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Abandoning female genital mutilation

"We are in no way abandoning African culture when we abandon female genital mutilation." Those were the words of Mélégué Traoré, a traditional chief and the former President of Burkina Faso's National Assembly, speaking to reporters during an event on female genital mutilation (FGM) held in Dakar.

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Parliamentarians discuss United Nations reform at annual parliamentary Hearing in New-York

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Why address the scars of the past? Many African countries coming out of conflict face poverty and other daunting challenges that require immediate and effective action. A serious consideration of the past may therefore not be a high priority. What is more, some may even consider that by recalling the past, they will reopen old wounds that would have otherwise faded away with time.



"As users, parliaments have an intimate understanding of the potential of information and communication technology (ICT) to enrich and renew democracy. As legislators, parliaments must play a proactive role in defining the shape of information societies" declared the IPU President, Pier Ferdinando Casini - who is also the Speaker of the Italian Chamber of Deputies - at the World Summit on the Information Society, held in Tunis, in November 2005.







Boat sailing every day during the WTO Conference.

In Hong Kong, members of parliaments urge ministers to achieve fair results in multilateral trade

On 16 December 2005, representatives of the IPU and the European Parliament attending the Sixth WTO Ministerial Conference in Hong Kong transmitted to the WTO Director-General, Mr. Pascal Lamy, the text of the declaration adopted at the end of the parliamentary session on the WTO, which had been held on 12 and 15 December in conjunction with the WTO Conference. The Declaration expressed concern at the lack of progress in WTO negotiations dealing with all key sectors, especially the major development issues, and urged trade ministers to bear in mind that the very lives and livelihoods of literally hundreds of millions of persons depended on the achievement of balanced, fair and equitable results in multilateral negotiations. *(Follow up on page 2)*



From left to right : Mr. Ezio Perillo, European Parliament's External Policies Director, Mr. Enrique Baron Crespo, Chair of the European Parliament's delegation, Mr. Pascal Lamy, Director-General of the WTO, Mr. Pier Ferdinando Casini, IPU President, Mrs. Wuyun Qimugem, Vice-Chairperson of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress of China, and Mr. Anders B. Johnsson, IPU Secretary General.

he parliamentary session in Hong Kong was coorganized by the IPU and the European Parliament, and attended by nearly 450 delegates, including some 300 parliamentarians from 72 countries. Many of them came to Hong Kong as part of their country's official delegations to the Ministerial Conference, and were directly involved in the negotiation process.

"The keywords for our debate are agriculture, non-agricultural market access, services, rules and institutional capacity building, among others", said IPU President Pier Ferdinando Casini at the opening of the parliamentary session. For his part, the WTO Director General, Pascal Lamy, who also took part in the session, welcomed the intention of legislators "to remind negotiators of the imperative of reaching a successful outcome".

Despite these expectations, the WTO Ministerial Conference in Hong Kong ended with an inconclusive result. Much remains to be done in order to conclude the Doha Round by the end of 2006. Parliamentary oversight of WTO talks will be an important factor in this process.

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WTO: Lamy to Casini, thank you for reminding parliamentarians "I would like to thank Mr. Casini for his call for the parliamentary session to remind negotiators of the imperative of reaching a successful outcome in this Conference". In his opening remarks at the parliamentary session which took place in parallel with the beginning of the WTO gathering, the WTO Director-General, Pascal Lamy, thanked IPU President Pier Ferdinando Casini, who presided over the parliamentary session. "I am touched by the continuous interest of the parliamentarians in the WTO's work. Your presence here ensures that the WTO as institution is working as democratically and transparently as possible".

ASCA and Yahoo Italia - 12 December 2005

Speaker of Swiss parliament visits exhibit on the IPU

n 19 October 2005, the Speaker of the Swiss National Council, Mrs. Thérèse Meyer, visited the exhibit on the IPU organized by La Mémoire du Grand-Saconnex, the local historical society in the town where the IPU Headquarters is located. The exhibit at the Ferme Sarasin in Grand-Saconnex (Geneva), which depicted the history and work of the oldest international political organization and presented its new Headquarters, the House of Parliaments, was also seen by the members of the IPU Executive Committee, as well as by some of the elected representatives of the 143 IPU Member Parliaments attending the 113th IPU Assembly in Geneva, and was subsequently open to the general public.



