underpinned by trust and dialogue"

Parliament is responsible for setting the legal parameters, adopting the budget and overseeing security activities. It can only exercise these responsibilities in full if it has broad access to information, the necessary technical expertise, and the power and intention to hold the government to account. This, in turn, requires a social fabric that is underpinned by trust and dialogue. Nowadays, the part that is played by those whose job it is to provide security is undergoing considerable change. New types of armed conflict and growing ties between States have prompted innovative responses and new thinking about the very concept of security. The attacks of 11 September 2001 and their aftermath have only underscored this need.

Anders B. Johnsson, IPU Secretary General

"A very reliable tool that can be a real help in building a safer world"

The Inter-Parliamentary Conference in Santiago offered an excellent opportunity to launch this Handbook, because both MPs and the

media were present. This event can also be linked to Chile's history. Recent developments on the world political scene also underscore the importance of such a publication. Mr. Adolf Ogi, former Federal Councillor in charge of the Swiss Defence Department and currently United Nations Ambassador for sport in the service of peace, was one of the prime movers behind the establishment of three key centres in Geneva: the Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces (DCAF), the Humanitarian Demining Centre and the Centre for Security Studies. The handbook published jointly by the IPU and DCAF is a very reliable tool, that can be a real help in building a safer world.

Mr. Paul Günter, Swiss MP,
President of the Swiss IPU Group

"The idea of democratic parliamentary oversight of the armed forces is also gaining ground within NATO and the OSCE"

Inside international organisations and within the international community, people are giving thought to the question of parliamentary oversight of the security sector. This means that there is greater awareness of this question. The 2002 edition of UNDP's Human Development Report stresses the importance of controlling the security sector. The idea of democratic parliamentary control of the armed forces is also gaining ground within NATO and the OSCE. It is viewed as a linchpin of all democratic development and cooperation programmes with the governments of countries undergoing democratisation. Its track record is perhaps not very good for the moment but the process is moving towards real democracy in an ever increasing number of countries, which are taking the question of democratic control of the armed forces very seriously. Accordingly, DCAF considers that the effectiveness of parliamentary control is all the more vital insofar as it guarantees that new solutions will be designed and implemented with all the desired transparency and accountability. Failing this, security forces could well misunderstand their mission and set themselves up as a State within a State, diverting scarce resources or wielding excessive political and economic influence.

Philipp Fluri, Deputy Director, Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces-Geneva (DCAF)

The example of Chile

In Chile, the Chief of Staff, General Juan Carlos Salgado, and the President of the Senate Defence Committee, Senator Fernando Flores (editor's note: a close friend of the late President Allende who spent many years in exile in Washington, D.C.) work together. Here are some of their impressions of the Handbook for MPs on the control of security forces.

Q : Is the fact that the Handbook is being launched here in Santiago, Chile, symbolic for you?

Fernando Flores : It is indeed symbolic. But I would like to stress that we are working together on many subjects. The General has access to state-of-the-art technology that can be of use to us!

General Juan Carlos Salgado :

We are working together to prepare a workshop on this subject.

Q : Why is the Handbook important?

General Salgado : This Handbook is important because it sums up the modern notion of security and because it defines the accountability that the State must display in the security field. In short, it is a compromise. And in my view this is a good way to tackle matters. Yet I would like to point out that the title lends itself to confusion, for by mentioning parliament's control over the security forces, this gives the impression that the sector of security forces is out of control. Rather, it seems to me that the Handbook tackles the interaction between parliament and security forces.

Senator Flores : Yes, that's right. I believe that people are learning little by little. The experience of some persons is important. This opens up the possibilities that MPs have for dealing with various subjects, including this one.

Q : Is it important that the citizens who have elected the parliamentarians who represent them understand better this relationship between armed forces and democracy?

General Salgado : Absolutely ! We must convince people of a great many things, including the relationship between the security sector and Parliament. We must keep on working to get the message across.

Q : Is it hard for you to convince citizens?

General Salgado : No, it's easier today than it used to be.

Women MPs and the IPU

More and more women MPs attend IPU conferences and hold high-level posts within the world organisation of parliaments. In Santiago, some 140 women parliamentarians from 93 countries debated the issue of the Iraq war and expressed their deep concern at the consequences of the war on women and children.

They urged the parties to the conflict to respect international humanitarian law and human rights and recalled the fundamental role of women in the aftermath of an armed conflict in relation to reconciliation. They also pointed out that the United Nations had a major role to play and requested the IPU to participate actively in the peace-making process.



