

# The World of Parliaments

Quarterly Review of the Inter-Parliamentary Union

May 2006 • N° 21

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#### **Democracy and the IPU**

As the IPU turns 117 years, the Organization is launching three studies dedicated to democracy. With Professor David Beetham holding the pen, the first in this trilogy sets out the requirements for a democratic parliament - to be representative, transparent, accountable, accessible and effective - and offers a rich selection of good examples of how parliaments carry out their tasks. The second is an expanded edition of the 1994 publication *Free and Fair Elections* written by Professor Guy Goodwin-Gill.

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#### **The IPU defends the human rights of members of parliament in Colombia**

For the past 20 years, the IPU Committee on the Human Rights of Parliamentarians has been seeking to protect members of the Colombian Parliament. The number of cases is increasing, involving members from one political party who have been assassinated, others who have been abducted by the Colombian Revolutionary Armed Forces (FARC), and others who belong to the opposition and who are being threatened. In this photo, Mrs. Martha de Lizcano, wife of former Congressman Oscar Lizcano, watches a videotape of her husband, sent by the FARC on 29 November 2005.



Photo: AFP/Univision

## **IPU APPEALS TO PARLIAMENTS TO HELP SAVE 20 MILLION PEOPLE IN THE HORN OF AFRICA WHO ARE LIVING UNDER THREAT OF STARVATION**

The IPU launched an appeal to its 143 Member Parliaments for assistance to Africa. The appeal underscores the gravity of the plight of more than 20 million people living under the threat of starvation in Kenya, Somalia, Eritrea, Ethiopia and the United Republic of Tanzania in the wake of the drought. The IPU, which is holding its 114th Assembly in Nairobi from 7 to 12 May 2006, draws attention to the 3,5 million people who are running out of food and water in north-eastern Kenya and need emergency assistance.



Photo: AFP/Stingar

## **Women Speakers make an impact in parliament**

Twelve women Speakers, representing half of the legislatures presided over by a woman, met on the occasion of the 50th session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) in New York on 27 February 2006. The meeting was organized by the IPU as a follow-up to the session organized during the Second World Conference of Speakers of Parliaments in September 2005 in New York. The women Speakers discussed their specific role in furthering gender equality. "Women transform parliaments by being themselves", said Mrs. Syringa Marshall-Burnett, Speaker of the Senate of Jamaica. (Follow up on page 4)

## FREE AND FAIR ELECTIONS ARE AT THE HEART OF DEMOCRACY

The study prepared by Professor Goodwin-Gill reviews a decade (1994-2004) of progress in the law and practice of elections around the world. It points out that the elections debate no longer solely concerns States in transition from conflict or from authoritarian forms of government. It is now increasingly relevant to all democratic systems, that are facing the internal challenges of alienation and distrust of the process. The third in the series is a pamphlet offering a panorama of parliamentary elections in 2005. It provides answers to questions such as how many people went to the polls in 2005, in how many countries, and what the results were.

In his study, Professor Goodwin-Gill stated that "the issue of representation will be increasingly dominant in the future, not just with regard to free and fair elections but also the very meaning of democracy at ground level. Globalization and technological change have also brought new challenges for the democratic process."

In a press conference at the Palais des Nations in Geneva, Professor Goodwin-Gill underlined that the will of the people is the basis of the authority of government. The question of free and fair elections is very much in the headlines, "whether we are thinking about the situations in Belarus, in Iraq, in the Middle East", said the author of the IPU publication. He added that "in the more developed democracies, we are also asking ourselves if our system allows for sufficient representation of all the voices of the multicultural communities that now make up our societies. We often find that the present system of voting, for example, does not precisely provide what we are looking for: a representative government."

Elections are the core of democracy, but in many countries, citizens are increasingly claiming that if an election is to be free and fair, the expression of the will of the people must also be respected. "We are right to be worried about the fake front that might be erected in this or that State with a view to persuading us that indeed all is well. In fact, if we go behind that fake front or behind the semblance of free and fair elections we find that there is nothing there or perhaps something worse than nothing", declared Professor Goodwin-Gill.



Prof. Guy Goodwin-Gill presenting the expanded edition of the IPU publication *Free and fair elections* during a press conference at the Geneva United Nations Office.

