

The World of Parliaments

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Women, quotas and politics

Rwanda, Costa Rica, South Africa, Mozambique... Women are increasingly present on the political scene, especially in parliament and they are determined to make a difference. With the elections in Kuwait where women voted and ran for the first time ever, another milestone in women's political empowerment has been achieved. But women still constitute a mere 16% of parliamentarians worldwide. Can the controversial question of quotas help? Interview with Prof. Drude Dahlerup of Stockholm University.

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Myanmar: the urgent need to pave the way for a transition to democracy

Myanmar, or Burma as it was called until 1989, has been under military rule since 1962 when General Ne Win took power in a coup d'état. It is regularly making headlines in the media, and more often than not owing to its most prominent citizen, 1991 Nobel Peace Prize laureate Aung San Suu Kyi, who has spent much of her life in Myanmar under house arrest. Her party, the National League for Democracy (NLD), won the elections by a large majority which the military regime had organized in 1990. Governmental and non-governmental sources alike recognized that they had been free and fair; however, the military regime has never allowed the parliament thus elected to convene.

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Greater need for a multilateral system

"We need to keep in mind that the United Nations was created to serve the peoples of the world – the first three words of the Charter of the United Nations are 'We the peoples...'." "All of us working at the United Nations thus have to remember that our task is to deal with the real problems in the field and to make a difference for the peoples of the world", said Jan Eliasson, Swedish Foreign Minister and President of the sixtieth session of the United Nations General Assembly. Interview.

PARLIAMENTS AND EMERGENCY IN THE HORN OF AFRICA

"We shall testify within our constituencies to the situation", said British Member of Parliament John Austin, on behalf of the delegation of legislators returning from the north-eastern province of Garissa, Kenya, in May 2006, on the occasion of the 114th IPU Assembly in Nairobi.

(Follow up on page 2)



Photo: IPU/J. Jennings

2004 Nobel Peace Prize laureate Wangari Maathai:

"Legislators should make laws that protect the environment rather than do politics with resources"

Taking the floor at the 114th IPU Assembly, Nobel Peace Prize laureate and Member of the Kenyan Parliament, Prof. Wangari Maathai, said that the environment must be protected. "As parliamentarians, we should adopt laws that protect the environment rather than do politics with our resources. It is one thing to make statements, but it is another thing to demonstrate by action. Action is what will make the difference. We can make all the laws we want. It is what we do that makes a difference. Sometimes, there is a desire to protect the environment, but there are also political interests", said the 2004 Nobel Peace Prize winner, who is also the Goodwill Ambassador for the Congo Basin Forest Ecosystem.

Photo: Josiah Kagika



LEGISLATORS IN THE FIELD

"It would not have been right to visit Nairobi without seeing the suffering being endured in other parts of the country"

The IPU Assembly was held in Nairobi against a backdrop of torrential rain. In contrast, the nomadic populations of the north-eastern part of the country were enduring their third successive year of drought.

A group of parliamentarians from donor countries joined the Deputy Executive Director of UNICEF and her staff on a flight to Garissa to see for themselves some of the effects of the crisis. On their arrival the provincial governor briefed them on the situation before they visited the general hospital. The hospital, which is under-staffed and ill-equipped, was struggling to cope with the influx of patients suffering the effects of malnutrition. Particularly distressing was the sight of infants in the paediatric ward fighting for their lives, cradled in the arms of women who, in many cases, were not their mothers but their grandmothers, who had continued caring for them after the death of their mothers.

The group then traversed parched scrubland to see an emergency feeding center in action. After that, it visited a grain distribution post where people were coming in on foot from many miles away to collect food.

As John Austin, MP, reported to the Assembly, "it would not have been right to visit Nairobi without



French MP, Mrs Geneviève Colot, in Garissa.

seeing the suffering being endured in other parts of the country". Nor was it right that African nurses cared for so many patients in European hospitals when there was a dearth of nursing skills in Africa, or that African vegetables and fruits were in abundant supply in the North when people were starving in the countries of origin.

The parliamentarians pledged to take action with their parliaments and governments to try to expedite assistance to the drought-stricken areas. They also agreed that such visits should become a more regular feature of IPU Assemblies.

...READ IN THE PRESS...

Kenya: What next after IPU Meeting in Nairobi?

With yesterday's closing of the 114th Assembly of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), held over the past week in Nairobi, Kenyans cannot help but retindle their formerly dampened sense of optimism about their MPs. Yes, our parliamentarians have, rather justifiably, been accused of having large appetites for public funds. And yes, popular support for Parliament is steadily weakening. But having hosted our parliamentary colleagues from around the world in the landmark Assembly - the sixth of its kind in Africa in 100 years - we can indeed argue that Kenya would not have been chosen if our Parliament was not up to scratch...It should be recalled that a day before the meeting, IPU President Pier Ferdinando Casini had said IPU would lobby the West to institute faire trade terms for Africa. "It's useless to talk about solidarity while keeping the doors closed to goods from Africa. Providing relief aid to the continent is not enough unless genuine efforts are made to address the structural problem..."