Mrs. Isabel Allende (left), President of the Chamber of Deputies of Chile, opened the Meeting of Women MPs in Santiago de Chile.

"At the IPU, countries have the possibility to defend themselves and give their point of view"

The Speaker of the Saeima of Latvia, Mrs Ingrida Udre, referred to the role of the world organisation of parliaments in the context of the war in Iraq:

Q : How do you assess the importance of parliamentary assemblies in such a difficult international situation ?

Ingrida Udre : They are very important, because representatives from different countries who hold different views can sit down together and discuss different issues. Moreover, countries have an opportunity to defend themselves and express their point of view. Adopting the resolution showed unity and also democracy, because even if we have different points of view, we found a compromise. It showed to the rest of the world that there is always a way to compromise and solve conflicts in different ways.

Q : Is it difficult for a woman to be Speaker of Parliament ?

I.U. : It is different ! Certainly. At the beginning, men looked at you like a woman. The men were behaving differently. Now men in parliament display proper behaviour, they are more polite than before, when we had a man as Speaker of Parliament.

"We have good working rules so we managed to deliver"

As a sign of the times, the "Twelve Plus" geopolitical group at the IPU is currently chaired by a woman, Norwegian MP Oddbjorg Starrfelt. The Group of so-called Western countries is composed of the following 43 parliaments: Albania, Andorra, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Canada, Cyprus, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Monaco, Norway, New Zealand, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Republic of Moldova, Romania, United Kingdom, San Marino, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey (observers: Serbia and Montenegro, Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, European Parliament).

Q : You are the Chairperson of the Twelve Plus Group. Is this a difficult job in the present international context ?

Mrs Oddbjorg Starrfelt: Of course we had an extra challenge with the war in Iraq and because we are divided as a region on that question. But we have good working rules so we managed to deliver. In the drafting committee for the resolution on the war in Iraq, we had one MP from a country in favour of the war and one MP from a country against the war, and they managed to produce a joint draft resolution.

Q : The Nordic countries always have the most women in parliament. What is their secret ?

O.S. : I am not sure, but it is in a way a self-reinforcing process. I think that the Nordic countries apply rules, first within the political parties or at least some parties, then within the different bodies of our democracies.

A man's point of view

"I do not know what Norwegian politics would have been today without a good balance between the genders"

Q : The Nordic countries are always at the top of the list when it comes to women in parliament. How do you explain this ?

F.M.V. : I think that women have had a strong position in Norwegian society for centuries. It took some time though before they were able to exercise their full rights in the political system. But this happened some one hundred years ago. We still have a way to go, but I think it is imperative that they make their contribution, because women often have a slightly different insight into problems and I think that this is very valuable. I do not know what Norwegian politics would have been today without a good balance between the genders.

Mr. Finn Martin Valtersnes, MP, Norway
President of the Committee on
Middle East Questions

"I am deeply saddened by the war in Iraq"

I am deeply saddened by the unjust war in Iraq, whose consequences are destruction and death affecting thousands of human beings, including women and children. On the other hand, I am absolutely delighted to have you here in Chile and to welcome you in my capacity as President of the Chamber of Deputies, which is a post held only for the second time by a woman since 1811, the year our National Congress was established.

Isabel Allende, President of the Chamber of Deputies of Chile
President of the Meeting of Women Parliamentarians

"In Santiago, we have worked in response to the demands of international public opinion"

Iranian delegations to IPU meetings almost always include a woman MP. The Santiago Conference was no exception, with the presence of

Mrs. Soheila Jelodarzadeh, one of the 12 Vice-Presidents of the Parliament of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Q : The Santiago Inter-Parliamentary Conference comes at a time when the international situation is tense because of the war in Iraq. What is Iran's position in this respect?

Soheila Jelodarzadeh : We have always said that the international community must do its utmost to strengthen the role of the UN in order to try and solve all conflicts at the international level. We have been the worst affected by the regime of Saddam Hussein, our neighbour. But we wish to underscore that dialogue and peaceful mechanisms are the keys to conflict settlement. As has been the case here in Santiago, we deem it important to work in response to public opinion. This is what must be done, and I believe that here at this Conference, we have worked in response to international public opinion.

Mrs. Soheila Jelodarzadeh
One of the 12 Vice-Presidents of the Iranian Parliament

Launching of joint IPU/UN Handbook to combat discrimination against women

In Santiago de Chile, the IPU and the United Nations launched a Handbook for parliamentarians on the *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and its Optional Protocol*. The Handbook was financed with the support of the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) and the Swedish International Development Authority (SIDA).