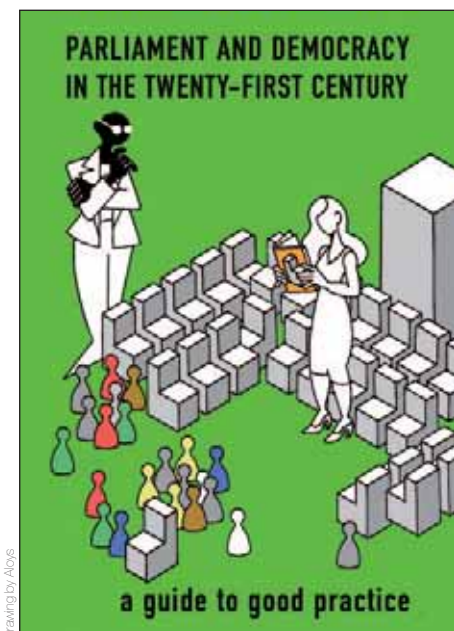
Photo: IPU/Parlason

### Parliamentary elections in 2005

Close to 330,000 people cast their vote in parliamentary elections in 39 countries in 2005. As a result, 7,845 persons were elected to parliament, and one of every five was a woman. Generally, voter turnout was high, although countries like Egypt, Venezuela and Zimbabwe reported very low participation. In most countries, the government was returned to power, although in seven this was not the case. In one country - Mauritania - parliament was dissolved unconstitutionally. These are some of the facts presented in a new IPU publication entitled "*Panorama of parliamentary elections in 2005*". The study examines parliamentary elections from the perspective of the IPU criteria for free and fair elections.



## Democracy and the IPU



The general debate of the 114th IPU Assembly in Nairobi will unfold under the theme of promoting democracy and helping to build democratic institutions. This comes at a timely moment.

Recently, the IPU has undertaken a host of activities which broadly seek to promote democracy. At the Assembly in Nairobi, the IPU President, Pier Ferdinando Casini, will present a new IPU guide on democratic parliaments. The publication is the outcome of a two year project in which parliaments have provided insights and suggestions of good examples on what constitutes a democratic parliament. The guide offers a template of the five core objectives of a democratic parliament - to be representative, transparent, accountable, accessible and effective. It also offers illuminating insights into the new frontier of parliaments - how best to be effective in the international arena.

The publication of the guide follows close on the heels on several other "democracy" products elaborated by the IPU. One of them is the new edition of free and fair elections; a review of development in law and practice over the last ten years since the IPU initially set down the first international principles and criteria of free and fair elections.

Another is a synopsis of elections - the fundamental building block of democracies - that took place in 2005. The report draws attention to trends for participation in elections, outcomes, and challenges facing States in overcoming shortcomings in the electoral processes.

These publications are complemented with the draft guidelines prepared by the United Nations in collaboration with several partners and, most prominently, the IPU, on the role of parliaments in reconciliation processes. Based on the experience of parliaments such as those of Burundi, Rwanda and Timor Leste, the guidelines offer convincing arguments about why the international community must pay much better attention to the needs of parliaments in countries moving from conflict towards peace, and offer many examples of how parliaments can and do contribute to peace.

Of course, convincing though they are, these standard setting documents must also be accompanied by political will. It is not enough to declare an electoral process to be free and fair. It is also necessary to respect the result, however politically uncomfortable it may turn out to be. Democracy and free and fair elections also require the international community to behave in a democratic manner and - in short - to be free and fair.

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### ...READ IN THE PRESS...

#### Elections are often a fake front

The organization of elections in many countries is often a front for democracy, according to the IPU. From Belarus to Iraq, there is no shortage of examples of situations where genuinely democratic conditions are not met. "If there is not an active civil society, if minimum security cannot be guaranteed in a country, if there is no rule of law, the holding of elections is but a smoke screen", said Professor Guy Goodwin-Gill, at the presentation of his study on *Free and Fair Elections*, a 233-page volume published by the IPU.

**Le Téléjournal en continu - TSR - ATS (Switzerland) 24 March 2006**

#### Belarus needs to review elections: parliamentary chief

Authorities in Belarus need to review the conduct of last weekend's controversial elections which returned President Alexander Lukashenko to power, the head of the International Parliamentary Union said on Friday. "The facts are still being

established. It's very hard for us to make a hard and fast judgement on the freeness and fairness of those elections," said Anders Johnsson, Secretary General of the grouping of 143 parliaments. "But I think enough has been reported in the media to cast a serious shadow of doubt on the freeness and fairness of the elections in Belarus". "Clearly the Belarussian authorities will have to revisit how they are organizing these elections and to see what should be changed," he told reporters. Belarus's Parliament is part of the IPU. Johnsson's comments came during the launch of a revised IPU manual on *Free and Fair Elections*, which lays out benchmarks that are often used by international monitors to assess elections. "It's an issue very much in the headlines today, whether we are thinking about the situations in Belarus, in Iraq, in the Middle East," said author Guy Goodwin-Gill, a professor at Oxford University.