AllAfrica.com - The East African Standard - 13 May 2006

MPs plead for speedy aid for drought-ravaged Africa

The world's lawmakers wrapped up a week-long conference in Kenya pleading with the rich nations to speed up delivery of humanitarian assistance for drought-afflicted regions in Africa, where food shortage is threatening millions. In addition, the 114th Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) said it was unacceptable that some people in world were living well while others, notably in Africa, were suffering as result of problems caused by food shortages..."It is not possible that people continue dying when others live well in other countries," IPU Secretary General Anders Johnsson told reporters at the final press conference there. "The donors have to respect their commitments and affected countries have to implement policies on sustainable food production, develop infrastructure, measures of good governance and an effective fight against corruption," Johnsson said. In addition to drought-ravaged East African regions, many countries in southern and northern Africa have suffered from severe food shortages for several decades. The problems have been exacerbated by recurrent conflict, grinding poverty, poor governance and international trading policies perceived by critics to be unfair.

Agence France Press (AFP) - 12 May 2006

One hundred years ago, Finnish women became the first women in the world to have unrestricted rights both to vote and to stand for parliament

In elections the following year, 19 female MPs were elected and women have continued to play a central role in the nation's politics ever since. A century on, Finland's woman President Tarja Halonen has just been voted into office for a second term and women's representation in parliament stands at a healthy 38%. Meanwhile, many nations in Europe and across the world trail far behind in terms of gender equality...According to Kareen Jabre of the Inter-Parliamentary Union, women's rights can often be boosted as a result of more widespread political upheaval. She cites the examples of Rwanda, Burundi, Iraq and Afghanistan, where new political constitutions drawn up in post-conflict eras have greatly improved women's political status. Rwanda, where quotas are in place, now tops the global table for female parliamentarians with 49% of seats held by women. But, Ms. Jabre said, "there is still a long way to go in most parts of the world, even where women have had the right to vote and be elected for decades".

BBC News - 1 June 2006



From left to right: a UNICEF representative together with Mrs. Rima Salah, UNICEF Deputy Executive Director, Mr. Maalim Mohamed (MP, Kenya), Mr. Terry Leyden (MP, Ireland), and Mr. Alain Destekke (MP, Belgium).

A gesture of solidarity

The 114th IPU Assembly held in Nairobi marked a precedent for the Union: a group of parliamentarians conducted an on-site mission in collaboration with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). The visit to the Province of Garissa, located in the north-east of Kenya, allowed members of the parliamentary mission to see what consequences the drought had had on some 3.5 million men, women and children, whose lives were threatened by malnutrition and a host of accompanying diseases. "It is our intention to report to our parliaments and governments on what we have seen. We shall encourage them to consider their assistance to the drought-stricken areas and, where appropriate, to take emergency steps to expedite relief. We shall also testify within our constituencies to the situation in the areas we visited", said United Kingdom MP, John Austin, speaking on behalf of his colleagues.

UNICEF has requested over US\$ 81 million to take action aimed at saving lives, but only US\$ 27 million have been collected, a third of the required amount. The United Nations agency recalls that over 8.7 million persons are affected in the five countries of the Horn of Africa (Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya and Somalia), of whom 4.5 million are children. Of those, 1.5 million are under-five-year-olds.

In recognizing IPU's efforts in that cause, UNICEF intends to work more closely with the world organization of parliaments to set up emergency programmes aimed at saving lives, but also at finding medium- and long-term solutions to the extreme vulnerability of the rural populations in the region. UNICEF's message to parliaments: the lives of children and the only way of life these rural populations know are today seriously jeopardized in the five countries of the Horn of Africa. It is high time, therefore, to come to their aid.

Solidarity can be shown at the level of parliament and government, but also at the individual level, as demonstrated by the modest contribution made by a handful of individuals to the New Life Home Trust in Nairobi, an orphanage which, for the past twelve years, has been giving care and hope to hundreds of children, many of whom were born with HIV.

As a Kenyan reporter told us on leaving, "the story of the Assembly does not end here. What all of you at IPU have done is important. And it should be continued".

L.B.

WTO Director-General Pascal Lamy meets legislators at *The House of Parliaments*: "A no or a yes to international accords is a bit like an atomic bomb, it limits the margin of involvement".

