

The World of Parliaments

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Regional averages of women in Parliaments, 2000 and 2004

Situation in January of each year for both
Houses combined, by ascending order of
the percentage in 2000*

Region	2000 (%)	2004 (%)
Latin America	+ 28	+ 32
Sub-Saharan Africa	+ 18	+ 22
Europe	+ 32	+ 36
Nordic countries not included	+ 38	+ 42
Pacific	+ 12	+ 16
Europe	+ 32	+ 36
Nordic countries included	+ 42	+ 46
Asia	+ 10	+ 14
Americas	+ 28	+ 32
Nordic Countries	+ 48	+ 52

* The percentages do not take into account the case of
parliaments for which data was not available

Post-conflict reconciliation: members of parliament are key players; women have a special role

Promoting international reconciliation,
helping to bring stability to regions of
conflict, and assisting with post-conflict

reconstruction are the foremost subjects
on the agenda of the 110th Inter-
Parliamentary Assembly in Mexico.

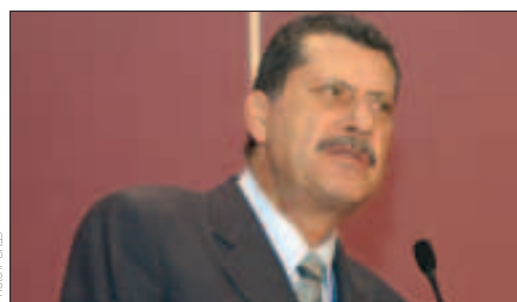


Photo IPU/B

Mr. Enrique Jackson, Speaker of the Mexican Senate.

Reconciliation, a lengthy
process, was discussed at an
international seminar in
Valencia, which highlighted
the role of women, not only
as victims of conflict but also
as key players in healing and
reconstructing a traumatized
society. Closer cooperation
with and between parliaments
is vital. (P.7)

"The Executive has long ceased to be the only force driving foreign policy"

**Q : As President of the 110th IPU Assembly, how would you define the
major challenges of this event ?**

Enrique Jackson: The 110th Assembly provides an excellent opportunity to discuss
the parliamentary perspective on a whole range of opinions and experiences within
today's political and economic processes. It is the ideal place to highlight both the
role that parliaments currently play within the sovereign spheres of each nation, and
their contribution to the international order. It will give us a chance to continue to
forge our role as catalysts and interlocutors. The Executive has long ceased to be the
only force driving foreign policy. Today's diversity means that a considerable num-
ber of public and private bodies are wielding real influence in international relations.
Parliaments have joined the process with considerable enthusiasm. I see the event as
a great melting pot of experiences.

Q : Can you tell us about the agenda ?

E.J.: There are major challenges. First, making a contribution to issues that are piv-
otal to global stability, such as terrorism. We will also look at some of the other
intractable problems that we have not been able to resolve, such as poverty and the
degradation of the environment, for which we must forge new strategies to cope with
the worsening situation. It is important to talk about development and technological
innovation and of course, explore mechanisms to improve multilateral instruments so
that the international decision-making system becomes more efficient and fairer. The
second part of the debates will focus on a subject that is both topical and complex -
the promotion of international reconciliation, which means providing assistance in
restoring stability to conflict-torn regions.

(continued on p. 3)

Second Conference of Speakers of Parliaments: operationalise the role of parliaments at international level



Photo IPIB

The Preparatory Committee made up of some fifteen Speakers of Parliament met in January to draw up plans for a second World Conference of Speakers of Parliaments.

A Preparatory Committee made up of some fifteen Speakers of Parliament met in January at IPU Headquarters in Geneva to draw up plans for a second World Conference of Speakers of Parliaments. The Conference will take place in late August or early September 2005. It will build on the conclusions and commitments made at the first ever global gathering of Presiding Officers of Parliaments who met at United Nations Headquarters on the occasion of the Millennium Assembly.

The 2nd Conference will aim to operationalise the role of parliaments at the international level. The President of the IPU, Chilean Senator Sergio Pérez, declared “The Preparatory Committee has started to assemble the building blocks to create the political will within parliaments and governments to give the IPU certain political and operational responsibilities in matters such as the promotion of peace and security, democracy, human rights and gender parity”.

The IPU Secretary General added that the 2nd Conference would also offer an important opportunity to evaluate progress achieved on the basis of the commitments made by the Speakers attending the 1st Conference to provide a parliamentary dimension to international cooperation and thus offer support to the United Nations. In the same vein, he said that they will assess action taken in parliaments to advance progress towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals.

“The more parliaments and the IPU are given a central role the better they can defend peoples’ interests”

During his official visits, the President of the IPU noted increasing interest among Speakers of Parliament in the IPU’s activities along with a commitment to make the presence of parliaments more strongly felt in the international political arena. « It is important to extend the purview of parliaments beyond national horizons. Understandably, they are taken up with regional, local and domestic politics, and from time to time they need to have their say on the rest of the world», said Mr. Hermann de Croo, Speaker of the

Belgian Chamber of Representatives.

“The British House of Commons takes a great deal of interest in world affairs”, emphasised the Speaker of the House, Mr. Michael Martin, when he received President Pérez in London last year. “I am not allowed to tell my parliament what to do, but having been a member of parliament for 24 years, I can say that the Foreign Secretary has to be very well briefed, because when he is questioned in the House, questions can arise relating to matters from all over the world. I see the IPU as an organisation of great friendship and it gives an opportunity to meet people from democracies all over the world, to exchange ideas and to learn the cultures of other countries, because when you learn about people of other cultures you learn to show respect”.

In Iran the parliament plays an important role. Receiving President Pérez in Teheran, the Speaker of the Majlis, Mr. Mehdi Karoubi, stressed that “the parliament is present in all spheres. It is the only legislative body and according to our Constitution, the Majlis cannot be in recess for a single day. Even during a war when parliamentary elections cannot be held, the legislature that was already in office continues to sit until the end of the conflict. Our Constitution states that nobody, no authority, can dissolve the Chamber. It is the strongest defender of the people”. He recalled that “the more parliaments and the IPU are given a central role the better they can defend peoples’ interests. I should add that the women’s group in the parliament is very active.”

Interview with Speaker Jackson

(continued p. 1)

Under this item, there will be substantive discussions about the role of IPU and the international community in establishing and safeguarding peace. The point is to build stronger representative institutions. There are obvious examples such as the case of Haiti, to name but one. We are worried about the violence, the lack of political stability and particularly the poverty. This third point is of particular interest to Mexico, because we are trying to establish mechanisms to create a fairer and more equitable system of international trade. The question of agriculture is paramount. What is going to happen with production and export subsidies for agricultural products? We will thus be following up on the parliamentary declaration adopted in Cancún at the fifth WTO Ministerial Meeting. Trade is a crucial subject. The Assembly will also look at the role of parliaments in protecting human rights and in reconciliation at the individual level, as well as the question of partnership among nations. There is clear agreement on the need to make progress in respect for human rights, especially those of the most vulnerable, such as indigenous groups, women, children and minority religious groups. The 110th Assembly will also feed discussion within countries about their domestic legislative frameworks. It will be one further step in the consolidation of the role of the Inter-Parliamentary Union in world affairs.

Q : "Do you think that parliaments feel stronger today?"