**Agence France Presse (AFP) - 24 March 2006**



## WOMEN IN POLITICS

### Women Speakers: how they are making an impact



From left to right: Mrs. Colleen Lowe-Morna, Executive Director of Gender Links (South Africa), Mrs. Drude Dahlerup, University of Stockholm (Sweden), Mrs. Syringa Marshall-Burnett, President of the Senate of Jamaica; Mrs. Barbara Prammer, Deputy Speaker of the Nationalrat of Austria; Mrs. Ingrida Udre, Speaker of the Saeima of Latvia and Chair of the Meeting of Women Speakers of Parliament; Mrs. Jozefina Topali, Speaker of the Parliament of Albania; Hon. Mtholi Motsamai, Speaker of the National Assembly of Lesotho; Mrs. Margareth Mensah-Williams, Vice-President of the IPU Executive Committee and Vice-Chairperson of the National Committee of Namibia; Mrs. Solveig Petursdottir, President of the Althingi of Iceland; Mrs. Immaculée Nahayo, Speaker of the National Assembly of Burundi; and Mrs. Sharon Wilson, President of the Senate of Bahamas.

**D**uring the meeting entitled *Gender Equality on the Legislative Agenda: The role of women presiding over parliament*, the Speaker of the Senate of Jamaica and her colleagues stressed that women's active participation in legislation, as parliamentarians, is vital to the articulation of women's issues. Women, they added, have to be in parliament and talk about the problems they encounter in areas as diverse as poverty, economic empowerment, health and population, violence, democracy and human rights.

The Speakers said that the changes brought by women parliamentarians to the institution of parliament operated on different levels. Women are instrumental in transforming the actual physical premises of Parliament to make them more gender- friendly and better adapted to the needs of working women with families (for instance, requesting facilities such as day-care centers, toilets, gyms, etc). They bring about changes in the institutional culture, using their influence to apply working methods and procedures to make parliaments better adapted to women members (meeting times etc).

Women change the institutional discourse to attune it more to their values. This often entails changes in language and vocabulary that had originated in traditional patriarchal thinking. Finally, according to the Speakers present in New York, women influence the legislative agenda to ensure that issues of particular importance to women are given a place in the debate.

It is a fact that women Speakers of parliament can be potential role models. They can also wield influence outside the parliament because their position gives them the opportunity to voice their opinions in other fora.

#### ...READ IN THE PRESS...

##### Women politicians "making gains"

A record number of women are serving in parliaments world-wide, but they only account for just over 16% of all MPs. Women have made progress in elections, but "true equality of status" is a long way off, says a report by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU). IPU chief Anders Johnsson said women were "dramatically under-represented". Women fared best in Rwanda, Norway and Sweden, but there are no women MPs in nine countries, including Saudi Arabia and Kyrgyzstan. On average, women made up about 20% of the deputies elected in the 39 countries which held parliamentary elections last year, the IPU reports.

**BBC News - 28 February 2006**

## WOMEN IN POLITICS

### IPU Yearly Analysis on Women in Politics One out of five parliamentarians elected in 2005 is a woman



In total, 20% of legislators elected in single or lower chambers in 2005 were women, according to statistics published by the IPU to mark International Women's Day. By the end of 2005, an average of 16.3% of the upper and lower houses of parliament were women, up from 15.7% in December 2004. This trend confirms the sustained progress made since 1995, when the proportion of women in parliament stood at 11.3%. A higher ratio of women parliamentarians was registered in 28 of the 39

parliaments that held elections in 2005 (72 per cent). Significantly, in nine countries, more than 30 per cent of those elected or returned to parliament were women. Norway topped the ranks in 2005. Some 37.9 per cent of those elected in Norway were women, placing it in third position behind Rwanda and Sweden in the global ranking.

(See table on the IPU web site: <http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/classif.htm> and analysis:

<http://www.ipu.org/pdf/publications/women06>).

## Gender equality must be promoted

This year's annual parliamentary meeting at the CSW, jointly organized in New York by the United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women and the IPU, brought together 150 parliamentarians from all regions of the world. It provided an opportunity to discuss parliamentary mechanisms to promote gender equality within the institution of parliament. What is needed is "gender equality beyond figures", said Mrs. Britt Bohlin Ohlsson, Member of the Swedish Parliament. Particular attention was paid to the role of parliamentary committees and bodies dealing with gender equality. The IPU released a provisional directory of these bodies. To date, some 60 parliaments have reported the existence of a specific body to address gender equality. Such committees are important in defending women's rights and promoting gender issues. Emphasis was placed on the need to ensure cooperation between these committees and other bodies, within and outside the parliament, and on the importance of facilitating contact between them, which is an area in which the IPU intends to do more work.

## Parliamentarians commit to child protection in the Asia-Pacific region

Exploitation, violence, prostitution, trafficking: every year, millions of children throughout the world suffer abuse. With a view to addressing these issues and developing a protective framework for children, members of parliament from 13 Asia-Pacific countries met in Viet Nam in February 2006 for a regional seminar hosted by the National Assembly and organized jointly by the IPU and UNICEF.