On 23 June, WTO Director-General, Mr. Pascal Lamy, briefed the Steering Committee of the Parliamentary Conference on the WTO (organized by the IPU and the European Parliament) on the current state of WTO negotiations. Mr. Lamy said that the role of parliamentarians in implementing legislation as a follow-up to commitments made by Member States "clearly makes parliamentarians crucial partners of international trade negotiations and more specifically of the WTO, which is the predominant legislation in world trade, since bilateral trade treaties have to comply with standards which are set in the multilateral system". But the WTO Director-General also said that there were areas where frustrations remained and where improvements should be made. "There is an obvious divergence in the way parliaments deal with international trade. Some parliaments play a determining role in the positions their governments adopt at international negotiations and can call for amending or changing negotiating positions; others do not enjoy such a broad role. Some parliamentarians only step in at the end of the negotiations, delivering either a "no" or a "yes" to international accords. And while that role is extremely powerful, it is a bit like an atomic bomb, it is "either or", and it limits the margin of involvement".



From left to right: Mr. Pascal Lamy, Mr. Anders B. Johnsson, Mr. Enrique Baron Crespo and Mr. Geert Versnick.

WOMEN, QUOTAS AND POLITICS:

"In the mood for trying to do something different"

"There is a mood for trying to do something different. There is a trend, even if it is very controversial", said Prof. Drude Dahlerup, of the University of Stockholm, speaking about quotas and other measures to promote women in politics. Prof. Dahlerup has published the first, global study on the use of quotas in all major regions of the world, entitled *Women, Quotas and Politics* (Routledge 2006). She gives an interview to the *World of Parliaments*.

Q: There is a controversy surrounding the introduction of quotas to give women a better chance of being elected to parliament, even among women. Why?

Drude Dahlerup: The introduction of quotas all over the world is controversial. A large number of countries have introduced quotas, in spite of their controversial nature. There are over 40 countries which have inscribed in their constitution or their legislation some kind of positive measures for women and there are about 50 countries where the political parties have voluntarily introduced quotas or other measures in their own statutes. We have been looking at the discourses, controversies and all kind of rules, because sometimes quotas are merely symbolic. It makes a big difference, for instance, if you have also some kind of sanctions for non-compliance with legislated quota measures. It is also crucial that quota measures be targeted and detailed. For instance, it is important to have rules about the ranking of women candidates on party lists, like in Costa Rica. Because one can have 50% women candidates on a list but if they are at the bottom of the list very few have a chance of being elected.



Q: How do you explain the fact that more and more measures are being adopted?

D.D.: Some countries, like Sweden, use the zipper system, whereby every other candidate on the list is a woman. But I want to make a distinction between fast-track policies and more gradually implemented measures. Some developing countries are coming and overtaking former top-ranking countries. In Scandinavia we used to be alone at the top with 30-40% women in parliament. But in the last couple of years, Rwanda has become number one in the world with 48.8% of women in parliament, while Sweden has 45.3%. Costa Rica is now number three, ahead of Denmark, Finland and Norway. Post-conflict societies - Afghanistan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Iraq, Rwanda, Uganda - started from scratch and today, with all the international recommendations, including from the IPU, one can suddenly change and make leaps in history, something we have never experienced in Europe previously. Costa Rica went from 19% women to 35% in one election, something that we have never achieved in Scandinavia. There is a mood for trying to do something different. There is a trend, even if it is very controversial.

Q: If everybody seems to agree that it is important to have women in politics, why is there resistance when we speak about quotas?

D.D.: I identify four categories of resistance. One is the anti-feminist way of saying that politics is a man's business and that women should stay at home. This is not very interesting. Then there are the post-communist countries which say that they had quotas during the Soviet regime and that they don't want

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Photo AFP

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them again. In fact, they didn't have quotas at the top, where the leaders were men. There is also the liberal opposition, saying that it is a question of merit and not a question of gender. Finally, you have the most interesting one: the feminist opposition, which says that quotas may create a certain amount of stigmatization. The other question is whether there is a sufficient number of women ready to enter into politics. In general, I would say that at the national level there are no problems in getting a sufficient number of women, because in a parliament there are 600 legislators at most. That means that 300 competent women are required, which is not difficult.

Q. What is your response to those who refuse quotas?

D.D.: I am not advocating quotas, I am advocating more women in politics. There are many measures - quotas is one of them - which under certain conditions, can be very efficient. But I can also say that men have been elected on informal quotas for many years. It is much easier for men to become politicians and be elected or re-elected, if they are already there. I would also argue that quotas are a temporary measure.

Q: Could quotas be considered as a form of discrimination against men?

D.D.: No. It would be discrimination if everything was fair, but if the starting point is that everything is not fair since men already have some advantages, then quotas or other measures are compensating the discrimination against women. The most important thing is that parties realize that they are the gatekeepers. It is time they start recruiting women and putting them at the top of the list and not at the bottom. Not to mention the electoral system. Countries have to come up with measures that match their political system. For instance, in countries with a majority system like India, the United Kingdom and the United States, the rate of women's representation is very low: 15% in the United States Congress and 19.5% in the United Kingdom Parliament. That is an embarrassment which is partly due to the electoral system. The question is: how can one have quotas in a majority system and only one candidate for each party? In this kind of system one has to do things differently. Another interesting factor that I would like to add is that today international image is becoming more and more important for countries. To have more women in politics is a symbol of being more democratic. That was not the case 15 years ago.