Female genital mutilation: zero tolerance

They are three pretty, young students, and they are clearly paying a great deal of attention to what the politicians, doctors and social workers are saying tonight at the Geneva Cantonal Hospital. With them is a young man, obviously quite moved. The questions put by these young Somali women after the presentations are revealing enough. One tells us "You know, we have all been through it". "It" being the unspeakable pain and ignominious scars of excision.

Even now, some 3 million children and teens are subjected every year to excision and other forms of female genital mutilation (FGM) such as infibulation, which mark their victims for the rest of their lives. These practices, which are violations of human rights, have devastating consequences both physically and psychologically; they can even result in death.

For what or for whom have between 100 and 140 million women and girls in the world, mainly in Africa, had the most private part of their bodies "cut or sewn"? Certainly not for religion. Many Muslim dignitaries have pointed out that the Koran makes absolutely no mention of FGM.

Then why is it that according to statistics from UNICEF, a little girl is subjected to excision on average every 15 seconds? According to the participants in an African parliamentary conference on this subject held in Dakar in December with the cooperation of the IPU, the African Parliamentary Union, the National Assembly of Senegal and UNICEF, it is because FGM has been perpetrated for generations in a social setting where family choices are dependent on decisions made by others. It is also because some parents, out of concern for their honour and their African culture and no doubt out of love for their daughters, believe that if their daughters are not excised they will not marry.

This is not the opinion of Mr. Mélégué Traoré, a member of parliament and the former President of the National Assembly of Burkina Faso. This highly respected traditional chief, who has himself refused to subject his daughters to FGM, explained that "We are in no way abandoning African culture when we abandon female genital mutilation".

To try to end the ordeal faced by African women from their earliest childhood and when they bring children into the world, an awareness campaign is being conducted in a number of African countries. Men, women, parliamentarians, traditional chiefs and religious leaders have mobilized to encourage the abandonment of these terrible practices, which are punishable by law in some countries. To help ensure that the awareness is universal, 6 February has been declared the International Day of Zero Tolerance of Female Genital Mutilation.

As Waris Dirie, a Somali fashion model and goodwill ambassador of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), wrote in *Desert Flower: The Extraordinary Journey of a Desert* Nomad, an extremely moving book she co-authored with Cathleen Miller, "I pray that one day not a single woman will have to undergo this torture; that this practice will become a thing of the past; that people will say, 'Have you heard that female genital mutilation has been banned in Somalia?', and then in another country, and another, until the world becomes a safer place for all women. It will be a wonderful day. That is my objective. Inshallah, if God wills it, that day will come".

LB

Recent IPU publications SECOND WORLD CONFERENCE OF SPEAKERS OF PARLIAMENTS (2005)

The Second World Conference of Speakers of Parliaments took place in New York at United Nations Headquarters in September 2005. Over 140 leaders of parliaments gathered there for three days of debate. Their purpose was to see how parliaments could help to bridge the democracy gap in international relations. This richly illustrated publication offers insights into the events as they played out over the course of the Conference. It looks at the issues underpinning the different items on the Speakers' agenda and describes the panel discussions and other events held alongside the Conference. It also contains a wealth of brief excepts from the statements made by the Speakers and the text of the Declaration adopted at the end of the Conference. This publication, available in English and French, can be ordered from the IPU Secretariat.



WHAT CAN PARLIAMENTS DO TO HELP ABANDON FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION?

R ecognizing that Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) is an act of violence against women and a violation of human rights, parliamentarians from more than 20 African countries gathered in Dakar on 4 and 5 December 2005 for a conference on FGM. They committed themselves to ensure the abandonment of this practice within one generation.

At the invitation of the National Assembly of Senegal and

in cooperation with the African Parliamentary Union (APU), the IPU and UNICEF, the legislators highlighted the need for coordinated action by all of society - government, traditional leaders, religious leaders, civil society actors and parliamentarians - and the importance of placing such an endeavour within a more general framework of poverty eradication and development strategies. At the close of the conference, the participants unanimously adopted a declaration listing the different types of coordinated action needed.

The Rapporteur of the Dakar Conference was the former Minister for the Condition of Women of Senegal and current member of the Senegalese National Assembly, Mrs. Aminata Mbengue Ndiaye. After the meeting she went to the village of Ker Simbara to meet the men, women and religious and traditional representatives of this pioneering community which has decided to abandon the practice of excision.

INTERVIEW _____

Q.: Why did you want to show us this village?