During the three-day meeting, participants discussed parliamentary mechanisms, and more particularly the role of parliamentary committees in protecting children. Attention also focused on two specific themes of particular regional relevance: trafficking of children and violence against children.

There was agreement on the need for international legal instruments on children along with the proper enforcement of adequate legislation. Regional parliamentary cooperation to ensure complementarity of action and harmonization of legislation was also highlighted, as was the need to develop specific mechanisms to address child protection issues within parliament. Participants met with Minister Le Thi Thu, who is also Chairwoman of the Committee on Population, Family and Children of Viet Nam, before visiting the Hoa Binh children's village, which looks after disabled children and children in need.



Indonesian Member of Parliament visiting children in Hoa Binh



## **HUMAN RIGHTS OF PARLIAMENTARIANS**

### **IPU defends the human rights of members of parliament in Colombia**

**T**he IPU Committee on the Human Rights of Parliamentarians was established in 1976. For the past 20 years, it has had to deal continuously with cases concerning members of the Colombian Parliament. The number of cases is on the rise. Between 1986 and 2004, a series of cases concerning parliamentarians belonging to the Patriotic Union (Unión Patriótica - UP) party were referred to the Committee.

This party was established in 1985 by the FARC, the main Colombian guerrilla group, in the course of the peace negotiations held with the Government of Belisario Betancur which aimed at its integration into national politics. However, virtually all UP leaders and many of its members were assassinated or forced into exile, to the extent that the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights has accepted to examine this situation as a case of political genocide. The IPU Committee has looked at the murder of six parliamentarians belonging to the UP. Only in two of these cases, those of Mr. Jaramillo Ossa, a candidate in the 1990 presidential elections, and Senator Manuel Cepeda Vargas, were the murderers caught and convicted.

Former paramilitary leaders Fidel and Carlos Castaño were found guilty of Mr. Jaramillo's murder and, in November 2001, sentenced respectively to 18 and 20 years in prison. In December 1999, two military officers were found guilty of Senator Cepeda's murder in August 1994 and were sentenced to 43 years imprisonment, which they are currently serving. Carlos Castaño, who was charged with masterminding this murder, was acquitted despite the fact that he had publicly admitted to ordering the crime. Mr. Castaño has remained free despite his conviction in the Jaramillo case and the many arrests warrants pending against him in other cases for kidnapping Senator Piedad Cordoba in May 1999. He disappeared in April 2004.

Some suggest that Mr. Castaño was killed by rival groups, while others claim that he is still in hiding, but his fate and whereabouts have so far not been officially established. The Committee has requested information about any investigations into the facts, so far in vain.

Opposition parliamentarians in Colombia continue to be targeted and risk their lives. In July 2002, Congressman Petro Urrego disclosed both plans to kill him and links between paramilitary groups and the Attorney-General's office. Most recently, "Operation Dragon" was discovered,



Of the six Colombian Congressmen whose release the IPU Committee is working for, Oscar Lizcano, kidnapped by the Colombian Revolutionary Armed Forces (FARC), is the longest-held.

a plot to kill several opposition parliamentarians, but investigations have not gone beyond the preliminary stage.

While these cases are not in the international spotlight, the fate of kidnapped persons has drawn much international attention, especially after the FARC kidnapping of Ingrid Betancourt, a candidate in the presidential elections of May 2002. The FARC are currently holding six members of parliament who were kidnapped between August 2000 and February 2002.

The health of some of the hostages is said to have seriously deteriorated in captivity. Several attempts have been made to conclude a humanitarian agreement; all have failed so far. While recalling that the FARC has a duty under international humanitarian law to release immediately, unconditionally and unilaterally all hostages, the IPU, through its Human Rights Committee and Governing Council, has consistently called on the parties concerned to conclude a humanitarian agreement, which it considers an essential step towards the achievement of lasting peace. It has pointed to the fact that the Government has accepted to negotiate with paramilitary groups, and started a process of demobilization and social reintegration. The IPU believes that the Colombian Congress has an important role to play in promoting a humanitarian agreement, and has consistently called on the institution to make every effort to do so.

A new Congress was elected in March 2006. The Committee will certainly continue to urge it not only to work towards the conclusion of a humanitarian agreement, but also to take the necessary steps to ensure that the members of the political opposition can carry

## IPU AND ASGP COOPERATION

### "IPU regards Secretaries General as valuable counterparts"

Anders Forsberg, the new President of the Association of Secretaries General of Parliaments (ASGP), visited the IPU Headquarters in April 2006, accompanied by Frédéric Slama and Roger Philips, the Co-Secretaries of the ASGP. "It is important that the Secretaries General be more involved during the IPU Assemblies so that we can keep abreast of the development of the IPU, especially now that the IPU is developing its cooperation with the United Nations and the WTO", said Mr. Forsberg.