Q: How do you explain the fact that Swedish women have obtained parity in government and such a high ranking in parliament?

D.D.: This has been a very slow development. Women have come on to the labour market and they are just as educated as men. Sweden is a secular society and it is based on social-democratic ethics. In Scandinavia it took women between 70 and 80 years to achieve what they have achieved. (See also website www.quotaproject.org).

"We believe that equal participation of men and women is crucial to truly deepening democracy"

Uruguayan Senator Monica Xavier was elected President of the IPU's Coordinating Committee of Women Parliamentarians in Nairobi. In her first interview, Senator Xavier shares her priorities with *The World of Parliaments*.



Uruguayan Senator Monica Xavier, President of the IPU Coordinating Committee of Women Parliamentarians (left) and Kenyan MP, Beth Mugo, Assistant Minister of Education and President of the Meeting of Women Parliamentarians in Nairobi.

Q: As President of IPU's Coordinating Committee of Women Parliamentarians, what will your priorities be?

Sen. Monica Xavier: My first priority will be to strengthen the promotion of women in politics – an area in which the IPU is a leader. This task can be achieved by establishing networks of women in politics in each country and between parliaments. In this regard, globalization has given us opportunities we must not bypass, but also disadvantages which we must take up as challenges and overcome together. Nowadays there is virtually no theme (trafficking in women and children, HIV/AIDS, domestic violence) that can be addressed without drawing on the experiences of other countries. Hence

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the key role IPU plays in linking us together. Second, I believe that as Latin American women, there is still insufficient South-South exchange. It is obvious that owing to our origins and our countries of destination – for cultural and economic reasons inter alia – our ties to countries of the North are greater than with the South. Achieving better and broader interrelation and knowledge are huge challenges and it is through inter- and multicultural dialogue that women will be able to help generate a culture of peace in a very decisive manner.

Q: You mentioned a culture of peace, how can that be achieved?

M.X.: Encouraging society and political representatives to engage in processes to learn about cultural differences and accept the different values shared by nations will go a long way to achieving peace and understanding among nations. That is why it is crucial to support communication processes in the cultural endeavours that reflect our rich and varied differences and similarities in this globalized world. Some more modest measures include combating sexism in advertisements, gender stereotypes in the media and, in particular, discriminatory stereotypes against cultures of the South. Our hemisphere's children must be introduced to society with its regional idiosyncrasies, while recognizing through games and formal education that its rights and duties are equal to those in any part of the world, irrespective of capability, gender status, ethnicity or religion.

Q: How would you describe the situation of women parliamentarians in Latin America?

M.X.: Women are under-represented in parliaments in Latin America. The global average of 16.6 per cent is surpassed only by four percentage points in our region (20.7%). On average, women obtained the right to vote and be elected on the continent in the 1940s but the dictatorships which several of our countries endured in the 1970s made the processes of integrating women in political positions difficult. The Legislature is no exception since this under-representation can also be observed in the executive branch and the top echelons of the judicial branch. Nowadays women participate freely in these three spheres but they do not reach top positions as they come up against a "glass ceiling"- an expression which I have adopted as my own. Indeed, in theory, nothing stands in the way of our climbing the social ladder but in practice, such progress is forbidden. In this regard, the recent elections held early this year showed a rise in the number of women elected. That

was achieved through affirmative action measures - quotas - which together with other positive results, helped increase average female participation globally.

Q: What message would you like to send to your male colleagues to foster greater cooperation between men and women in politics?

M.X.: We believe that equal participation of men and women is crucial to truly deepening democracy. Half of the population cannot be left outside the important decision-making arenas. This is particularly true for parliament, which is the institution that represents the diverse interests of society. If it is true, as I believe, that gender equality is an objective we must meet, then it is clear that we still have a long way to go in terms of female representation in parliamentary systems, particularly in Latin America. Notwithstanding their low numbers, women parliamentarians from different countries who are in contact with us and who collaborate with social organizations make their presence more visible. The challenge consists of increasing numbers, promoting gender-sensitive legislation and monitoring enforcement by the Executive. In this task of deepening democracy we must all, women and men, bring our different opinions and experiences to bear.

Q: What can IPU do to further promote women's participation in parliament?