E.J. : We are stronger. In all countries, we are a power centre, we have privileges and the electors have mandated us to represent them. We have to move forward. Delegates from the Executive branch, who have the negotiating mandate, should know that everything they decide goes before the parliament. This is the real battle for every member of the Inter-Parliamentary Union. It is not sufficient to believe it and to know it, we have to make this conviction manifest in our decisions and actions that we take to defend the interests of each country. (see also quotes on women in politics P.9-10)

Agriculture and subsidies

How much is a European cow paid to chew the cud? Two dollars a day, if we are to believe what Joseph Stiglitz said on the radio the other day. A lot of people have their views on how good it is to be a cow in today's European Union. The UNDP's 2003 report says that the annual dairy subsidy in the European Union is 913 dollars per cow, while the annual aid to Sub-Saharan Africa from the European Union totals a mere eight dollars per person.

The UNDP also offers some telling figures on the cotton trade. The US aid to sub-Saharan Africa amounts to 3.1 million dollars a day, and the US domestic cotton subsidy alone totals 10.7 million dollars per day. The IPU brandishes its own statistic: the Parliamentary Conference on the WTO in February 2003 stated that agricultural support in wealthy countries, taken globally, is about four times the amount that is paid out in development assistance to the poor nations of the world. And more figures will doubtless be quoted when the Second Standing Committee debates the issue of trade in agricultural products at the upcoming Mexico Assembly.

What conclusion are we supposed to draw? That world trade is built around conditions that are so unfair as to be positively evil? That is certainly what some of the noisier groups at the Cancun trade talks would have us believe. Steady on, says the WTO. It's not quite that simple. On that, they are certainly right. If ever a devilishly complex set of issues was seen in oversimplified terms, it has to be the agriculture negotiations. As the WTO points out, things have come a long way since the days of the GATT when international trade rules did little to discipline agricultural trade. But the Uruguay Round changed that, and agriculture is now firmly within the WTO multilateral trading system. The Agriculture Agreement, together with individual countries' commitments to reduce export subsidies, domestic support and import barriers on agricultural products were a big step towards reform. The Doha declaration then confirmed the long-term objective of a fair and market-oriented trading system through a programme of fundamental reform. To all of that might be added the conviction, deeply entrenched in every country's culture, that it has the right not only to defend itself, but also to feed itself.

True. Remove the time factor, and governments could continue their leisurely progress towards agricultural trade reform. Unfortunately, time is of the essence. The United Nations has set the ambitious target of halving world poverty by 2015. If that target is to be even remotely realistic, poor countries must harness their development to trade. Which means that something has to be done about agricultural subsidies. Otherwise, we can go on chewing the cud till the cows come home.

J.J.

IPU Secretary General in the Middle East

The IPU Secretary General, Anders B. Johnsson, paid official visits in the Middle East from 1 to 5 March. In Damascus, he attended the 11th Conference of the Arab Inter-Parliamentary Union, which brought together many Speakers of parliaments from the Arab world, including Mr. Nabih Berry, Speaker of the Parliament of Lebanon, who was elected President of the AIPU for the next two years. Mr. Johnsson then went to Amman where he continued discussions with the Speaker of the National Assembly of Jordan, Mr. Abdul Hadi Al-Majali, about a proposed meeting of Speakers of parliaments of the countries neighbouring Iraq to discuss a possible role for the IPU in support of the constitutional process in the country.

The IPU Secretary General also went to Jerusalem, where he was formally welcomed by Speaker Reuven Rivlin during a plenary of the Knesset. He also met with the persons who had attended last July's meeting between members of the Knesset and members of the Palestinian Legislative Council, in Geneva. All agreed on the need to pursue the dialogue between the two parties.

Mr. Johnsson visited the Palestinian Territories, where he met with Prime Minister Ahmad Qorei "Abu Ala", the former Speaker of the PLC, and with the current Speaker, Mr. Rafiq Al-Natsch. The IPU Secretary General briefed them on the dialogue between PLC and Knesset members, supported by the IPU. He also had discussions with the President of the Palestinian Authority, Mr. Yasser Arafat, the Palestinian Minister for Negotiations, Mr. Saeb Erekat, and other senior officials. The Palestinian representatives expressed their interest in technical cooperation projects and in possible IPU support for the PLC.

A more equitable information society

«Everybody must have access to a more equitable information society. That was the purpose of the Summit», said the MPs attending the Parliamentary Panel organised by the IPU as part of the World Summit on the Information Society, held in Geneva

- It is essential to make the internet available to ensure transparency within the government and in politics. People have that right. We are asking all parliaments and all governments to set up e-parliaments and e-governments so that their citizens have free access to information. The digital gap is causing a lot of problems, and not only in the developing countries. A large part of the population is denied the information which others have. How can we build an information society if they are marginalized? **Mrs. Isabelle Fila Lémina, MP, Congo Brazaville.**
- The problem is the difference between people. The wealthy have equipment and access to Internet. The poor cannot buy computers and get nothing from this information society. We have to see how we solve this problem. **Mr. Ahmad Daban al-Naana, MP, Jordan.**
- The progress we have seen in terminal devices, including cell phones, is incredible. Japan is at the top for the number of mobile phones owned by the people, and for Internet - mobile phone connexions. In terms of cooperation, Japan has offered considerable financial assistance in the form of bilateral ODA. In the Asian region, we have the Asia broadband project, and Japan is instrumental in this initiative. In the case of Africa, there is very little connexion and I think our assistance there is very limited. **Mr. Tani Hiroyuki, MP, Japan**

last December. Very well, but how can you guarantee the right to information for all countries, North and South alike? Some of the participants in the Panel, which was chaired by Mrs. Muriel Siki, a Swiss journalist, shared their thoughts with us.

- As representatives of citizens, parliaments are a key starting point for democracy. As government agencies, political parties and media go on line, that institution has a legitimacy of representation and needs to be in that space. Parliaments need to be very active and aggressive in ensuring that the institution doesn't fall behind the other sectors of democracy. More information is publicly accessible to lobbies, interest groups and citizens. The question is : how do you educate with all the materials on line ? **Mr. Steven Clift, US expert on e-democracy.**
- In order to ensure that the resolutions passed in Geneva take practical effect, parliaments must make sure that budgets include the resources to develop the Internet and the information society. We must pass laws to have the right legal framework and to monitor the activities of the government. I proposed that at the IPU Assembly in Mexico we should take stock of progress made since the Geneva Summit, and also that we should work with the organisers of the Geneva Summit to make sure that parliaments, through IPU, are associated with all assessments of information society policy carried out in each individual country and internationally. **Mr. Patrice Martin-Lalande, MP, France**



Photo O. Delamare-Deboutville

«Everybody must have access to a more equitable information society. That was the purpose of the Summit», said the MPs present in Geneva.

● I was very surprised to see that some of my colleagues are wondering if they should or should not draft legislation, because this is our most important role. The second one is to act as a watchdog in the area of technology and government neutrality; parliaments should set the example in using of the new technologies. We have to transform the parliament into a paperless institution. It will save a lot of money and in the same time, it will give the opportunity for the public to see which are the main legislative initiatives on the desk of each MP. In Romania, we have an electronic mail box for parliamentarians in which you can find all the legislation that we have to discuss and all the links to different documents related to a bill, plus all the history of the document, all amendments that were made in the past.