The ASGP President also mentioned the IPU seminars on specific political topics, which are of great interest to many parliaments and also their Secretaries General. "We have fruitful cooperation with the IPU and I find it very important to strengthen it, for instance by supporting the emerging democracies in different parts of the world. The IPU is asking for specialists or officials from our parliaments and I look forward to deepening the cooperation between our two institutions in that field and others. At our meeting in Nairobi, we will present interesting projects in this area."

Mr. Forsberg also underlined the importance of developing the IPU and the ASGP web sites. "Moreover, we are expecting to take part in the discussions about the development of the IPU and we have had talks with the European Broadcasting Union (EBU - Eurovision), the largest professional association of national broadcasters in the world, which has 74 active Members in 54 countries in Europe, North Africa and the Middle East and 48 associate Members in 28 countries".

In the near future, the IPU, the ASGP and the EBU plan to hold a seminar on how to better inform people about parliament's activities, especially through the television channels. "I have the impression that the IPU regards the Secretaries General as valuable counterpart in dealing with this and we will do what we can to take part in this process", concluded the ASGP President.

#### ...READ IN THE PRESS...

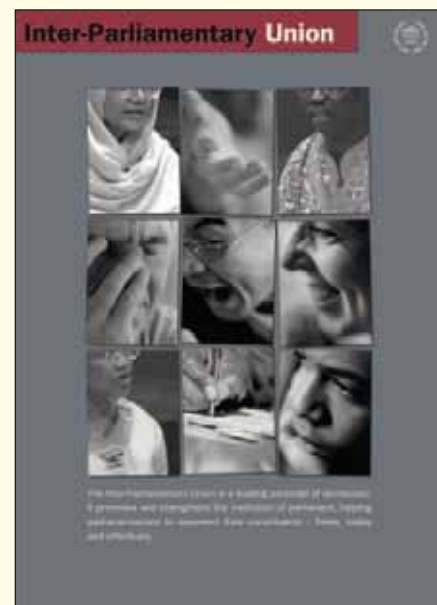
##### Conference: Parliaments are essential to halt crisis

How to bolster donor support for parliaments in conflict states is the focus of an international conference which opened in Brussels Wednesday evening. "The parliaments play a tremendous important role in conflict prevention in countries in the world, in particular fragile states which face crisis", Belgian minister for development and cooperation, Armand De Decker, told a news briefing ahead of the inaugural session of the conference. About 80 parliamentarians, donors and experts from countries including Afghanistan, Iraq, Lebanon, and the Democratic Republic of Congo (RDC) are participating in the two-day event organized by the Belgian government and Parliament and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), in association with the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU). "Parliaments, crisis prevention and recovery" is the theme of the conference. De Decker said that the role of parliaments is underestimated and called on the parliaments to promote good governance, sustainable development policies and parliamentary diplomacy.

**IRNA (Islamic Republic of Iran News Agency) - 19 April 2005**

#### Recent IPU publications **INFORMATION BROCHURE**

Working with communications consultants Saatchi & Saatchi, the Inter-Parliamentary Union has recently issued a new information brochure in English, French, Spanish and Arabic. This publication is designed to upgrade the image of the organization of the world's parliaments. The new brochure showcases the dynamism and diversity of the organization's work, and highlights the unique niche occupied by the IPU among international political organizations.



## TECHNICAL CO-OPERATION UPDATE <sup>1</sup>

### **Equatorial Guinea: Sensitization and capacity-building**

The IPU recently launched a training programme for ten staff members of the House of People's Representatives (CRP). This two-year programme is focussing on techniques for the recording of parliamentary proceedings and the production of reports. To complement this training, stenotype machines and computers have been delivered to the CRP. Recording parliamentary proceeding has been recognised as an important tool not only for preserving institutional memory but also for making available information on the parliament's work and promoting transparency. The project is funded by the European Commission.

### **Afghanistan: preparing the future National Assembly**

Working together to build the capacities of the new parliament in Afghanistan, the IPU and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) have over the past months continued to organise activities in support of the newly elected members and the parliamentary staff. Advisory support on the recording of parliamentary proceedings and the workings of a multilingual parliament, which began in December 2005, resumed in 2006 with a consultant from the Belgian parliament making a further two trips to Kabul. The IPU helped organise a series of seminars during March and April 2006 on issues ranging from globalisation to legislative-executive relations, targeting members of the Meshrano Jirga. A similar set of seminars will be organised later in 2006 for the members of Wolesi Jirga. Additional activities foreseen in the coming months include a capacity building programme for the Speaker of the Wolesi Jirga; a consultancy mission to review the committee system and provide advice on its organisation; and study visits for members of the National Assembly.