M.X.: A lot of things! Continue to promote affirmative action measures and conduct strict monitoring and evaluation of results, encourage parliaments to ratify international instruments and promote parliamentary action to repeal discriminatory laws, foster exchanges on various issues by way of seminars, panel discussions, etc. It can also promote debates and legislation on the democratization of political parties that mainstream affirmative action measures within their structures, discuss social policies that liberate women in part from their social role of reproduction and family life and mitigate the effects of the double burden on their chances of participating in politics. The IPU can promote anti-discrimination policies on the labour market so that women may gain economic and social autonomy and lead a full political life, promote proactive policies against domestic violence, which is a hurdle to women playing leading roles outside the home. Finally, parliaments and the IPU should lead by example in their technical and administrative structures and regulations that promote gender parity in day-to-day life.

ROLE AND OBLIGATIONS OF PARLIAMENTS

Stephen Lewis, United Nations Envoy:

"AIDS is the single greatest scourge in human history"

During the IPU Assembly held in Nairobi, the organization of world parliaments held a panel on HIV/AIDS and children, in cooperation with UNICEF and UNAIDS. At a press conference, United Nations Secretary-General's Special Envoy for AIDS in Africa, Stephen Lewis, pressed legislators to empower women and "to look at model legislation and to move it from country to country to make sure that it is enshrined, implemented and enforced".

Mr. Lewis asked members of parliament "to go home with a recognition that AIDS is the single greatest scourge in human history. There has never been anything like it before", he said, adding that the two areas of enormous neglect as far as AIDS is concerned in Africa are children and women. "Regarding children, priorities have to be set, such as: treatment for infected children, prevention of mother-to-child transmission, policies to respond to AIDS orphans and prevention among adults and teenagers". Finally "the parliamentarians of Africa and beyond have to take far more seriously the interventions on behalf of women, because what happens to women is tied to children and what is happening to women is a nightmare".

The United Nations Secretary-General's Special Envoy for AIDS in Africa said that "there has to be legislation on sexual violence and rape, on property and inheritance rights, on quotas for parliamentary representation and on the elimination of user fees since they hamper women's access. The failure of the



international community generally to respond to women has never been more dramatic than in the face of the pandemic. That is what I want to leave with the parliamentarians and I genuinely believe they are capable of making a major difference".

Referring to Africa, he said that the situation is still horrendous and the number of people dying unnecessarily is heart-breaking. "Africa cannot handle the costs alone. The ongoing failure of the international community is a travesty. I believe that parliamentarians have a tremendous obligation. It is not just a role, it is an obligation to build on positive initiatives from various countries. Kenya did a fascinating analysis two or three years ago of its various laws relating to AIDS and much of the gender dimension filtered through that. Education and legislation go hand in hand. But the gender dimension is the absolutely crucial question", he insisted.

"EMPOWERING FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES TO FACE THE AIDS PANDEMIC"

UNICEF Deputy Executive Director, Mrs. Rima Salah, said that local, national and international communities cannot wait any longer if they want to combat the pandemic in an efficient way. "Leadership and political commitment are important. But we all have a role to play. It is very urgent that we play our role in empowering families and communities to really face the AIDS pandemic, change customs, practices and attitudes", she said.

Mrs. Salah insisted that capacity-building of families and communities must be implemented. Access to services such as basic health, education and protection services is essential. For the UNICEF Executive Director, changing the status of women is also a priority. "I just met with Mrs. Graça Machel in Mozambique. She said that we cannot stop the pandemic if we do not change the status of women and if we do not really increase empowerment programmes for women".

Last but not least, the role of the media is also important, "because they reach out to every community and every family", concluded Mrs. Salah.

...READ IN THE PRESS...

Lack of direction in AIDS fight "a shame" says United Nations

United Nations Secretary General's Special Envoy for HIV/AIDS in Africa, Stephen Lewis, said that the lack of direction at the global level in the fight against the disease is "a shame". He added that insufficient funds was one of the reasons behind the inaction to curb AIDS. But "what is shameful", he said, was the lack of direction at all levels, which is a real obstacle to responding to the pandemic. Africa cannot finance the fight against AIDS on its own, although it must contribute its own share of resources", stated Lewis during a panel discussion held during the IPU Assembly in Nairobi. "The Global Fund to fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria has recently approved a new set of funding but there is no money for that. The same countries that pledged to increase funds have reneged on their promises", he said.

Spanish Press Agency (EFE) - 10 May 2006

HUMAN RIGHTS OF PARLIAMENTARIANS

Myanmar: the urgent need to pave the way for a transition to democracy

The military regime set up in January 1993 a National Convention to draft a new constitution for which it fixed a rigid framework of six pre-determined objectives and 104 principles, consecrating the leading role of the army. In 1995 NLD delegates walked out of the Convention as it did not in any way allow for free and democratic debate. By 1996, when the Convention was adjourned, less than 3% of the delegates were actually elected representatives and none of them was from the NLD. In May 2004, the Convention was reconvened, but none of the obstacles to a free and democratic debate have been removed.