Mr. Varujan V. Pambuccian, MP, Romania.

● As legislators, we must encourage the investment competition in new technology and keep an overview on the way the technology is used. We should be bold enough not to intervene, we should allow societies to use and gain the benefits. But there may be some areas where we need to intervene on issues like protecting privacy, dealing with criminal use of the Internet, for instance for child pornography, not to mention financial crime, where we will need international cooperation. There are also other issues like spam, which is clearly a major problem. We need to collaborate globally together. It is going to be feasible if we have good exchanges of information between law enforcement authorities. It means that we all have to be more open in allowing the specialist investigators access to information if they are to have proof on a case. **Mr. Malcom Harbour, Member of the European Parliament.**

Zoom

Parliaments in a knowledge-based society

Senator Carlos Cantero, Republic of Chile

The emergence of a knowledge and information-based society has shaken the legitimacy, purpose and functioning of traditional institutions. Initially sidelined by global networks, these are now adopting new roles and fresh approaches to organisation and knowledge management. New paradigms call for political and socio-cultural adaptation. Whenever fault lines appear in history, alternative avenues beckon, one offering the chance to exploit opportunities, the other to waste them. If we parliamentarians can make the right choice, the coming decades will usher in a better world.

The Information and Communication Technology (ICT) revolution has coloured all facets of society, and development has become systemic, organic and multidimensional. The impact of the new technology has spread worldwide, generating disparities between regions and producing different territorial entities, some of which engineer and exploit comparative advantage in order to successfully “connect” to the world (the winners) while others remain on the sidelines of development (the losers). The citizen is left to cope with the uncertainties of the process and its consequences. The challenge for our parliaments is to remodel the lineaments of the institution so as to improve governance, reinforce equity (especially through education), and narrow the digital and health gap for the benefit of greater human welfare, as Amartya Sen’s theory of human development would have it.

In both personal and institutional relations, the concept of endogenous territorial development is taking root, defined as the capacity to engineer competitive advantage, increase output, develop human and social capital and capitalise on synergies. Leadership is increasingly seen in terms of empowerment, education and training is becoming a lifelong process, and there are increasing demands for power to be decentralised. Grassroots involvement is growing in confidence, calling for credibility, transparency and honesty, especially in politics.

Societies once centralised are now configuring themselves as networks, closed systems are being prised open, time and space are becoming virtual, and diversity and pluralism enjoy new status. In place of the simple dialogue, communication is becoming multidirectional, transmitted through interactive multimedia support systems. Hierarchies are shifting; verticality is giving way to horizontality. Development is tightly geared to social and territorial synergies; to the availability of knowledge and information; to whether policies are forward-looking and all society’s components are involved in strategic planning, pulling in the same direction, regardless of social status or political or religious creeds, thus triggering competition throughout the system and forging productive networks.

Wherever people live, connectivity and access to digital media are indispensable guarantees of equity and equality of opportunity for the citizen, who is clamouring for a new development ethos. Above and beyond digital infrastructure, it is time to change society’s culture and mentality, to create a positive organisational environment which instils life into endogenous collegiality. The parliaments and geopolitical blocs that are quick to comprehend and unravel this process, converting passive awareness into active know-how, and which can extrapolate from individual and collective experiences for the good of society, as the philosopher and pedagogue Jean Piaget taught, are the ones that will stand to gain the most from the opportunities offered by the Information and Knowledge Society and its new paradigms.



Us Congress Hears from IPU Committee on the Human Rights of parliamentarians

On February 11th 2004, an IPU delegation representing the Committee on the Human Rights of Parliamentarians was present in Washington DC for a hearing before the US Congressional Human Rights Caucus, on the theme of *“Investigating the human rights violations suffered by elected representatives around the world – the political and legal aspects, and the implications for democratic life”*.

The delegation, comprising Mr. Juan Pablo Letelier (MP, Chile), accompanied by the IPU Permanent Observer at the United Nations, and the head of the IPU human rights programme in Geneva, attended the event at the invitation of the two Co-chairs of the Congressional Human Rights Caucus, Congressman Tom Lantos (Democrat, California) and Congressman Frank Wolf (Republican, Virginia).

In his statement, Mr. Letelier informed participants about the mandate, the procedure and functioning of the IPU human rights committee, on which he had sat until recently after serving a full five-year term (including two years as President). He stressed the importance of defending parliamentarians who suffer human rights abuses and are arbitrarily removed from office as a duty of all those who believe in representative democracy: “Governments are all too often tempted to silence MPs who criticize their policies or denounce malpractices or abuses.... When democracy breaks down in a country, parliament is almost invariably among the first victims”, he said.

Mr. Letelier went on to illustrate some of the public cases that the Committee has handled, including success stories from Honduras, Chad and Cuba, (the latter involving two

Czech citizens) as well as pending cases from Colombia, Eritrea, and Myanmar. In these cases, as in many others, parliamentary diplomacy can play a crucial role as it allows for dialogue and thus promotes the settlement of sometimes complex human rights problems.

In conclusion, Mr. Letelier noted: “the IPU Committee on the Human Rights of Parliamentarians considers it a responsibility for all MPs around the world to show solidarity for their colleagues under threat and to take action in their favour. Those of us who take democracy to heart must work together to help to restore due process and remedy human rights abuses. Everyone can make a difference in the settlement of these cases. I would therefore like to invite the Human Rights Caucus of the US Congress to join us in this important endeavour”.

Mr. Letelier’s visit to Washington came after a stop in New York on 10 February, for a public conference on the same subject at the United Nations. The two events helped raise awareness of the IPU work on the human rights of parliamentarians in the international media, and Mr. Letelier was featured during a prime-time live interview for the Spanish channel of CNN.

The full transcript of Mr. Letelier’s statement in Washington can be found on the Web site of the Congressional Human Rights Caucus at <http://www.house.gov/lantos/caucus/briefs.htm>.

The Congressional Human Rights Caucus, founded in 1983 by Representative Tom Lantos, brings together over 200 members of the US Congress, dedicated to the promotion of democracy and human rights worldwide.



“When democracy breaks down in a country, parliament is almost invariably among the first victims”, said Chilean MP Juan Pablo Letelier at the US Congress.

Parliamentarians protect parliamentarians

The Committee on Human Rights and Humanitarian Aid of the German Bundestag has launched the *“Parliamentarians Protect Parliamentarians”* campaign to help threatened and persecuted politicians. Along with lawyers, journalists, trade unionists and representatives of women’s organisations, ethnic and religious minorities and indigenous peoples, politicians are among the human rights defenders who are at risk. As the experience of the Committee on the Human Rights of Parliamentarians of the IPU has shown, MPs are often slandered, threatened, removed from office, subject to arbitrary arrest, sentenced for “subversive” activities, tortured and even murdered. Exercising their freedom of speech has usually been their sole offence. The basic idea of the *“Parliamentarians Protect Parliamentarians”* campaign is that MPs who can exercise their mandate in safety should help their fellow-parliamentarians who are at risk in other countries. The German Bundestag as a whole participates in the campaign and has invited its Members to use their international contacts in favour of their colleagues and other human rights defenders who are at risk, drawing attention at home and abroad to their situation by various means of action and so ensuring respect for their human rights.

More information about the campaign can be obtained from the Secretariat of the Committee on Human Rights and Humanitarian Aid menschenrecht-sausschuss@bundestag.de or by consulting the Website of the German Parliament www.bundestag.de.