### **Algeria Promoting parliament's effective involvement in the national budget process**

In March 2006, the IPU co-operated with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in organising a three-day seminar for Algerian parliamentarians and parliamentary staff on the budgetary process. During the seminar, experts led discussion on issues relating to the preparation, execution and parliamentary oversight of the budget with a focus on prioritization of national activities and the participation of civil society in the budgetary process. The seminar was an opportunity to compare Algerian practice with those of parliaments in



The President of the Senate of Burundi, Mr. Gervais Ruyikiri, paid an official visit to the House of Parliaments in April 2006 to discuss cooperation between the IPU and the parliament of Burundi and, more specifically, a project being designed by the IPU to strengthen the parliament of Burundi over the coming years and examine the role it must assume in the country's reconciliation process. New Parliament building in Bata.

Belgium, France, the USA and the Arab world. The IPU handbook on "Parliament, the Budget and Gender" was made available as background documentation.

### **Exploratory Missions in Africa and Latin America**

At the request of parliamentary authorities in Burundi and the Republic of Congo, the IPU fielded exploratory missions to Bujumbura, in February 2006, and to Brazzaville in April 2006. These missions undertook an exhaustive assessment of the functioning of the parliaments in these countries and identified their needs and proposed solutions. The recommendations made by the mission teams are being written up as programmes of action that will be used to mobilise resources from the donor community in a bid to assist the authorities of the parliaments concerned in tackling the constraints that undermine efficiency. An exploratory mission is also foreseen to the Parliament of Ecuador in May 2006.

### **Continued support for the Parliament of Uruguay**

The IPU, UNDP and the UN OHCHR are working closely to design the third phase of their initial project to support the parliament. This new phase will cover the period from 2006 -2008 and will continue to focus on more active involvement of civil society in the work of parliament, including through the promotion and defence of human rights. The original project began in August 2003 and initially addressed the constitutional functions of the parliament, especially its oversight function. It also helped to strengthen the parliament's administrative and human resources capacities.

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



# Parliamentary developments

## AFGHANISTAN

On 19 December 2005, the National Assembly held its first session after being suspended for many years. The first parliamentary elections since 1988 took place on 18 September 2005 for the 249-member House of the People (Wolesi Jirga). Final results were announced on 14 November 2005, and on the same day, the newly-elected Provincial Councils met to elect representatives to the House of Elders (Meshrano Jirga). The House of Elders currently consists of 68 representatives from the Provincial Councils (34 permanent members and 34 transitional members who will serve until the District Councils are elected, and who can choose their own representatives), as well as 34 members appointed by the President on 11 December 2005.

## BHUTAN

On 19 December 2005, King Jigme Jigme Singye Wangchuck announced that a century of absolute monarchy would come to an end. The country's first national parliamentary elections are scheduled to take place in 2008. The draft constitution provides for a bicameral parliament: a 75-member national assembly, and a 25-member national council. The new Constitution, presented by the King in March 2005, is still to be ratified by referendum. Following advice from his astrologers, the King postponed the constitutional referendum to 2008. Meanwhile, the office of the chief election commissioner was officially established on 16 January 2006.

The King also announced that he would be abdicating his throne, indicating that Crown Prince Jigme Khesar Namgyal Wangchuk would be crowned as the new king before the constitution was adopted.

## DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO

A new Constitution was officially adopted on 18 February 2006 following the Supreme Court

confirmation of the results of the 18 December 2005 constitutional referendum. The draft constitution, adopted by the transitional parliament in May 2005, was approved by 84.3 per cent of voters registered in the referendum. Its adoption paves the way for elections scheduled for June 2006.

Under the new Constitution, Parliament and the President are to be elected for a five-year term. The statutory number of members of the new bicameral Parliament is the same as for the current transitional parliament (500 members for the National Assembly and 120 members for the Senate). Members of the National Assembly will be directly elected by universal suffrage, while senators will be indirectly elected by provincial assemblies. The President, who can serve a maximum of two five-year terms, appoints the prime minister from the largest party in parliament. On 21 February 2006, the transitional parliament passed a bill giving the Independent Electoral Commission 110 days to organize elections from the moment President Joseph Kabila signs the document, which then becomes law. On 10 March 2006, President Kabila promulgated the new electoral law, setting 18 June 2006 as the date of the first election in the country's 46-year history as an independent nation.

## IRAQ

Following the approval of a new Constitution by referendum in October 2005, elections for a parliament composed of 275 members were held on 15 December 2005. Despite continuing violence, turnout was high, with 79.63% of registered voters taking part in the elections. This marked a sharp increase from the 58.32 per cent turnout in the January 2005 elections. Final results gave the mainly Shiite Unified Iraqi Coalition a total of 128 seats. The two main Sunni parties (Tawafiq Iraqi Front and Hewar National Iraqi Front) won a total of 55 seats, followed by the Kurdistan Gathering with 53 seats. After numerous postponements since mid-

February 2006, the new Parliament held its first session on 16 March 2006. However, the session was adjourned indefinitely after 30 minutes since it had not yet elected a new Speaker. The Parliament will elect the country's new President. The formation of a new government will officially end the political transition in Iraq.