It is not surprising that ever since 1990 this situation has been of deep concern to the Inter-Parliamentary Union. As the world organization of parliaments striving to strengthen democracy worldwide, the IPU has condemned the failure of the authorities to convene parliament and it has expressed its view that the National Convention, in its current form, is nothing but an attempt to prolong military dictatorship.

But it is not only the institutional level that has been of deep concern to the IPU. Indeed, in the wake of the 1990 elections, scores of parliamentarians-elect were arrested and detained and many were arbitrarily sentenced under draconian laws. Many more have been forced to resign as parliamentarians-elect and from the NLD. Today, 13 parliamentarians-elect remain in prison, some of whom are said to be in a poor state of health. This is the case of Than Nyein and May Win Myint. Both were arrested in October 1997 and two months later sentenced to seven years' hard labour for holding anti-government rallies.

In November 2004, they were given an additional 60-day prison term and in February 2006, their prison term was extended for a further year under the State Protection Law. Both are reportedly not receiving the medical treatment they require. There are, moreover, regular reports of ill-treatment of detainees and parliamentarians-elect have been sentenced for passing information about such ill-treatment to the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar. Thus, Saw Naing Naing and Zaw Myint Maung, both arrested in October 1990 and sentenced respectively to 25 and 10 years' imprisonment for holding a secret meeting to form a provisional government, were given an additional seven-year sentence in 1996 for attempting to pass information about prison conditions to the United Nations Special Rapporteur.

Parliamentarians-elect, like anyone else engaging in an attempt to carry out a political activity, risk arrest or re-arrest and detention at any time. Thus, in March 2003, following an attack on Aung San Suu Kyi and her supporters - widely believed to have been orchestrated by the military junta - she and scores of NLD supporters

and parliamentarians-elect were arrested or re-arrested. Aung San Suu Kyi and 17 NLD senior officials were later placed under "protective custody", and Aung San Suu Kyi has since remained under house arrest. The glimmer of hope that appeared when talks between the military regime and the NLD started in October 2000 evaporated after those events, and the people of Myanmar are no closer to a democratic future.

The IPU and its Committee on the Human Rights of Parliamentarians have not only consistently urged the authorities to release all parliamentarians-elect who remain in prison, but have also called on the authorities to engage in genuine talks with the NLD to prepare the way for the transition to a democratic government to which the people of Myanmar aspire.

The IPU has been calling on its Member Parliaments to take strong action in support of democracy in Myanmar and has compiled information on parliamentary initiatives that have been taken to this end. The IPU has, in particular, encouraged the ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Myanmar Caucus to continue to strengthen its important work, which resulted in Myanmar abstaining from assuming the chairmanship of ASEAN in 2006. Clearly, for the IPU, parliaments all over the world should make every effort and press their governments to ensure that the country embarks on a process which will finally enable the people of Myanmar to exercise their inalienable right to participate in their government, as enshrined in Article 21 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.



1991 Nobel Peace Prize laureate,
Mrs. Aung San Suu Kyi

Photo AFP

IPU-UNITED NATIONS COOPERATION

Interview with Mr. Jan Eliasson

"Our task is to deal with the real problems in the field and to make a difference for the peoples of the world"

A few weeks before becoming Swedish Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr. Jan Eliasson, President of the sixtieth session of the United Nations General Assembly, gave *The World of Parliaments* and the IPU E-Bulletin his views on different topics, among them the cooperation between the United Nations and the IPU.

Q: You have made several efforts to implement the decisions of the World Summit Outcome. Which do you feel have been the most important achievements?

Jan Eliasson: In December last year, the United Nations General Assembly decided to establish the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF), which will ensure a more predictable and timely United Nations response to humanitarian emergencies. More than US\$ 250 million have already been pledged to this Fund, which was launched on 9 March 2006. Another important decision was to set up the Peacebuilding Commission. Through this mechanism, the United Nations will be better equipped to support countries emerging from conflict in their transition to peace. On 15 March this year, the General Assembly created a new human rights mechanism, the Human Rights Council. This was a historical decision. The Council signals a new beginning for the promotion and protection of human rights around the world. Candidates are to document their own human rights records and face the risk of expulsion if they violate their pledges while serving on the Council.

Q.: You often say that it is important for the United Nations to bring the realities of our world into the meeting rooms. What is your view of how this can be achieved?

J.E.: We need to keep in mind that the United Nations was created to serve the peoples of the world – the first three words of the Charter of the



United Nations are “We the peoples...”. All of us working at the United Nations thus have to remember that our task is to deal with the real problems in the field and to make a difference for the peoples of the world. There are different ways in which we can bring in the realities to the meeting rooms of the United Nations. One way would be to have more interactive debates on themes of global relevance with participants who can contribute their expert knowledge from the field. Another way would be to strengthen our relationships with relevant external partners – parliaments and civil society, including non-governmental organizations. As parliamentarians, we can deliver the messages of our constituents. Similarly, we can play an important role in raising public awareness about the work of the United Nations.