Mrs. Aminata Mbengue Ndiaye: Because I am proud of these women and the people of Ker Simbala. The entire process of abandoning excision started here. I paid tribute to Imam Demedaora, who was the first to go out among the neighbouring villages to speak with the people. From the outset it was clear to everyone that this was a problem of communication and dialogue. To change traditions, you have to speak to the people, to let them know their rights and to teach them about democracy and human rights. That was at the basis of the transformation and the change in mentality. The women understood that they had rights, and this was particularly important in relation to their children.

Q.: In concrete terms, what happened?

AMN: The rights to health and education were emphasized first. Building on a literacy programme, the village's men and women gained awareness, which allowed them to take a stand; that in turn really built up the political will. Right from the outset, Senegal ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. But it was necessary for the local environment to be conducive as well for laws to be adopted, in particular in relation to traditional practices. That was what forged the political will that permitted the adoption of a law in 1999.

Q.: Is adopting laws enough?

AMN: The law alone is not enough. It must go hand in hand with education and awareness. In many communities, women's associations are active in making it understood to

everyone that these are harmful traditional practices and in making known the repercussions for the girl child, her health and development. We now know that there are serious repercussions, which can even kill. Previously, this was all quite hush-hush; the issue was not discussed. But now people are aware that there is a law, which

Photo Mbacke Diop Sassour

can include repressive measures if it is not respected. We must also make the police aware of the problem and train them, as the police can educate the people. We will also try to set up joint programmes along the border. Meetings on population questions are held by parliamentarians' groups along the borders with Guinea-Bissau, Gambia and Mali or Mauritania, with those countries that have not yet adopted laws, to ensure some consultation on this question.

Q.: You listened to the villagers. What else did they tell you?

AMN: In this village, which has abandoned excision, the people told me about their needs, including the basic problem of water. As parliamentarians, we can act as their spokespersons with the Government so that their needs in this area can be addressed.

For more information on the regional parliamentary conference entitled *Violence against women, abandoning female genital mutilation: The role of national parliaments*, organized by the African Parliamentary Union in cooperation with the IPU and UNICEF, visit: http://www.ipu.org/splz-e/dakar05.htm.





...READ IN THE PRESS.

Rejecting FGM not an affront to tradition

West African religious and traditional leaders meeting with political officials this week affirmed their commitment to eradicating female genital mutilation, saying that to abandon the practice is not to reject traditional or religious values. "We are in no way abandoning African culture when we abandon female genital mutilation," Mélégué Traoré, a traditional chief and former President of Burkina Faso's National Assembly, told reporters on Sunday, the opening day of a conference gathering politicians, health and human rights NGOs, religious experts and traditional leaders in the Senegalese capital. The World Health Organization says that 3 million girls per year undergo some form of genital cutting, mainly in 28 countries of Africa and the Middle East. "The most prevalent justification for the practice is that tradition requires it, but it is not required by tradition," Traore said.

The conference was organized by the Senegalese National Assembly and the African Parliamentary Union in cooperation with the Inter-Parliamentary Union and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). Parliamentarians from across Africa discussed ways to help end FGM, which is widely practised across Africa, despite national and international laws deeming it a violation of human rights and a threat to women's health. **IRIN and Reuters - 7 December** 2005

PARLIAMENTARIANS CONTRIBUTE TO WORLD SUMMIT ON THE INFORMATION SOCIETY

Access to information was at the heart of debates at the parliamentary meeting on the occasion of the second phase of the World Summit on the Information Society, held in Tunis.

The second phase of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) brought together more than 18,000 participants from governments, civil society, the private sector and international organizations. They inter alia sought acceptable solutions to complex problems such as how to govern the Internet and establish mechanisms to ensure that the benefits of information and communication technology (ICT) are spread equitably across the globe. In parallel, parliamentarians from 29 countries attended the parliamentary meeting on the WSIS organized by the IPU and the Tunisian Chamber of Deputies, in cooperation with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). The meeting focused on one of the core elements of the information society: access to information.

More than 60 countries have adopted laws on freedom of information

Information is a limitless resource that can be developed by people anywhere in the world, using no more than their personal creativity. However, to create new information and knowledge requires access to the store of information that already exists. Many of the structural and technological barriers to access to information are being challenged by the WSIS process. Panellists at the parliamentary meeting spoke of their experience in developing Freedom of Information Acts and set out the principles underlying such legislation. More than 60 countries have now adopted laws on freedom of information. Such laws are a formidable tool for increasing government transparency and accountability.

Participants also underlined the potential of the Internet to enrich and renew democracy. A whole generation sees the Internet as its natural means of receiving information and communicating with others. It was considered that parliaments need to continue their efforts to harness the potential of the Internet as an interactive channel of communication between citizens and their elected representatives. The Global Centre for ICT in Parliament, launched at the WSIS as a joint initiative of the United Nations Department for Economic and Social Affairs and the IPU, is designed to offer a timely boost to parliaments' capacity to make effective use of ICT.