...READ IN THE PRESS...

"Not doing anything for Amina would be inconceivable!"

Less than a month from the next legal episode concerning the fate of the Nigerian woman Amina Lawal, voices are being raised in support of the young woman. The Geneva-based Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) has once again called for a pardon for Amina. The world organisation of parliaments, the oldest multilateral political institution, cannot be harsh enough in expressing its indignation. "As far as we are concerned, there are three issues. First of all, the death penalty. For the IPU, in the 21st century, this is simply inhuman. Next is the notion of the 'crime' of adultery. We find this absolutely absurd. As for stoning, it is grotesque! We are deeply shocked on these three grounds", declared IPU Secretary General Anders Johnsson. "Not doing anything for Amina would be simply inconceivable! We cannot stand idly by!"

La Tribune de Genève – 10 May 2003



Photo Héctor Yañez

The Chilean daily *El Mercurio* ran a front-page article on the launching of the IPU/UN Handbook on the Convention and its Optional Protocol. From left to right, Mrs. Gwen Mahlangu, President of the IPU Coordinating Committee of Women Parliamentarians, Mrs. Angela King, Assistant UN Secretary-General and Special Advisor for Gender Equality and the Advancement of Women, and Mrs. Isabel Allende, President of the Chilean Chamber of Deputies.

They said:

The Convention is the most comprehensive instrument that exists on women's rights, considering that it encompasses the full range of the vital aspects of the human person. Our parliaments have a major part to play in implementing the Convention and its Optional Protocol. We have to set about sensitizing the governments that have not yet ratified the two instruments.

Mr. Sergio Páez, President of the IPU

The guide published by the UN and the IPU is a very good idea, because in some countries, these issues are very important. In some others they may seem less important, even in the Nordic countries, but when we speak with our colleagues from those countries, we find violence against women in the families and some hiring-related discrimination.

Mr. Ingrida Udre, Speaker of the Saeima of Latvia

Follows on p.12

Constitutional and Parliamentary Developments

CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC

On 15 March 2003, General François Bozizé overthrew the elected President, Ange-Félix Patassé, and declared himself President. Shortly after taking power, he dissolved the National Assembly and the Government and suspended the Constitution. The National Assembly was replaced by a Transitional National Council, an advisory and legislative body established in April 2003. Composed of representatives from all political, religious, professional and social backgrounds, the Council has a mandate to draft a new Constitution and prepare a conference for a national dialogue and elections. In June 2003, President Bozizé announced a return to constitutional order for January 2005, also stating that he wished to organise a national dialogue, a constitutional referendum in 2004, presidential elections in the third quarter of 2004 and municipal and legislative elections in the fourth quarter of that same year.

CROATIA

On 2 April 2003, Parliament approved amendments to the Electoral Law to give ethnic minorities more deputies after the next election. Under the revised law, ethnic minorities (mostly Serbs, Italians and Hungarians) will be entitled to eight deputies in parliament, up from the current five. Serbs, the largest minority, will have three representatives, while Italians and Hungarians will each have one, and all other minorities combined will be able to elect three deputies. The next general election must be held by April 2004, and Parliament must adopt any electoral changes at least one year before that date.

DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO

On 5 April 2003, President Joseph Kabila promulgated the new Transitional Constitution endorsing a peace deal to end more than four years of war. The peace accord was finalised on 2 April 2003 in Sun City, South Africa and accepted by all parties to the conflict. The new Constitution provides for a transitional government, which includes rebel groups and opposition parties, to rule for up to 2-1/2 years, after which the country's first democratic elections in four decades are to be held. Mr. Kabila will preside over this transitional government, and four vice-presidents will be chosen from among the main rebel parties, the civilian opposition and the current government.

KYRGYZSTAN

On 2 February 2003, a referendum on the amended Constitution was held. Voters were asked to say "yes" or "no" to the package of changes, which included turning the current bicameral parliament into a unicameral body and also voting whether they wanted President Askar Akaev to stay on until December 2005 (the end of his constitutional term). Official results showed that 76.61 per cent of the electors had voted in favour of the proposed amendments, while 10.2 per cent voted against, and that 78.74 per cent had approved the proposal that President Akaev remain in office until his term expired in order to preside over the implementation of the changes. The newly amended Constitution came into force on 18 February 2003, after President Akaev had signed the relevant decree.