Post-conflict reconciliation: members of parliament are key players; women have a special role

On 20th and 21st February, a seminar entitled “Conflicts : Prevention, Resolution, Reconciliation”, was held in Valencia (Spain). It was organised by the UNHCR Spanish Committee and Globalitaria Peace-building Initiatives with the support of the Universal Forum of Cultures, Barcelona 2004, the Generalitat of Valencia and Bancaja Foundation, and sponsored by the Inter-Parliamentary Union.

This was the last seminar organized by the UNHCR Spanish Committee before the Final Conference which will be celebrated in the framework of the Universal Forum of Cultures (16-20 June) in Barcelona. The first session of the Valencia Seminar was open to the public and dealt with issues related to “Women in Conflict”. The other sessions were working sessions restricted to invited participants. MP delegates were presented with the conclusions and recommendations resulting from the work developed in previous seminars with civil society representatives, on the issues of prevention, resolution, and reconciliation. The aim was to assess and discuss their feasibility and the initiatives taken, or that could be taken, to further the agenda.

This seminar was the first opportunity for Members of Parliaments in post-conflict countries to gather and exchange experiences and points of view among themselves and also with experts from the Policy Commission of Women Waging Peace (Washington) and International IDEA (Stockholm). The following MPs were present : Mr. Osman Brka and Mr. Nade Radovic, Bosnia-Herzegovina; Mr. José García and Mrs. María Eugenia Mella, Chile; Mrs. María Isabel Mejía Marulanda and Mr. José Ignacio Mesa, Colombia; Mr. Silvano Hrelja and Mrs. Lucija Cikes, Croatia; Mr. José Luis Delgado Nuñez and Mrs. Luz Doris Sánchez Pinedo, Peru; Mr. Vladimir Bavlov and Mr. Bato-Jargal Jambalnimbuev, Russian Federation, Mr. Prosper Higiro and Mrs. Bernadette Kanzayre, Rwanda; Mr. Mathuzpa Lameck Mokoena and Mrs. Suzanne Christina Vos, South Africa. Mrs. Morena Herrera, an independent member of the Parliament of El



The Valencia seminar was the first opportunity for MPs in post-conflict countries to gather and exchange experiences.

Salvador, was also invited as an expert on women in conflict.

The participants underlined the importance of the seminar which gave them the possibility to learn from other experiences on post-conflict and reconciliation. They stressed that reconciliation is a process, and pointed out that women are not only victims of conflict but also key players in healing and reconstructing a traumatized society. They also insisted on the role of the media - especially as far as its action is detrimental to reconciliation processes and the prevention of conflicts - and the need for closer cooperation between Parliaments. They noted that MPs themselves are sometimes part of the conflict; and that they should give an example of good behaviour and refrain from fuelling the hostilities.

The IPU will continue to work on reconciliation issues and will be present at the Barcelona Forum in June 2004.

Strengthening parliament as a guardian of human rights: the role of parliamentary human rights bodies

The Inter Parliamentary Union held the first ever international seminar of parliamentary human rights bodies, entitled “Strengthening parliament as a guardian of human rights : the role of parliamentary human rights bodies”, at the Palais Wilson in Geneva (15-17 March 2004). During the seminar, opened by Mr. Bertrand Ramcharan, United Nations Acting High Commissioner for Human Rights, Mrs. Odile Sorgho-Moulinier, Director, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and the IPU Secretary General, Anders B. Johnsson, more than 150 MPs from 54 countries discussed how parliamentary human rights committees can contribute to strengthening and implementing human rights at the national level. Various experts also attended this event (more information in our next issue).

WOMEN IN PARLIAMENTS 2003:

Nordic and post-conflict countries in the lead

“2003 marked a promising year for women in national parliaments, with two world records broken and progressive developments occurring in several parts of the world”, says the IPU Secretary General.

The latest statistics from the IPU show that by the end of the year, for the first time, women had broken the 15% average barrier across all national parliaments. Women today comprise 15.2% of the numbers of both lower and upper Houses. Moreover, of the 181 countries with national parliaments, over 94% have at least one woman in parliament. These achievements are tempered, to some degree, by the fact that only 14 countries have so far managed to reach the 30% threshold of women in national parliaments, a figure widely considered to signify the point at which women can make a meaningful impact on the work of the parliament.

A second world record was broken in Rwanda when elections held in 2003 saw a remarkable increase, by 23.1 percentage points, of women to the National Assembly. With a score of 48.8%, the country came the closest to reaching equal numbers of men and women in any national parliament. Until these elections, Nordic countries had been set to reach that target. Among other reasons for this progress, women MPs in Rwanda benefited from a constitutional quota which reserves 24 of the 80 seats in the lower House to women. Women in the Rwandan upper House are also guaranteed 30% of the seats.

“The trend in post-conflict countries to institute mechanisms, such as quotas and reserved seats,

which ensure the presence and participation of women in the newly-created institutions has been quite effective. In fact, in addition to the regular place of Nordic countries, the last five years have seen post-conflict countries feature prominently in the top 30 of the IPU’s world ranking of women in national parliaments”, noted the President of the IPU, Senator Sergio Páez.

It is important that women are present from the very beginning of the post-conflict reconstruction process and that their participation is secured throughout. “Let’s hope that lessons learned in Rwanda and other post-conflict countries will serve in countries undergoing post-conflict transition,” Mr. Páez continued.

On the 1st of March 2004, at the unicameral level, only 7 women were Presiding Officers (6,2%) in the following countries : Dominica, Estonia, Georgia, Hungary, Latvia, Republic of Moldova and San Marino. At the bicameral level, 14 women were Presiding Officers (10,3%), 6 of whom presided over Lower Houses, (8,8%) and 8 over Upper Houses (11,8%), in the following countries : Antigua and Barbuda (House of Representative and Senate), Bahamas (Senate), Belize (House of Representatives), Chile (Chamber of Deputies), Granada (Senate), India (Council of States – Acting President), Jamaica (Senate), Lesotho (National Assembly), Netherlands (First Chamber of the States-General), South Africa (National Assembly and National Council of Provinces), Spain (Congress of Deputies) and Trinidad and Tobago (Senate).

Women presiding officers of parliaments

► Evolution over the past five years



► Situation as at 1 January 2004: 21 (8.4%)

Unicameral: 7 women Presiding Officers (6.2%)

Dominica; Estonia; Georgia; Hungary; Latvia; Republic of Moldova and San Marino.

Bicameral: 14 women Presiding Officers (10.3%)

(6 women in Lower Houses (8.8%); 8 women in Upper Houses (11.8%))
Antigua and Barbuda (House of Representatives and Senate); Bahamas (Senate); Belize (House of Representatives); Chile (Chamber of Deputies); Grenada (Senate); India (Council of States - Acting President); Jamaica (Senate); Lesotho (National Assembly); Netherlands (First Chamber of the States-General); South Africa (National Assembly and National Council of Provinces); Spain (Congress of Deputies) and Trinidad and Tobago (Senate).

Speakers' actions to promote women's participation in parliament

"Committee on gender sensitivity"

I was always a believer in the equality of all human beings. I have long been a human rights activist. As Presiding Officer, I encourage equal participation of all members, especially women parliamentarians, in order to achieve a gender balance. We have a committee on gender sensitivity, women's representation on all standing and ad hoc committees, and women's representation on all delegations to local, regional and international fora. I have also been involved personally in the IPU reform, especially on gender parity issues.