## ITALY

On 21 December 2005, President Ciampi countersigned the new electoral law that would be applied to the elections scheduled for 9 and 10 April 2006. The electoral law re-introduces the full proportional representation system for 617 of 630 seats in 26 constituencies, while the first-past-post system is used in the single-member constituency in Valle d'Aosta, an autonomous region. Based on Law No. 459/2001 and its enabling regulation (Presidential Decree No. 104 of 2003), a further 12 Deputies (as well as six senators) are elected from the Constituency for Italians Abroad (Circonscrizione Estero), divided into four geographical groups: a) Europe; b) South America; c) Northern and Central America; and d) Africa, Asia, Oceania and Antarctica.

The new electoral law introduces various minimum thresholds for the formation of a political coalition (10% for the Chamber, 20% for the Senate) or for a political party (4% for the Chamber, 3% for the Senate) to be entitled to win seats. In cases where a political coalition or a political party with the largest number of votes fails to win 340 seats, a winning coalition or party will be given "bonus" seats to reach the required 340 seats. Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi, who had proposed the reforms, insisted the new system would offer more accurate representation in parliament, while opponents of the reform argued that it would bring political instability with the development of several small parties.

The old proportional representation system had been replaced in 1993 by a mixed voting system whereby 75 per cent of seats in each chamber were filled from constituencies and 25 per cent by a proportional representation system.

## LIBERIA

Following parliamentary elections on 11 October 2005 in parallel with presidential elections, the new Parliament held its first session on 13 January 2006. As provided for in the 2003 Comprehensive Peace Agreement, the new Parliament is composed of a 64-member House of Representatives, elected for six years, and a 30-member Senate, with members serving six or nine-year terms. Three days later, Ms. Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf was sworn in as President, becoming the country's first elected female Head of State. A 14-year civil war ended in 2003.

## SOMALIA

On 26 February 2006, the Somali Transitional Federal Parliament (TFP) met for the first time on Somali soil in the town of Baidoa. The session was attended by 205 of the 275 members of the TFP. The unicameral TFP had met in Nairobi until June 2005.

Disagreements between the government and parliament on the location of the new parliament and the deployment of foreign troops continued to hamper the transitional process. Under pressure from international donors, President Abdullahi Yusuf and Speaker Sharif Hassan Sheikh Aden met in Yemen on 5 January 2006, and agreed to convene the Parliament in Somalia within 30 days. Baidoa, which is 240 km southwest of the capital Mogadishu, was later chosen as its venue.

## SWAZILAND

On 8 February 2006, a new Constitution came into effect in Swaziland (see Issue N°19, November 2005). The new Constitution includes a bill of rights on freedom of assembly. However, uncertainty remains over the status of the 1973 decree banning organized political groups. While some eminent national scholars have argued that the new law supersedes old laws, others have pointed out that the Constitution was deliberately ambiguous on the issue.

## UKRAINE

On 1 January 2006, constitutional amendments aimed at significantly increasing parliament's powers came into force. Under the amended Constitution, parliament's term has been extended from four to five years, and the parliamentary majority will nominate a prime minister as head of the executive branch. The prime minister will then nominate members of the cabinet, who will have to be approved by parliament. Previously, only the president was empowered to appoint ministers.

The law on the election of people's deputies of Ukraine, passed in March 2004, came into force on 1 October 2005. It provided that all 450 members of Parliament would be elected according to the proportional representation system. Under the previous mixed system, 225 members were elected from single-member constituencies and the remaining 225 seats were filled using a proportional system.