LIECHTENSTEIN

Constitutional reforms, including the granting of extensive new powers to Prince Hans Adam II, were approved in a referendum held on 16 March 2003. The vote followed months of intense campaigning both for and against the proposals, which were first suggested by the Prince some ten years earlier. The changes to the 1921 Constitution were approved by 64.3 per cent of voters, with a high turnout of 87.7 per cent of the electorate of 16,500. The monarch is now empowered to dismiss the government and appoint interim Prime Ministers, and is not subject to the authority of the Constitutional Court. He has also been given powers to appoint judges. On the other hand, the changes to the Constitution take away the Prince's right to rule by emergency decree for an unlimited period and to nominate government officials. The amendments also give the people the right to call a referendum to end the monarchy.

LITHUANIA

On 24 December 2002, the Constitutional Court ruled that parliamentary deputies could not serve simultaneously as members of local councils. The justices stated that the President, MPs, Cabinet members, judges, and other individuals to whom the Constitution assigned special status could not be local councilmen.

On 23 January 2003, Parliament amended Article 47 of the Constitution to grant foreign legal entities and natural persons the right to acquire farmland in the country. The law came into force one month after its approval by a vote of 116 to four with four abstentions, but the land sales will effectively become possible only in 2011 -- seven years after Lithuania officially joins the EU -- since the country negotiated a transition period in its membership talks.

On 25 February 2003, Parliament voted overwhelmingly to amend the Referendum Law by easing the requirements for successful passage of such initiatives. It retained the condition that more than half of all eligible voters must participate in the referendum for it to be validated, but lowered the number of favourable votes needed for passage from the previous one-third of all eligible voters to a simple majority of the votes cast. The amendments also allow voting to take place over two days, lengthen the term for absentee voting, and widen the list of those eligible to vote from home.

PHILIPPINES

On 5 February 2003, the Congress ratified a new electoral law giving overseas Filipinos voting rights. For the first time, an estimated 7.4 million Filipinos living abroad will be allowed to vote in national elections. The first test of the law's impact on the country's political future will come in the May 2004 presidential and congressional elections. Under the new law, overseas Filipinos can cast their votes in embassies and consulates or, in some areas, mail their votes.

QATAR

On 27 April 2003, Qatari voters approved a referendum ushering in a new Constitution that replaces the 1972 "Provisional Political Order". The new text provides for a Parliament composed of 45 members, 30 of whom will be elected in polls where women may stand and vote. The remaining 15 will be appointed by the Emir, who will also appoint the Prime Minister and the Cabinet ministers. The proposed

legislature will be able to question ministers and subject them to votes of no-confidence, but the Emir retains the power to dismiss Parliament. The latter will have a four-year term and the power to legislate and vote on the budget. Elections to the proposed legislature are expected to take place sometime in 2004. The 150-article Constitution also envisages the establishment of a separate judiciary.

RWANDA

The Rwandans voted on 26 May 2003 on a referendum concerning a draft new Constitution which focuses on efforts to combat the "ideology of genocide" and ethnic divisions and which is supposed to put an end to a "transition" of nearly a decade, following the 1994 massacres which left one million dead among the Tutsis (minority) and moderate Hutus. The draft new Constitution polled 93 per cent of the votes, with a turnout of 87 per cent.

The new text authorised multipartyism but regulates the activities of the political parties, which must belong to a Concertation Forum responsible for promoting consensus. Moreover, parties may not identify with any race, ethnic group, tribe, clan, region or religion, or be based on gender distinctions, under pain of sanctions that can go as far as dissolution, handed down by a High Court of the Republic. The Constitution also provides that the President of the Republic shall be elected by direct universal suffrage for a seven-year term, and shall only be eligible once for re-election. It further stipulates that the majority of members of the National Assembly shall be elected by universal suffrage, with the remainder to be elected by the District and Municipal Councils, by Kigali City Council (24 women), by the National Youth Council (two members) and by the Federation of Associations of the Handicapped (one member). The Constitution also sets up a 26-member Senate, most of whose members are appointed for eight-year terms. A special effort was made in terms of the representation of women, by setting aside at least 30% of the posts for women in decision-making bodies. Finally, the Constitution officially replaces the Rwan-