Time and again, parliamentarians returned to the issue of the digital divide between those countries that have access to technologies for information and communication and those that have limited or no such access. As information and knowledge are increasingly recognized as one of the motors of development and democracy, urgent action is needed to close this gap. The general feeling at the end of the meeting was that parliaments needed to be actively involved in the follow-up to the WSIS. Parliamentarians have a major role to play, both as legislators, and by holding their executives to account on the commitments made at the World Summit.

The full report and programme of the Parliamentary Panel on the occasion of the World Summit on the Information Society are available online at http://www.ipu.org/splz-e/wsis05.htm

PARLIAMENTARIANS ADDRESS THE QUESTION OF EFFECTIVE UNITED NATIONS REFORM AT THE ANNUAL PARLIAMENTARY HEARING IN NEW YORK

The global response to terrorism, humanitarian crises, and post-conflict situations were the subjects of a discussion that brought parliamentarians together with United Nations officials, governmental representatives and other experts against the backdrop of efforts to reform the world body.

"What goes up must come down", as the saying goes, and so it is for recent plans to reform the United Nations, and related initiatives on terrorism, humanitarian intervention, and peacebuilding: first adopted by some 190 heads of State at the United Nations in early September, those plans will hardly become effective until they are taken up again at the legislative level in the national parliaments of the world. That was one of the messages of this year's Parliamentary Hearing at the United Nations, entitled *Our shared responsibility for a stronger United Nations to meet the challenges of the twenty-first century*, which took place on 31 October and 1 November in New York.

Opened by the President of the General Assembly, Mr. Jan Eliasson (Sweden), and the newly elected IPU President, Mr. Pier Ferdinando Casini (Speaker of the Italian Chamber of Deputies), the meeting provided an opportunity for the United Nations to hear the views of parliamentarians on the real prospects of recent reforms and initiatives to be implemented at the national level. As Mr. Eliasson said, "parliamentarians can bring a higher degree of realism to the work of the United Nations; it is important for representatives of the people to come to the United Nations for the United Nations to nurture its links with the people".

The IPU President expressed a similar view in his opening remarks, saying that "while we perform our constitutional role at home to represent the will of the people, this includes a clear responsibility in relation to the multitude of international negotiations that take place in multilateral forums. We want to make sure that we are well informed of these negotiations, that we have an opportunity to debate what is being negotiated, that we can question ministers and that



From left to right:

Mr. Gennady Gatilov, Principal Officer, Strategic Planning Unit, Executive Office of the United Nations Secretary-General, United States Congressman Jim Leach, Mr. Jan Eliasson, President of the United Nations General Assembly, Mr. Pier Ferdinando Casini, IPU President and Mr. Anders B. Johnsson, IPU Secretary General.

we can call into question the negotiating position they are advancing on behalf of our people."

Notable panelists at this year's Parliamentary Hearing were: Congressman Jim Leach of the United States House of Representative's International Relations Committee; Senator Mohammedmian Soomro, Chairman of the Senate of Pakistan; Senator (Lieutenant General) Romeo Dallaire of Canada; the Honourable David Musila, Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly of Kenya; and the Honourable Finn Martin Vallersnes of Norway, President of the IPU Committee on Middle East Questions.

The full **report** and the **programme** of the Parliamentary Hearing are available online at http://www.ipu.org/Splz-e/unga05.htm.

Of the four broad topics on the agenda of this year's Parliamentary Hearing, the one on terrorism generated the most heated exchanges and raised several critical questions: how does one distinguish acts of terrorism from liberation struggles? Should anti-terrorism legislation impede upon basic civil liberties?

On the other hand, the parliamentarians found common ground on other aspects of the matter, calling all acts of terrorism (in the broad sense of any form of violence targeting innocent civilians) criminal acts that should be punished by law in all jurisdictions; pledging to ensure the early ratification and effective implementation of the relevant international instruments against terrorism; calling for the root causes of terrorism (poverty, discrimination, occupation) to be seriously addressed; and supporting further efforts at international coordination against terrorism.

AFRICAN PARLIAMENTARIANS TURN TO THE PAST TO ENSURE A BRIGHTER FUTURE

Why address the scars of the past? Many African countries coming out of conflict face poverty and other daunting challenges that require immediate and effective action. A serious consideration of the past may therefore not be a high priority. What is more, some may even consider that by recalling the past, they will reopen old wounds that would have otherwise faded away with time.