Mr. Mosé Tjitendero, Speaker of the National Assembly of Namibia

"Parity is a criterion accepted by all of the political parties"

First and foremost, regardless of the fact that I am President of the National Assembly of Mali, I am an elected MP who holds convictions about policies for the advancement of women - convictions that are widely shared in the parliamentary groups and the National Assembly Bureau. With the support of the parliamentary groups and the Presiding Officers' conference, we have secured the election of two women as 4th and 6th vice-presidents of the National Assembly. A woman is also vice-president of a general committee, and the composition of parliamentary missions both within and outside the country is always mixed. Parity is a criterion accepted by all of the political parties in the National Assembly of Mali and whenever we are required to make nominations, we always seek to include both genders as a matter of principle.

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

"Men and women should have the same opportunities for advancement"

This is the first legislature in Hungary during which four women have held ministerial portfolios within the government. A woman presides over the largest political group in parliament, one of our women vice-presidents is also a party leader and, for the first time in the history of Hungarian democracy, the President of the Assembly is a woman. The deputies play a busy role in all the work without any need for particular support. My experience leads me to believe that the tasks assumed by parliamentarians are not connected to their gender. The differences, if there are any, are not related to matters of substance but rather to the approach and to the kind of solutions proposed. We all know that men and women approach things from a different angle. Men seek purely rational solutions while women are more attuned to sensibilities. I believe men and women should have the same opportunities for advancement in employment, studies, and politics, and that the mothers of young children should be able to benefit from their rights and return to the job market.

Mrs. Katalin Szili, President of the National Assembly of Hungary

"Legislative training sessions in order to upgrade the skills of women MPs"

We have taken steps to guarantee that women parliamentarians play a part in all the activities of the parliament. They participate in the standing committees, field visits, study trips and other missions both within and outside Rwanda. We have also begun to set up legislative training sessions in order to upgrade the skills of women parliamentarians because most of them are new to parliament, just like a number of their male colleagues. We are also appealing to various partners for increased material and financial resources for the women deputies and senators, channelled in particular through the Forum des Femmes Rwandaises Parlementaires (FFRP) to help them become more attuned to the needs of the population, especially other women who see them as their forerunners and representatives.

Mr. Alfred Mukezamfura, President of the Chamber of Deputies of Rwanda

"Meetings between parliamentarians and women leaders in their fields"

Within the Chamber of Deputies, the Bureau - chaired by the President of the Chamber and composed of the representatives of all the parliamentary groups - plays the lead role in decisions affecting the life of the institution which relate to political, social and cultural events held alongside the legislative work. I am keen to build on this tradition which has manifested itself in different and interesting ways. I applauded the initiative, launched by deputies within the Bureau, to set up meetings between parliamentarians and women who are leaders in their fields, either in Italy or internationally. These meetings, such as the meeting held with journalists who were in Iraq during the fighting last year, shed light on women's views on strategic questions which have a major impact on public opinion. I have also backed initiatives designed to bring the Chamber of Deputies into contact with civil society. We instituted the annual Ilaria Alpi and Maria Grazia Cutuli award, two Italian journalists who lost their lives while reporting in Somalia and Afghanistan respectively. I would also recall the December 2003 Study Day in the Chamber of Deputies devoted to the parliamentary speeches of Nilde Iotti, the first Italian woman to preside over the Chamber and who held the post longer than anybody else.

Mr. Pier Ferdinando Casini, President of the Italian Chamber of Deputies

"Commission to investigate murders of women in Juárez"

Of a total of 128 Senators, 22 are women. Nine of the 46 Committees are chaired by women, and we have seven Committees devoted to external relations, four of which are chaired by women from different parties. In both Chambers, the Committees on equity and gender received tremendous support from the parliamentary bodies. Every year, a parliament of women meets to discuss matters strictly related to gender and this is attended by legislators and non-governmental organizations. In the year 2003, the Senate set up a special commission to commemorate the 50th anniversary of women's suffrage in Mexico and I personally pushed for the creation of this commission, which was chaired by a woman, and I played an active part in the celebrations. The international instruments for protecting women which the Executive has referred to the Senate of the Republic for ratification have benefited from rapid treatment and all were approved. We have twelve instruments for the protection of women, ranging from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights to the recent Optional Protocol of the CEDAW. I should also make special mention of the establishment of a Senate commission to investigate the murders of women in Juárez. I made sure that men and women from all political tendencies sit on the commission.

Mr. Enrique Jackson, Speaker of the Mexican Senate

"If we institute the new system, we will have more chances of having women representatives"

In Sri Lanka, there is very little participation by women in parliament. There are many proposals to have more women candidates, but the problem is that people have to elect them. At the last election, we had many women candidates, and one candidate was a minister, but she was defeated. We have a proportional representation system, and the people prefer to elect men than women. We are now proposing to appoint a select committee to set up a new electoral system. I think that if we institute the new system, we will have more chances of having women representatives.

Mr. Joseph Michael Perera, Speaker of the Parliament of Sri Lanka

"People trust us and think that we are capable of doing the job"

In Latvia, we have approximately 20% of women in parliament. We do not have a quota system because we believe strongly that people are elected on the basis of their professional capabilities. Women are quite active, not only in the family but also in politics. Our President is a woman, our Minister of Foreign Affairs is a woman, the Speaker of Parliament is a woman and the Chairperson of the Foreign Affairs Committee is a woman too. This doesn't mean that we have some kind of gender issues against men, it is purely to do with the development of society. Historically, women in Latvia have been very active. We are elected because people trust us and think that we are capable of doing the job. We can still do more, especially on issues such as violence in the family, or ensuring equal pay for women and men.

Mrs. Ingrida Udre, Chairperson of the Saeima of Latvia

"In Scandinavia, politics is, so to speak, in the lead"

We have several explanations for the high presence of women in the Nordic parliaments. One is the proportional electoral system. In Finland, there is a proportional list but the individual choice of the voters also comes into play. Another explanation is to be found in ideological debates in the country. In this area in Scandinavia, politics is, so to speak, in the lead. The business world is falling behind, and the academic world lags behind as well. We have not enough women university professors, and women are also poorly represented in the trade unions.

Mr. Björn von Sydow, Speaker of the Riksdag of Sweden

TECHNICAL COOPERATION UPTADE

The following is a rundown of the Union's recent work to strengthen parliamentary capacities worldwide

Assisting the Albanian Parliament in dealing with European Integration: On 25 February 2004, the IPU and the United Nations Development Programme organised a seminar in Tirana for Albanian Members of Parliament on European integration issues. This seminar offered participants the opportunity to gain a better insight into how other parliaments have dealt with European integration in the context of their traditional law-making, oversight and representational functions. Resource persons from Hungary and Romania shared their experiences with their Albanian counterparts. The seminar was also attended by senior officials from the Albanian government. This seminar is being followed up with visits to the Parliaments of Hungary and Belgium.