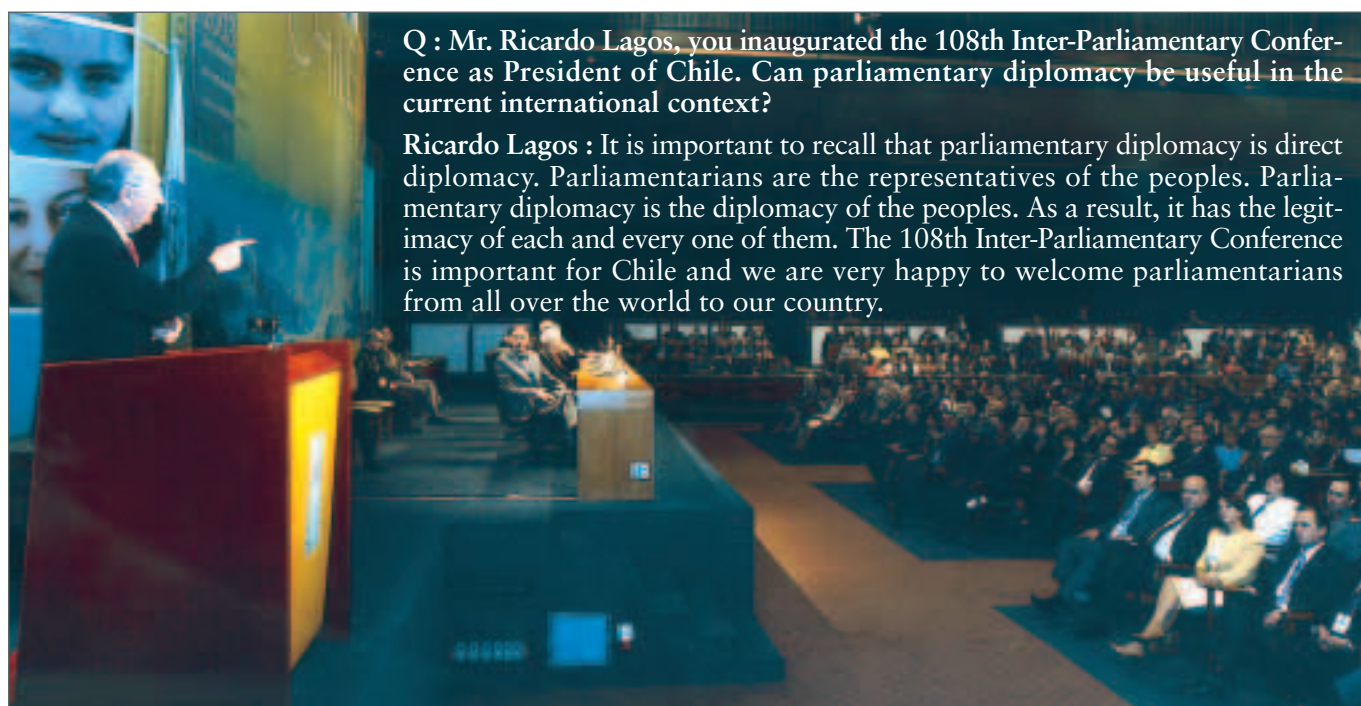
dan Patriotic Army (APR), a product of the former Tutsi rebellion, by the Rwandan Defence Forces (RDF).

SWITZERLAND

On 13 December 2002, Parliament adopted a new law on its organisational structure, which will go into force on 1 December 2003 and which introduces the following changes.

Motions concerning points that fall within the purview of the Federal Council are henceforth authorised. If such motions are forwarded by both Councils, the Federal Council may itself take the required measure; if it refuses, it is obliged to present to Parliament the draft bill amending the distribution of powers, so that Parliament is competent to take the required step. Motions may no longer be turned into postulates (*postulats*) but may be amended by the second Council. These changes are intended to make this instrument more targeted and more effective. Decisions to follow up an initiative and draft a bill shall henceforth be subject to the approval of the two committees of each Council and not those of a single Council as before (except for cantonal initiatives, which required the approval of both Councils). Before issuing decrees, the Federal Council shall consult the competent commissions of the Federal Assembly if they so request. In addition, the current right of consultation in the foreign policy sphere has been maintained and broadened somewhat. The Federal Assembly no longer merely takes note of the programme of the legislature, but voices its views by means of a simple federal decree on the goals of the programme. It may also opt for the federal decree, a more binding and more finely shaded instrument, for other key plans or major reports. The Federal Assembly, its members and its bodies may access the information they need for the exercise of their duties but are bound by secrecy requirements. Whereas MPs, legislative committees and even oversight commissions are subject to varying restrictions in terms of the right to information, this right is unlimited for delegations of oversight commissions. The Federal Tribunal shall defend its own rights before Parliament, without the mediation of the Federal Council.