Experience has shown, however, that addressing the scars of the past is the best way to guarantee that the crimes of the past do not happen again. The most successful reconciliation efforts have been those where governments have, at some risk and against the odds, made a genuine attempt to confront past abuses.

These thoughts were in the back of the minds of African parliamentarians who participated in the *Regional* seminar on the role of parliaments in national reconciliation in Africa, held in Bujumbura from 7 to 9 November 2005.

The painful history of the seminar's host country, Burundi, epitomizes the hardship that comes with conflict. Today, the country is at a crossroads. Presidential and legislative elections in 2005 have

radically changed its political landscape. Significant strides have been made in securing peace, though fighting still continues in some parts of the country. The new authorities have expressed their commitment to uncovering the truth of the past. Discussions are under way to define the parameters of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC).

The difficult decisions that Burundians now face served as a starting point for much of the debate on the use of transitional justice mechanisms for reconciliation, which, in addition to truth commissions, may also include trials, reparation programmes for victims and institutional reform. Members of parliament everywhere in Africa are ideally placed to initiate a national debate to identify the right mix of these mechanisms that would serve the reconciliation process in their own countries.

While according to the participants in this event TRCs can indeed make an essential contribution to reconciliation, their success is not guaranteed. There are many pitfalls and questions to be answered, the first of which concerns the timing for the creation of such a commission. Will its establishment unify, or divide? Are the former rulers capable of frustrating the entire exercise, including by putting those who choose to tell the truth at risk? Will the new authorities use the commission to take revenge? What kind of truth is being sought? Which period of abuse should the commission look into? How

> can the authorities make sure that the TRC's creation and work is a nationwide endeavour, and is supported by all?

> > When providing reparation to victims, there is the challenge of determining appropriate compensation. In the event of massive violations,

> > > how does the State provide redress, and how does it obtain the required resources?

In discussing the option of prosecuting perpetrators of abuses, the magnitude of the violations makes it sometimes impossible for ordinary the justice system to respond. The use of gacaca courts in Rwanda aims to provide an answer to this challenge and has the advantage of involving society in the administration of justice at the grass-

roots level. The pursuit of justice also raises another important question. Where should it take place? In principle, a justice system which is close to those whom it is meant to serve is preferable. However, often the national justice system is very weak and cannot live up to its responsibility to dispense justice. The International Criminal Court or a hybrid nationalinternational tribunal could then offer an alternative.

The summary and recommendations of the seminar may be found on line at www.ipu.org/Splz-e/bur05.htm.

Building capacity for the sustainable management of water resources: regional seminar for Arab parliaments

B uilding on a partnership now well into its second year, the IPU and the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR) in cooperation with the Arab Inter-Parliamentary Union and at the invitation of the National Assembly of Lebanon, kicked off the first of a series of regional seminars on sustainable development issues on 29 and 30 November 2005 in Beirut.

The focus of the seminar reflected the important stakes involved in water issues in the



Members of parliament from the Arab region who participated in the seminar.

Arab region. Indeed, water has been identified as one of the greatest potential sources of future conflicts.

The Beirut seminar provided legislators and parliamentary staff from 13 parliaments in the Arab region with the opportunity to discuss and exchange experiences on the vital role parliament can play in improving the management of water resources, with a view to ensuring their sustainability, including through the development of sound national legislation. Participants learned of innovative experiences in the management of scarce water resources in the region. Furthermore, in addition to spreading understanding of parliaments' oversight role over government water management activities, the seminar served as a forum to promote awareness among parliamentarians of the need to ensure better representation of citizens in respect of water issues at the global level.

Recent IPU publications HUMAN RIGHTS: A HANDBOOK FOR PARLIAMENTARIANS (2005)

Published jointly by the IPU and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), this handbook is intended for parliamentarians who want to familiarize themselves with the framework that has been set up since 1945 by the United Nations and regional organizations to protect and promote human rights. It presents the notion of human rights and the core contents of the rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It specifies the obligations of States to protect and promote human rights, and contains suggestions as to action that parliaments and their members may take to contribute to their realization.

This publication can be obtained free of charge in English and French from the IPU Secretariat. The PDF versions can also be downloaded from the IPU website.