Strengthening the international relations function of the Parliament of Timor Leste. On 18 December 2003, the IPU in cooperation with UNDP organised a seminar in Dili on parliamentary diplomacy. Members of Parliament received detailed information on parliaments' involvement in international affairs. Resource persons from Australia and Brazil were in attendance. The seminar was a follow-up to a consultancy organised by the IPU in November-December 2003 to enhance the knowledge of MPs and parliamentary staff in the area of international relations and protocol. Activities planned in the near future include working with the caucus of women MPs to ensure that women MPs make a meaningful contribution to parliamentary processes.

Study Visit for Members of the Assembly of Kosovo: In December 2003, Members of Parliament as well as secretariat staff from Kosovo paid a four-day working visit to the Parliament of Belgium and the European Parliament in Brussels. The visit familiarized them with the overall functioning of these parliaments with a specific focus on parliamentary services including the library, archives, documentation and information technology. The study visit was helpful in establishing a practical knowledge base for introducing an electronic document management system in the Kosovo Assembly in 2004.

Strengthening Zambian MPs' capacity to participate in international co-operation. The IPU, alongside the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association and the SADC Parliamentary Forum, provided expert inputs and participated in a workshop for Members of Parliaments serving on international organisations, held in Lusaka on 28 and 29 February. This workshop was intended to build the capacity of Zambian members of parliament designated to represent Zambia at the Pan-African Parliament (PAP) which was subsequently inaugurated in Addis-Ababa, Ethiopia in mid March 2004. The workshop also sensitised the other members of parliament who represent Zambia in inter-parliamentary organisations, on the role, work, and future challenges of these institutions.

Updating the IPU database of experts: With the invaluable assistance of the Association of Secretaries General of Parliaments, the IPU is currently updating its roster of experts. Persons with expertise and experience in the functioning of parliaments are encouraged to send to the Technical Co-operation Programme a copy of their CV together with an Expert Data Form which they can download from the IPU website at <http://www.ipu.org/strct-e/experts.htm>.

FLASH

Inauguration of Pan African Parliament

The Pan-African Parliament was inaugurated in Addis Ababa in mid March. It is one of the organs of the African Union of which it will ultimately be the legislative arm. In the words of the Chairman of the Commission of the African Union, Alpha Oumar Konaré, members of the Parliament are called upon to craft the political road map of the continent. It comprises MPs from the African Union's 53 member states. At the inaugural session, the MPs elected Mrs Gertrude Mongella from Tanzania, as their speaker. In July, last year, speaking in Cape Town (South Africa), the IPU President, Senator Sergio Pérez, pledged IPU support for the creation of the Pan-African Parliament. "Representative institutions should drive and manage globalisation in order to make it more transparent and democratic and therefore more consonant with the interests of the vast majority of the world's population. In the African context -declared President Pérez- this means building a Pan-African Parliament that can, in time, play a legislative and oversight role vis-à-vis the African Union."

Expansion of the European Union: the challenges of the new parliaments

National parliaments provide a direct and visible link between the European Union and its citizens and are currently involved in European decision-making in various different ways. Among their many functions they participate in the national EU decision-making processes where they are responsible for parliamentary scrutiny of government policy at a European level, not to mention EU treaties which require approval by the national parliaments of each Member state before entering into force.

The European Union will expand from 15 to 25 Member states on 1 May this year. To find out how this will affect national parliaments of the 10 new members we have asked the 10 parliaments what they see as the challenges to their parliaments. In this issue, we start publishing their responses (follow up in the next issues).

"The Czech Parliament set up a new Committee for European Integration"

M. Milan Ekert, Head of the Czech IPU Group, explains that "after the ratification of the association agreement between Czech Republic and European Union and after the elections in 1998 the Czech Parliament set up a new Committee for European Integration. This committee has played the role of supervisor of the accession negotiations and the process of the adjustment of the Czech legal system to the *aquis communautaire*". After the successful referendum this whole process will lead to the biggest enlargement of the European Union in its history. "First of all it will be a big change in the way we work. The Czech Parliament, as well as the other institutions, will have to improve the decision-making process and create an effective system of communication with European institutions, including the European Parliament. The European Union is understood by our citizens as a major gateway towards peace, prosperity, co-operation and safety. It is also an opportunity to exploit knowledge and potential".

"The Estonian Parliament formed a new European Affairs Committee"

"After the 2003 elections, the *Riigikogu* (Estonian Parliament) formed new European Affairs Committee, its tasks being to draft an analysis of the impact of accession and prepare the necessary reforms for the *Riigikogu* to take part in the EU decision-making process", explained Ms. Annika Milt, Secretary of the Estonian IPU Group. It was formed under an

amendment to the Rules of Procedure Act of the *Riigikogu* and will come into force before accession (the Act was adopted on February 11). The ratification of the accession Treaty in the *Riigikogu* took place on 21 January 2004.

"The main idea behind the amendments is the need to involve both the EU Affairs Committee and the specialized standing committees in our internal co-ordination process. We studied various member States' solutions. Every State is unique; the challenge is not to copy any given system or model, but to take the parts that are useful and appropriate for us and integrate them into our domestic context.

When the European Commission presents a bill, it is delivered by the Government to the *Riigikogu*. The *Riigikogu* Bureau forwards the draft to the European Affairs Committee and to the relevant standing committee. The latter discusses the draft, evaluates its relevance to the Parliament and submits a reasoned position to the EU Affairs Committee. The EUAC gives its position to the Government, based on the opinion of the standing committee. The relevant minister appears before the EUAC before the text is discussed and decided upon in the Council", added the Secretary of the IPU Estonian Group.

"The Foreign Affairs Committee has the same co-ordinating role within the context of CFSP. The nature of mandates might be described as "politically binding". The parliament gives its opinion. A distinction should be made in the context of important policy papers such as white or green papers and the Financial Framework. In this respect one might see a parallel process in the IGC and the way it has been treated by our parliament.

At the beginning of the IGC during the Italian Presidency, our Government presented a white paper containing positions on main issues to be discussed. The *Riigikogu* discussed this document under the co-ordination of the European Affairs Committee. The Foreign Affairs Committee and Constitutional Affairs Committee discussed the paper and gave their positions, the *Riigikogu* had a plenary discussion after which the groups gave their positions. All the positions were collated by the European Affairs Committee and following a debate the package was presented to the Government. The Committee discussed the updated positions before the Brussels Summit and presented its positions to the Government.

A concise policy paper on Estonia's EU policy for 2004-2006 is being prepared and will be discussed in the Government and the Parliament in spring 2004", concluded Ms. Milt.

Parliamentary developments

AFGHANISTAN

On 26 January 2004, President Hamid Karzai signed the country's new Constitution into law. The new text stipulates that Afghanistan will be a tolerant, democratic Islamic state under a strong presidency, a two-chamber parliament and an independent judiciary. The text also declares men and women equal before the law and recognizes minority language while giving few powers to provincial authorities, as a chance to pull the country together after nearly a quarter-century of violence. The roughly 500 delegates from across the country that formed the Loya Jirga (grand assembly of elders) had met in Kabul since 14 December 2003 to debate and ratify the draft Constitution. The new Constitution will pave the way for presidential and legislative elections which, according to the 1999 Bonn Accords, should take place in 2004.

BARBADOS

The Public Accounts Committee Act 2003 was passed to provide for a larger Public Accounts Committee. This Committee, that previously was only formed by not more than seven members of the House of the Assembly, now comprises seven members of the House and six members of the Senate. The relevant Standing Orders of the House of the Assembly and the Senate were amended to accommodate the provisions of the Act.