Q.: How would you describe the main challenges ahead for the United Nations?

J.E.: First and foremost is the task of restoring and strengthening belief in the multilateral system. In today’s world, there has never been a stronger need for a multilateral system to provide global solutions to global problems such as poverty, communicable diseases, environmental threats, acts of terrorism, the spread of weapons of mass destruction and organized crime. Much is at stake – the alternatives to multilateralism are unilateralism or separate groups of countries facing each other. It is therefore essential to make the United Nations a stronger and more effective actor on the world scene.

Q: At the United Nations World Summit last year, heads of State and government called for enhanced cooperation between the UN and the IPU in the implementation of the Millennium Declaration and in effective UN reform. What are your thoughts on how this political commitment can be put into practice?

J.E.: It is necessary to strengthen cooperation between the United Nations and national and

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regional parliaments, including through the IPU, within the existing structures. The United Nations stands to gain from a more active role of parliamentarians in the implementation of United Nations decisions in general. We need to find better ways to enhance the exchange of information between the United Nations and parliamentary bodies, such as the IPU. Parliamentarians can contribute to the United Nations reform efforts in many different ways. Apart from exercising their legislative responsibilities, they can tell their constituents back home what difference the United Nations makes in their daily lives and why multilateralism matters. They can also make contributions on the operational level. One important area where parliamentarians can play a significant role is in peacebuilding. Countries emerging from conflict need help to build capacity and institutions in many areas, including in democratic governance. Their experience will be invaluable in the international effort to rebuild war-torn societies.

...READ IN THE PRESS...

114th IPU Assembly - British delegates to meet Iran MPs

Two members of the British IPU delegation said they had organized a closed-door meeting with delegates from Iran. But Lord Morris of Aberavon and Lord Joplin declined to reveal the agenda, only hinting that the issue of threats by the United States to attack Iran over its controversial nuclear programme was likely to feature in the talks.

The Daily Nation (Kenya) - 11 May 2006

IPU ADVISORY GROUP TO HELP MAINSTREAM INTERNATIONAL HIV/AIDS COMMITMENTS



From left to right: Mrs. Kathleen Cravero (UNDP), Mrs. Anda Filip (IPU), Senator Margareth Mensah-Williams (Namibia), Mrs. Purnima Mane (UNAIDS), and Mr. Marcel van Soest (World AIDS Campaign).

In her address to the United Nations High-Level Meeting on HIV/AIDS on 2 June, the Vice President of the IPU Executive Committee, Senator Margareth Mensah-Williams of Namibia, pledged that the IPU would work continuously to mobilize stronger support from the world's parliamentary community in the fight against the pandemic.

The important role of parliaments in this process is in fact also reflected in the Political Declaration on HIV/AIDS adopted by the United Nations High-Level Meeting at the end of its session. Through this Declaration, States have committed themselves to taking action to promote gender equality, the empowerment of women and the protection of girls, respect for the full rights of people living with HIV/AIDS, greater protection for all vulnerable groups, provision of the full range of HIV preventive measures, and the full engagement of the private sector and civil society, including people living with HIV, in the response effort.

The IPU address was made at the a Parliamentary Caucus held in New York on 1 June, and was organized by IPU in collaboration with UNAIDS and UNDP. The meeting, attended by some 60 MPs - many members of specialized HIV/AIDS parliamentary committees - stressed the need to raise greater awareness within parliaments about HIV/AIDS, mobilize the necessary political response, and enhance dialogue and interaction between parliaments and grassroots HIV/AIDS organizations. The Caucus said it would recommend that the IPU establish an advisory group that would seek to help mainstream international HIV/AIDS commitments and policies throughout the IPU's 146 Member Parliaments. The group would also help further develop the growing relationship between the IPU and UNAIDS.

IPU-UNITED STATES CONGRESS PANEL DISCUSSION ON ASSISTING FLEDGLING PARLIAMENTS IN POST-CONFLICT AND TRANSITIONAL SOCIETIES

At a meeting held on Capitol Hill under the aegis of the IPU and the House Democracy Assistance Commission (HDAC), IPU President Pier Ferdinando Casini joined with HDAC Chairman, Representative David Dreier, and HDAC Ranking Member, Representative David Price, in underscoring the need for timely and sustained support by the international community for strengthening parliamentary institutions in countries emerging from crisis and conflict.

The meeting, entitled *Building strong and effective parliaments in post-conflict societies: lessons learned and the road ahead*, was attended by members of

Congress, senior advisers, and representatives from key United States institutions such as the State Department, USAID, the National Democratic Institution (NDI), the International Republican Institute (IRI), the International Foundation for Election System (IFES), the Asia Foundation and several others. Panellists included the United States Archivist, Honorable Allen Weinstein, and Deputy Assistant Administrator of USAID, Mr. Paul Bonacelli.