TECHNICAL CO-OPERATION UPDATE¹



New Parliament building in Bata

Equatorial Guinea: Sensitization and capacity-building

This project seeks to contribute to the modernization of the functioning of the House of Representatives of the People of Equatorial Guinea. A seminar for legislators was organized in September 2005 on the budgetary function of parliament. The seminar aimed at acquainting the participants with the detailed mechanisms of the budget process and building their capacity to ensure effective parliamentary oversight of the national budget. A training programme is due to start in early 2006 for eight persons on the recording and production of parliamentary proceedings. The objective is to ensure that parliamentary proceedings are properly documented in an official record that can be disseminated in order to contribute to the transparency and democratization of the legislative process.

Nigeria:

Bringing parliament closer to the people

This project, which aims to build the capacity of the Nigerian National Assembly and six of the country's state assemblies and to ensure that legislative decisions are informed by inputs from society, continued in earnest during the last quarter of 2005, prior to its closure on 31 December 2005. A host of workshops were organized, including an orientation seminar in Bauchi, Gombe in June 2005; a workshop on the budgetary process in Jos, Plateau in July 2005; a national conference on human rights in Oshogbo, Osun in August 2005; a seminar on civil society involvement in the budget process in Abia in October 2005; a workshop on women in politics in Kebbi in November 2005: a seminar for state assemblies' service commissions in Abuja in November 2005 and a seminar on environmental law in Cross Rivers in December 2005. The workshops brought together members and key staff of the National Assembly and of the state assemblies. Additional training workshops held in October and November 2005 were targeted to the staff of specific parliamentary services, including editors, information officers, library personnel and research staff. Some senior parliamentary staff attended attachments in the South African and Kenyan parliaments in October 2005 and in the French National Assembly and the Belgian House of Representatives in November 2005. During these attachments, participants studied the functional attributes of their host counterparts, reviewing similarities and differences

in the organizational structures and their respective scope of responsibilities.

Afghanistan: Preparing the future National Assembly

Recent months saw increased cooperation between the IPU and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), which have worked together in preparation for the establishment of a new parliament in Afghanistan. Under a memorandum of understanding signed between the two organizations in July 2005, the IPU provided advisory support in the preparation of the draft rules of procedure for the new parliament and helped organize and participated in a training seminar in Kabul for newly trained staff on parliamentary processes and best practices, in October 2005.

The IPU also assisted in the preparation of an orientation seminar for new legislators and facilitated the participation in the seminar of two members of parliament from South Africa. Furthermore, advisory support was provided, through a consultant from the Belgian parliament, on the recording of parliamentary proceedings and the workings of a multilingual parliament.

Iraq:

Creating a conducive environment for a solid and democratic legislature

Over the past months the IPU has been working closely with UNDP and the authorities of the Transitional National Assembly of Iraq with a view to developing and implementing a project of assistance for the Iraqi National Assembly, that was elected on 15 December 2005. An assessment mission is planned for February 2006 to develop such a project, which will address the immediate and longer-term needs of the Iraqi National Assembly. Priorities that have already been identified include online documentation in Arabic on parliamentary procedure and practice and the training and professional development of legislators and staff.

Pakistan:

Startegic approach to parliamentary development

In November 2005 the IPU and the Parliament of Pakistan signed a memorandum of understanding with a view to implementing technical assistance inputs of a project of assistance that had been designed following an IPU mission in October 2003. Under this agreement the IPU organized two study visits for cross-party and gender-balanced delegations of members and support staff of both Houses of Parliament to the parliaments of Thailand and the Philippines in December 2005. During these visits, participants reviewed the functioning and workings of the committees and other structures involved in the law-making process. The IPU also organized a train-the-trainers programme in December 2005 in the Parliament of Australia for selected staff from the Pakistani Parliament. This programme focused on parliamentary procedures and legislative drafting. The staff will then serve as resource persons for the induction and orientation of new members of the Pakistani Parliament.

¹ The Union's Technical Cooperation Programme provides assistance to parliaments worldwide, strengthening their capacity to perform their functions more efficiently.

Parliamentary developments

ARMENIA

The National Assembly adopted amendments to the Constitution on 27 September 2005, without the participation of two opposition parties, the Justice Bloc and the National Unity Party. The aim of the amendments is to ensure greater separation of powers between the executive, legislative and judicial branches, including by limiting presidential powers and giving more powers to the Assembly. While the European Union, the Council of Europe and the Government of the United States hailed the constitutional amendments as a first step towards reform in Armenia, some opposition parties called for a boycott of the planned constitutional referendum, insisting that what was needed was not constitutional change, but regime change.