GEORGIA

On 6 February 2004, members of Parliament approved on second and third reading the constitutional amendments that had been introduced by President Mikheil Saakashvili. Opposition deputies who had voted against the amendments during their first reading the previous day dropped their objections. The approved amendments reintroduce the post of Prime Minister, empower the Parliament to remove the government by means of two successive no-confidence votes adopted by a two-thirds majority. The president acquires the right to dissolve parliament if it fails to approve the draft budget, or in the event of a government crisis. Deputies rejected, however, a proposed amendment that would have stripped them of their immunity from prosecution.

ICELAND

On 15 December 2003, a new law relating to pensions for the President of the country, Cabinet members, members of Parliament and Supreme Court judges was adopted. Various laws pertaining to the highest officials of the three branches of government were regrouped under one comprehensive legal act.

IRAQ

On 8 March 2004, the Governing Council signed the draft Constitution, officially called the Transitional Administrative Law, which will remain in effect until a permanent constitution is drafted and ratified in 2005. The new constitution is a key aspect of the United States' plans to turn over power on 30 June 2004. The document, that was drafted following two days of talks by members of the Governing Council, recognises Islam as one source of legislation rather than the only source but has put off details on some aspects of Kurdish autonomy. It includes a comprehensive bill of rights, providing protection for free speech, religious expression, assembly and due process. The Constitution stipulates that Iraq will have a President with two Deputies, a Prime Minister and a Cabinet. Elections for a Transitional National Assembly, which will be charged with drafting and voting on a permanent constitution for Iraq, will be held by the end of 2004, if possible. If not, the elections would be held in 2005. Rules for those elections will be written by the interim Iraqi government that takes power on 1st July. The Constitution also set aside 25% of the seats in the provisional legislature for women.

Kurdish and Arabic are enshrined as Iraq's dual official languages. But the charter allows for education in all of Iraq's other minority tongues.

Kurds are allowed to veto a permanent Constitution with a two-thirds vote - a right that had caused the Shiite walkout and cancellation of a signing ceremony scheduled for 5 March. Kurds can also prevent certain laws meant for all of Iraq from being enforced in their zone. Members of the Governing Council, however, were unable to agree on the terms and size of the Kurdish self-rule region in the north. Kurdish leaders had demanded the right to keep their peshmerga militia as a distinct armed force and to control oil and other resources in their region. They also sought to add districts to the autonomous area.

ISRAEL

On 28 July 2003, an amendment was introduced to "Basic Law: the President of the State". This amendment added a fourth situation in which the President of the State may temporarily hand over his duties to the Speaker of the Knesset. This is if he asks to be temporarily relieved of his duties, because he cannot fulfil them.

The Parties Financing Law was also amended. As of the second half of 2003, money the parties collect from candidates registering for internal primaries is no longer considered financial contributions to the party.

On the occasion of the Knesset's 55th anniversary, celebrated on 10 February 2004, the Knesset was presented with basic principles of a new code of ethics for its members. On the same occasion it passed, in first reading, a new version of the declaration of allegiance by Members in the "Basic Law: the Knesset", that will include their undertaking to act in accordance with the rules of ethics of the Knesset. The Amendment will be passed in second and third reading after the code of ethics is completed.

JAPAN

On 26 October 2003, a partial amendment to the Public Offices Election Law came into effect to permit political parties to announce party manifestos. It was decided that as a part of election campaign activities for general elections, political parties and groups would be allowed to distribute printed materials, such as pamphlets, leaflets and books, containing policy statements related to national politics and basic plans for bringing them about, provided the materials had been submitted beforehand to the Minister for Public Management, Home Affairs, Posts and Telecommunications.

On 1 November 2003, a partial amendment to the law concerning the salaries of secretaries of Diet Members came into force. It brings those salaries into line with those of secretaries in Public Administration, who are classified as public servants in special service.

KYRGYZSTAN

On 13 January 2004, Parliament approved the amendments to the Election Code to bring it in line with constitutional changes adopted in February 2003 and also in accord with international standards. In the new Election Code, the voting procedure has been totally changed. It gives independent observers every right to access any document needed for scrutiny. Local election committees have also been changed. From now on, one third of the committee will consist of party members and activists from civil society. The other two thirds of the committee will consist of municipal employees and representatives of the administration. No state employees will be allowed in it. The delivery and ballot count will be more transparent, as the counting of ballots will be done in the room where the voting took place, to exclude any possibility of falsifying results. Finally, it also establishes that parliamentary campaigns may begin only 25 days prior to an election, presidential campaigns 35 days prior to the election date, and local-election campaigns 20 days before the election.

LUXEMBOURG

Between 19 December 2003 and 10 February 2004 three laws amending the Constitution were adopted. These laws amended, *inter alia*, article 114 which covers the

procedure for amending the Constitution, and article 24 in which the sentence concerning the security deposits by writers, publishers or printers was deleted because it was obsolete, as was the sentence concerning stamp duty for newspapers and periodicals. In the same article, a provision was also deleted which stated that the publisher, printer or distributor may not be prosecuted if the author is known, a national of Luxembourg and resident in the country. The most recent law amended articles 63 and 65 of the Constitution, in the first case to allow for the voting of laws by proxy, although nobody may receive more than one proxy, and in the second case to stipulate that no vote will be taken on one or several articles except at the request of at least 5 Deputies.

On 10 February 2004 a law was adopted to cover participation in the European elections of 13 June 2004 by nationals of those States due to become Members of the European Union on 1 May 2004.

On 22 August 2003 a law was adopted to institute the mediator, i.e. an impartial intermediary between the Government and the citizen. The mediator is attached to the Chamber of Deputies and does not receive instructions from any authority in the exercise of his/her functions.

NEW ZEALAND

On 16 December 2003 the House of Representatives adopted amendments to its Standing Orders that came into force on 10 February 2004. A number of the changes incorporated in the Standing Orders make permanent rules that had been adopted as sessional orders. These included provisions relating to the electronic lodgement and publication of questions for written answer and arrangements for the availability of printed copies of bills.

The remuneration for Members of Parliament was adjusted by the Parliamentary Salaries and Allowance Determination 2003, that came into force on 1 November 2003 and will expire on 30 June 2004.

PHILIPPINES

In August 2003 a law was passed allowing natural-born citizens of the Philippines who have lost their Philippine citizenship by reason of their naturalisation as citizens of another country to re-acquire Philippine citizenship. The new law restores to those citizens full civil and political rights, which include the right of suffrage and to run for elective office, subject to the requirements and qualifications of the Constitution and existing laws, and provided that upon filing of a certificate of candidacy, a sworn statement of renunciation of all foreign citizenship is made before an authorised public officer. The right of suffrage or the privilege to be appointed to public office do not apply to candidates occupying public office in the country where they are

naturalised citizens or those in the active service in the armed forces of the country where they are naturalised citizens.

On 13 January 2004, the Commission on Elections (COMELEC) issued three Resolutions to implement three Republic Acts that had been adopted in December 2003 to increase the number of legislative districts from 209 to 212.