"Diplomacy between peoples"



Q : Mr. Ricardo Lagos, you inaugurated the 108th Inter-Parliamentary Conference as President of Chile. Can parliamentary diplomacy be useful in the current international context?

Ricardo Lagos : It is important to recall that parliamentary diplomacy is direct diplomacy. Parliamentarians are the representatives of the peoples. Parliamentary diplomacy is the diplomacy of the peoples. As a result, it has the legitimacy of each and every one of them. The 108th Inter-Parliamentary Conference is important for Chile and we are very happy to welcome parliamentarians from all over the world to our country.

Chilean President Ricardo Lagos inaugurated the 108th Conference in Santiago on 6 April 2003.

They said:

Follow up from p.9

Few causes defended by the United Nations have generated more intense and widespread support than the campaign to promote and protect the equal rights of women. The Charter of the United Nations prominently reaffirmed the equal rights of men and women. Since then, the United Nations has helped to build a structure of internationally agreed strategies, standards, programmes and goals to advance the status of women worldwide.

Mrs Angela King, UN Assistant Secretary-General and Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women

This Handbook is very important. First of all, it is important for the new democracies, because they can see what can be done and how it can be done. It can also be important for these countries which have come a long way in this respect like my country, because we have to have things written down and remind ourselves of the different steps. On the other hand, I think that this is one facet of democracy that we will always have to work on, because we did not win that battle once and for all, we have to win it every day.

**Mrs Oddbjorg Starrfelt, MP, Norway
President of the Twelve Plus Group**

As a woman, I am of course in favour of such a Handbook. I think that 50% of the inhabitants of the planet are women, and we have to include children also. We still do not have all our rights and women are in many cases treated as objects of men. This should not be the case. This is another good role for the IPU: to push all of the world's parlia-

mentarians to campaign and to improve the policies which lead to a better quality relationship between men and women. And also to try to reduce violence against women and children within the families. The ones who should be educated should be the men ! It is their mentality that causes these tragedies.

**Mr. Pensak Chagsuchinda, MP, Thailand
Member of the Committee on
Middle East Questions**

As parliamentarians, we form the backbone, so to speak. We have to make sure that in our countries, all the international conventions are ratified in time. We have a great job now that we have the Handbook. We have the bible and we have to know the bible in order to preach the bible. So we have to make sure that we know what the Optional Protocol is all about and to make sure that laws are passed in all our countries in order to eliminate all sorts of discrimination against women and children. This Handbook will make a difference for countries that are not very familiar with the CEDAW and its Optional Protocol. Now there are guidelines telling them what parliaments have to do, and we as parliamentarians have to debate these issues, to look at all the programmes in our countries to see whether there are hearings, to examine the laws to determine whether they are discriminatory and also to make sure that governments submit reports on the status of women to the CEDAW Commission in New York. Today women have a better tool.

**Mrs. Margareth Mensah, Deputy-Chairperson
of the Namibian National Council**

**Mr. Ibrahim Boubacar Keita,
President of the National Assembly of Mali**

"Anything we can do to promote women is a good thing"

I.B.K. : Anything we can do to promote women, in my country and in my Assembly, is a good thing. I am also here as President of the African Parliamentary Union, and we are receptive to anything that can help to promote women on the African continent. This is why we welcome and fully support this IPU initiative. We cannot do too much to back the promotion of women and convince people once and for all that the woman is man's equal with regard to every human activity that we can undertake on the earth. This must be acknowledged, without any hint of paternalism that we are being "soft" on women. We are not being "soft" on them – they are simply getting what they deserve, what they have achieved by dint of unfailing efforts down through the centuries. This is why I am pleased to see that the culmination of the initiative taken by the IPU is set down in a document.

Q : At the Ouagadougou Inter-Parliamentary Conference, a large share of the discussion was devoted to the issue of female genital mutilation. In your opinion, has progress been made in this respect ?

I.B.K. : A lot of progress has indeed been made. We have been discussing this question for decades throughout the world. This concerns us first and foremost in Africa, because on our continent, a majority of women are still affected by this practice. We must make absolutely sure that in the 21st century, this is only a memory. We run campaigns all over Africa to show the harm done by female genital mutilation so that everyone will understand that there are no benefits for anyone but only various types of frustration. And it is good for the woman to preserve her body intact, just like the man. Here as well, there exist culturally determined practices, not only in Africa but elsewhere. As far as women are concerned, let us join forces to ensure that they safeguard their bodies.

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