The referendum held on 27 November 2005 needed to be endorsed by a simple majority, with a minimum turnout of one third. According to the Central Election Commission, 65 per cent of Armenia's 2.3 million registered voters turned out for the poll, of whom 93 per cent supported the constitutional amendments, though observers from the Council of Europe questioned the accuracy of the high turnout figures.

BANGLADESH

Following constitutional amendments in 2004, the statutory number of members of parliament was increased from 300 to 345, with the addition of 45 seats reserved for women. Under the amendments, which will be valid for 10 years, the seats are allocated in proportion to each party's representation in parliament. On 6 September 2005, 36 women parliamentarians were duly nominated by political parties, based on their results at the 2001 election. The Awami League, for which nine seats were reserved, did not put forward any candidates, insisting that new women parliamentarians should be directly elected. The nine remaining seats were therefore attributed to nominees of other parties, including the ruling Bangladesh National Party, on 2 October 2005.

IRAQ

On 15 October 2005, more than 63 per cent of some 15.5 million registered voters participated in a referendum on the draft Constitution.

According to Article 61 C of the provisional Constitution, the Transitional Administrative Law (TAL), the new Constitution needed to be ratified by a majority of the voters in Iraq, and it would pass only if two thirds of the voters in three or more governorates did not reject it. The draft was approved by 78.59 per cent of voters, and it passed in 15 of 18 governorates. It was rejected in two governorates by a majority of two thirds, while in Ninewa governorate, 44.92% voted in favour and 55.08% voted against. The Constitution having thus been approved, elections were scheduled for a permanent parliament, to be known as the Council of Representatives of Iraq, for 15 December 2005.

The Council of Representatives will consist of 275 members, of whom 25 per cent must be women. Of the 275 seats, 230 are allocated to the 18 governorates based on the number of voters registered in each at the parliamentary elections held for the Transitional National Assembly on 30 January 2005.² Governorate seats will be filled by a proportional representation system. The remaining 45 seats will be allocated in two phases. Firstly, they will be distributed to political groups which did not win any seats in governorates, but which reached a certain threshold (compensatory seats); and secondly, to other entities which won governorate seats and surpassed a certain threshold nationwide (national seats).

ITALY

A constitutional reform bill was passed by the Chamber of Deputies on 20 October and by the Senate on 16 November 2005. The so-called Devolution Bill, promoted by the pro-autonomy Northern League party, a member of Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi's coalition Government, strengthens the powers of the Prime Minister and gives full autonomy to the country's 20 regions over health, schooling and local policing, starting from 2012. The reforms still need to be ratified in a referendum.

If the reform is approved by the referendum, the Prime Minister will no longer be appointed by the State President, but will be directly elected by citizens, and will no longer require a vote of

² These elections had been held for a provisional National Assembly tasked mainly with drafting the new Constitution.

confidence from the parliament. He or she will also be able to appoint and dismiss ministers and dissolve parliament. The new Constitution will also transform the Senate into a body representing the regions, a *Senato federale* or Federal Senate, which will not have the right to pass a vote of noconfidence against Prime Minister. The purview of the new Senate will be limited to matters of "concurrent" legislation which are not exclusively pertinent to either the central State or the regions.

The current Italian Constitution, promulgated in 1948, was designed to prevent the emergence of another dictatorship following the fascist era. It limits the powers of the Prime Minister, which has led to short-lived administrations: only five governments have completed the full five-year term since World War II.

KENYA

On 21 November 2005, 57 per cent of Kenyan voters who took part in a referendum rejected a proposed new Constitution that in the eyes of the opposition would have insufficiently restricted the sweeping powers held by the executive branch (see issue No.19, November 2005). Before the referendum, seven of the 28 cabinet ministers rejected the draft and vowed to resign if the new Constitution was adopted. They led the "No" campaign, together with the official opposition party, the Kenya African National Union (KANU), using an orange as their symbol. President Mwai Kibaki led the "Yes" campaign under the symbol of a banana, with the intention of enacting the new Constitution by 12 December 2005, the country's Independence Day. The campaigning, while colourful and animated, was also violent, with seven deaths recorded in clashes.

Following the rejection of the new Constitution, President Kibaki dismissed his entire Cabinet on 23 November. The next day, he suspended the reopening of parliament, which had been scheduled for 29 November 2005. Parliament is now scheduled to re-open in March 2006. On 9 December 2005, a new Cabinet was sworn in, although three ministers and 13 deputies, including two of the President's key allies, refused to take up their posts.