ROMANIA

On 18 September 2003, the Law for the revision of the Constitution of Romania was adopted by the two Chambers of the Parliament, in separate sittings. This Law was subsequently approved by national referendum on 18 and 19 October 2003. The new Constitution entered into force on 29 October 2003. According to the main amendments, the Constitution, among others,

- establishes the appropriate Constitutional framework and the juridical grounds for Romania's Euro-Atlantic integration: harmonizes its provisions with the main regulations of the European Union and stipulates the right of Romanian citizens to elect and to be elected in the European Parliament after Romania's accession to the European Union;
- consecrates the unity of the Romanian people and the solidarity of the Romanian citizens as bases of the State;
- guarantees equal access of men and women to public positions and dignities;
- stipulates the right of the parties to a fair trial and a solution of their cases within a reasonable term;
- institutes the liability of the State for prejudices caused as a result of judicial errors, and stipulates the liability of the magistrates having exercised their mandate in ill will or grave negligence;
- increases the role and the importance of the Superior Council of Magistracy as the guarantor of the independence of justice, and includes representatives of the civil society in its composition;
- stipulates that the State shall grant social scholarships to children and young people coming from disadvantaged families and to those institutionalized;
- acknowledges the right of any person to live in a healthy, well preserved and balanced environment;
- stipulates the guarantee and the protection of private property, irrespective of its owner; nationalization and any other measures of forcible transfer of assets to public property based on the owners' social, ethnic, religious, political or other discriminatory features, are forbidden;
- enhances the role of the Advocate of the People (Ombudsman), whose term of office shall be of 5 years instead of 4;
- sets up a clearer division of the legislative competences of the Chambers of Parliament in order

to speed up legislative activity and eliminate the stages of mediation and divergence (each bill and legislative proposal shall be debated and adopted by both Chambers, but the Chamber having competence to make a final decision shall be the second one notified. The decision-making competence of the Chamber of Deputies covers mainly the ordinary laws, while that of the Senate covers the ratification of international treaties or other agreements. The organic laws are shared equally between the two Chambers, in accordance with their importance and number);

- lowers the number of citizens that can promote a legislative initiative from 250,000 to 100,000;
- restricts parliamentary immunity to the votes cast or political opinions expressed in the exercise of office; lowers the age limit of candidates for the Senate to 33 years from 35;
- extends the term of office for the President of Romania from 4 to 5 years and stipulates the right of the President to request the Constitutional Court to resolve legal disputes of a constitutional nature between public authorities;
- stipulates that, in cases of unconstitutionality of laws, before their promulgation the Parliament is bound to reconsider the provisions found to be unconstitutional by the Constitutional Court and to bring them into line with the Court's decision and restricts the possibility for the Government to adopt emergency ordinances to exceptional cases, the regulation of which cannot be postponed.

SWITZERLAND

On 1 August 2003 a constitutional amendment came into force to increase the citizen's political rights. This amendment, which had been accepted by the people in a popular vote on 3 February 2003, establishes that 100.000 citizens may deposit a bill drafted in general terms and calling for a constitutional or legislative amendment. The people shall then take a decision in a popular vote. Moreover, the scope of the referendum in the area of international law has been enlarged, so that all treaties containing important provisions which establish legal rules or which entail mandatory federal legislation must be put to an optional referendum. On 1 December 2003 a completely revised law on the Parliament came into force. The principle substantive changes endow Parliament with more power to influence the Government. Parliamentary Committees are guaranteed a right of access to information held by the Government and the Committees themselves must determine what information they need. In addition, the Parliament ensures that measures taken by the State are assessed for their effectiveness. Furthermore, the Parliament is involved in major planning of State activities and in the definition of its external policy.

Areas at The House of Parliaments named after the two Nobel laureates who jointly founded the IPU

The French pacifist MP Frédéric Passy, one of the two co-founders of the Inter-Parliamentary Union, who was awarded the first Nobel Peace Prize in 1901, along with the founder of the International Red Cross, Henry Dunant of Switzerland, now has a building in Geneva named in his honour. On 17th March, the IPU inaugurated the Frédéric Passy Archive Centre, in the presence of the Executive President of the French IPU Group, Senator Robert Del Picchia, and the Ambassador of France to the international organisations in Geneva, Mr. Bernard Kessedjian. The Frédéric Passy Archive Centre, an annex of *The House of Parliaments*, was restored with the support of the French Parliament.

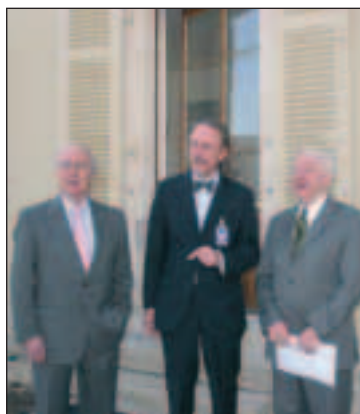


Photo IPU/B



Photo IPU/B

The second founding father of the IPU, British MP William Randal Cremer, has a hall named after him in the IPU's new Headquarters. The William Randal Cremer Hall was formally inaugurated in the presence of Mr. John Austin, M.P., Chairman of the British IPU Group, the IPU Secretary General, representatives of the diplomatic corps in Geneva, and the Members of Parliament present at the inauguration of *The House of Parliaments* on 3rd October 2003. William Randal Cremer was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1903. The British IPU Group provided financial support to the renovation of *The House of Parliaments*.

... READ IN THE PRESS ...

Women in the spotlight for one day

PARIS (AP) - A good many countries celebrated International Women's Day on Monday by holding special events but much remains to be done for the rights, the health and the education of half of the human race. Women's rights and democracy are one and the same thing, said Shirin Ebadi before the United Nations in Geneva. The first Nobel Prize winner from a Muslim country, the lawyer and human rights activist was dressed in black as a sign of "mourning for women's rights in Iran", she explained. Beside her, the Chief Prosecutor of the United Nations International Criminal Tribunal (ICT), Carla Del Ponte, emphasized that "in most democratic societies, in a single generation, women have had an opportunity to fulfil their professional aspirations, but the same has not happened in the rest of the world". A study by the Inter-Parliamentary Union, representing 142 parliaments, shows that the proportion of women in parliaments has reached a record level of 15.3%, with a high of 49% for Rwanda compared to 15.1% on average for Africa, and a very honourable 45% for Sweden, as opposed to 6% on average for the Arab countries.

Yahoo Actualités France – 8 March 2004

Rwanda heads the list for women in legislative chambers

With a proportion of 48.8% and 39 of its 80 seats held by women, the Parliament of Rwanda has the highest proportion of women members in the world. The changes following the 2003 elections means that this war-torn central African country has dislodged the traditional winner: Sweden, with 45.3%. The reason for the number of women in the lower Chamber of Rwanda is to a large extent the system of quotas; but not entirely. In the new Constitution, a mechanism was introduced to reserve 30% of the seats for women. "People put their trust in women above and beyond the quota, as they are aware that they have a significant role to play", said Kareen Jabre Officer-in-Charge of the Inter-Parliamentary Union's Programme for the Promotion of Partnership between Men and Women. The IPU membership counts 138 parliaments; the organisation was responsible for preparing the statistics. In addition to Rwanda, Jabre draw attention to similar experiences in Muslim countries such as Morocco, where women account for 10% of the parliament thanks to the quota or Jordan where 6 Deputies (5.5%) were elected "where previously there had been only one in its parliamentary history".

El País (Spain) – 29 February 2004

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