### ...READ IN THE PRESS...

#### Chinese version of UN Guide to Refugee Law launched in Beijing

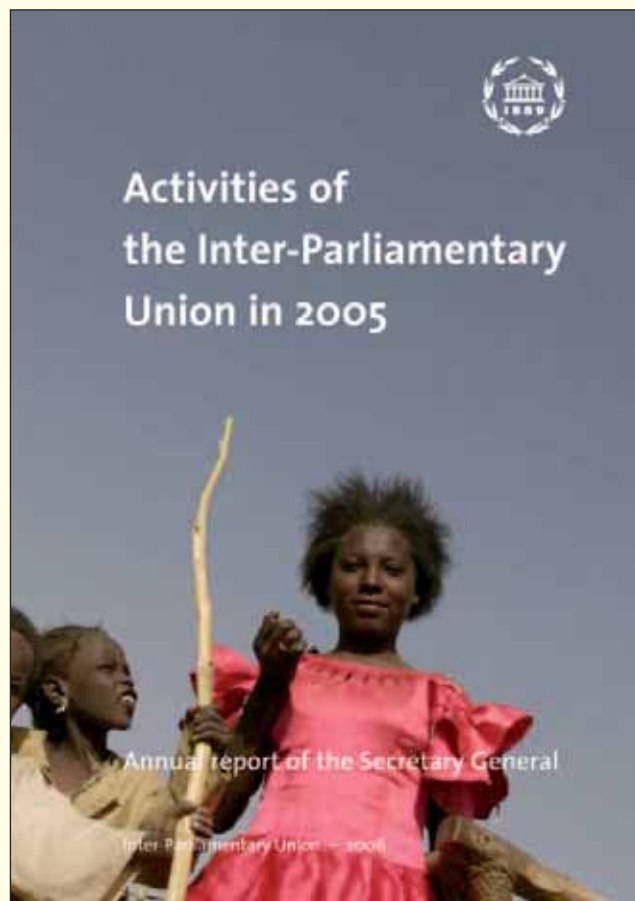
The Chinese version of a handbook on refugee protection, *A Guide to International Refugee Law*, was launched in Beijing. Visiting UN High Commissioner for Refugees Antonio Guterres and Vice-Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee of Chinese National People's Congress (NPC) Lu Congmin attended the launching ceremony. The book, jointly compiled by the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the Inter-Parliamentary Union in 2001, aims at helping members of parliament and governmental officials to become more familiar with the general principles of international refugee law. The book has been translated into 34 languages, making it the most widely translated UNHCR publication.

**Xinhua News Agency (China) -  
22 March 2006**

### Recent IPU publications

#### ANNUAL REPORT OF THE SECRETARY GENERAL

A backward glance over 2005 shows a hectic year in which events followed one another in rapid succession. In fact, the Inter-Parliamentary Union has never undertaken so many activities in a single year. The focus in IPU's work in recent years has been on promoting democracy. 2005 was no exception. Traditional activities continued unabated: there were four needs and review missions to different parliaments, eight projects to strengthen parliaments and four new parliamentary handbooks. 2005 got off to a rapid start with the Organization present in the Middle East for the election of a new President of the Palestinian Authority and, immediately thereafter, observing the out-of-country voting for the Iraqi Transitional Assembly. The pace of events continued unabated and by the time the year came to a close, the IPU had organized twenty-one meetings attended by over 4,000 members of parliament, an all time record.





The IPU analysis *Women in Parliament 2005: a year in perspective*, presented in March 2006 on the occasion of the International Women's Day was quoted by some 200 media worldwide. A non-exhaustive list of the global coverage it received is presented in this scrapbook.

**QUOTE ...  
... UNQUOTE**  
The IPU analysis  
*"Women in Parliament 2005:  
a year in perspective"*  
in the news



## ...READ IN THE PRESS...

### Three years of famine

Three years of drought, and consequently, famine, have placed virtually all the countries of the Horn of Africa in a precarious situation. Some 20 million nomads and herders in Ethiopia, Djibouti, Somalia, Kenya, Eritrea and Tanzania are on the verge of starvation after seeing their camels, goats and zebus die. The United Nations has appealed to wealthy countries to donate 350 million Euros to curb this imminent disaster. This amount can save only 8 million of the 20 million persons whose lives are in jeopardy... Anders Johnsson, Secretary General of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) - with a membership of 143 parliaments from across the world - has called on its Members, from Geneva, to pressure their governments. "We are making an appeal for a humanitarian and a political gesture, because people are dying due to lack of aid", he said. On 5 May, the IPU will be holding its annual Assembly in Nairobi, Kenya, which some 1,500 delegates are expected to attend. In Kenya alone 5 million persons have been affected by the famine according to President Mwai Kibaki.

**El Periódico (Spain) - 8 April 2006**

### Every 15 seconds, a girl suffers genital mutilation, says the IPU

To mark the fourth International Day of Zero Tolerance of Female Genital Mutilation, over 40,000 parliamentarians pledged to take political action in consultation with all ...in society in order to inform the electorate about the damage caused by the indefensible practice of female excision, inflicted on a girl every 15 seconds, according to the President of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), Pier Ferdinando Casini.

**La Jornada (Mexico) - 7 February 2006**

### Inter-Parliamentary Union committed against female mutilation

The Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) expressed the commitment of its 40,000 members of parliament to combat female genital mutilation, which between 100 million and 140 million women have already endured. The Organization's President, Mr. Pier Ferdinando Casini, declared that parliamentarians across the world "are determined to take action along with traditional and religious leaders, government agencies and civil society organizations to do away with this practice as soon as possible".

**EFE (Spain) - 3 February 2006**

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The World of Parliaments,  
IPU Quarterly Review is  
an official publication of  
the Inter-Parliamentary  
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Printed at Sadag SA - France  
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