SUDAN

Following the ratification of the new power-sharing Constitution by the National Assembly on 6 July 2005 (see issue No.19, November 2005), a new bicameral parliament, composed of the National Assembly and the Council of States, was established in the Sudan on 31 August 2005. The current legislature will run for five years of the six-year interim period, until general elections are held.

The National Assembly consists of 450 appointed members: 234 members (52 per cent) from the National Congress Party (NCP), 126 members (28 per cent) from the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM), 63 members (14 per cent) from northern opposition parties, and 27 members (6 per cent) from other southern groups. Of the total, 60 seats (13 per cent) are reserved for women. The 50-member Council is composed of two representatives from each of the 25 states, elected indirectly, by the state legislatures. In addition, there are two observers from Abyei Area Council who do not have voting rights.

UGANDA

On 23 November 2005, President Yoweri Museveni signed three laws: the Political Parties and Organisations Act 2005, the Presidential Elections (amendment) Act 2005 and the Parliamentary Elections (amendment) Act 2005. They paved the way for the Electoral Commission to fix the polling day for the presidential, parliamentary and local government elections to be held between 12 February and 12 March 2006. The 2006 polls will be the first to be contested by opposition parties in almost two decades. The multiparty system was reintroduced following a referendum in July 2005 (see issue No.19, November 2005), which lifted the restriction on political parties introduced by Mr. Museveni in 1986.

UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

On 1 December 2005, President Sheikh Khalifa Bin Zayed announced an election for half of the Federal National Council, without specifying the date of the ballot. Until now, all 40 members of the unicameral parliament formed in 1972 have been appointed by the rulers of the United Arab Emirates' constituent states. The introduction of democratic elections in the Middle East has been urged by the United States, while the 22 members of the Arab League have insisted such change should not be imposed by outside pressure.

IPU TO LAUNCH GUIDE TO DEMOCRATIC PRACTICE IN PARLIAMENT

The third meeting of the IPU panel on Parliaments' Contribution to Democracy convened in Geneva from 23 to 24 January 2006 to review progress on a major new IPU study on the characteristics of a democratic parliament and how these characteristics are implemented worldwide. This study will be illustrated by examples of democratic practice from parliaments around the world. During two days of discussions, parliamentarians, academics scholars and legislative specialists analysed the responses to the challenges facing parliaments in the twenty-first century. Among these challenges are how parliaments are seeking to be more representative, accountable and accessible as well as to be more effective at both the national and international levels. The panel's findings will be presented in the form of a practical guide.

In the words of Professor David Beetham, the panel's rapporteur, "the guide is intended to demonstrate that parliaments are the true cornerstone of democracy". For his part fellow panel member, Mr. Abdewahed Radi, Speaker of the Moroccan House of Representatives stressed that "if democracy is to develop, a culture of democracy must be nurtured".

Recent IPU publications NATIONALITY AND STATELESSNESS: A HANDBOOK FOR PARLIAMENTARIANS (2005)

"Citizenship is man's basic right, for it is nothing less than the right to have rights" (Chief Justice Earl Warren (USA, 1958). Published jointly by the IPU and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

(UNHCR), the handbook on nationality and statelessness provides parliamentarians with a broad description of the international principles regulating nationality and statelessness. It discusses the rights and obligations of stateless persons as protected under international law, highlights the main causes of statelessness and suggests practical steps parliamentarians can take to help reduce the incidence of statelessness. This publication can be obtained free of charge in English and French from the IPU Secretariat. The PDF versions can also be downloaded from the IPU website.



Contacts :

Inter-Parliamentary Union The House of Parliaments 5, chemin du Pommier P.O. Box 330 CH - 1218 Le Grand Saconnex Geneva - Switzerland Phone (0041.22) 919.41.16/27 Fax (0041.22) 919.41.60 e-mail: postbox@mail.ipu.org

Office of the Permanent Observer to the United Nations in New York Inter-Parliamentary Union Room 3002, 220 East 42nd Street New York, N.Y. 10017 United States of America Phone (001) 212.557.58.80 Fax (001) 212.557.39.54 e-mail: ny-office@mail.ipu.org

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Editor in Chief: Luisa Ballin Assisted by: Mohamed Amani Nora Babic **Catherine Blondelle** Martin Chungong Anda Filip Rogier Huizenga Kareen Jabre James Jennings **Danny Kutner** Alessandro Motter Andy Richardson Ingeborg Schwarz Valeria Sistek

Jill Toedtli Alain Valtat Hiroko Yamaguchi

Web site: Pieyre Castelier Serguei Tchelnokov

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