In his remarks, President Casini referred to IPU's recent study, *Parliament and Democracy in the 21st Century: A guide to good practice*, to illustrate how democracy cannot exist without a viable parliament that meets the basic standards of transparency and accountability. All presenters agreed that in post-conflict countries especially, but not exclusively, parliaments encounter significant difficulties in performing their functions due to lack of infrastructure, training, political deadlock, faulty electoral processes, and many other factors. International assistance to these parliaments is therefore key to helping restore democracy. However, the presenters found that there is no one model of democracy that should be followed and that assistance must be sensitive to local circumstances. They also agreed that assistance should be seen as a two-way learning experience between providers and recipients.

During his visit to Washington from 7 to 9 June, President Casini also met with Senator Richard Lugar, Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Representatives Adam Putnam and Thomas Reynolds, members of the Republican leadership of the House of Representatives, Congressman Alcee Hastings, President of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, as well as with other leading members of Congress. The key theme of their discussion was the need and modalities for re-engagement by the US Congress in the work of the IPU.



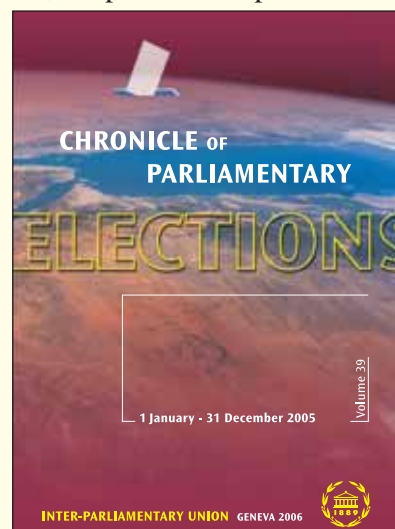
From left to right: Mr. P. Bonacelli, Mr. P.F. Casini, Mr. D. Dreier, Mr. A. Weinstein and IPU Secretary General, Mr. A.B. Johnson.

Recent IPU publications

39TH CHRONICLE OF PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS

The 39th edition of the Chronicle of Parliamentary Elections reports on national parliamentary elections that were held in 39 countries for 47 parliamentary chambers in 2005. These elections saw some 328,752,500 people electing a total of 7,845 persons to represent them in their national parliaments. Of these, approximated 20% were women, confirming the upward trend witnessed in recent years. Argentina and Zimbabwe were in the lead with 42% female representation in Argentina's Upper House, and 40% female elected members in Zimbabwe's Upper House.

The Chronicle, which is published in English and French, can be ordered from the IPU Secretariat. Price: CHF 35.- (CHF 24.50 for IPU members).



AFGHANISTAN: HELPING PARLIAMENT STRENGTHEN DEMOCRACY



Photo: Japanese House of Councillors

The IPU and UNDP organized a Study Visit for members and senior staff of the Afghan Parliament to the Japanese Diet. The Afghan delegation was received by the Speaker of the House of Councillors, Mrs. Chikage Oogi.

Since late 2003 the IPU has been working with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in assisting the National Assembly of Afghanistan to establish itself as a democratic institution, enabling it to carry out its role as a representative, open and transparent branch of government. In addition to ongoing training of parliamentary staff, the IPU and the UNDP have also focused on strengthening the capacities of the members of parliament.

They jointly organized a Conference on Effective Legislative-Executive Relations in Kabul from 15 to 17 April 2006. This conference was attended by Members of the Meshrano Jirga (House of Elders - Upper House) and key senior staff of the relevant government ministries, including representatives of the State Ministry of Parliamentary Affairs.

During the three-day event, participants joined resource persons from Bangladesh, Canada, India, Sri Lanka, the United Nations and the IPU in exploring in-depth ways and means of enhancing cooperation between parliament and the Executive.

The IPU and UNDP also organized a Study Visit for members and senior staff of the Afghan Parliament to the Japanese National Diet in June 2006.

During this visit, participants were able to engage their Japanese counterparts on issues related to the overall functioning of parliament. Areas of focus included decision-making through parliaments, separation of powers between parliament and government, bicameralism, electoral systems and party politics. Discussion were also held on the legislative process, including parliamentary involvement in the budget process. Participants also looked at how the Japanese National Diet tackled the issue of parliamentary oversight of the Executive in order to promote transparency and accountability and fight corruption. They examined the facilities available to members including research, ICT (Information and Communication Technology) as well as ways and means of mainstreaming gender parity and human rights into parliamentary procedure and practice.

"The Afghan Parliament needs to become acquainted with other parliaments of the world by becoming a member of the IPU"

Interview with the Speaker of the Meshrano Jirga (House of Elders) of Afghanistan, Prof. Sebghatollah Mojaddedi, who is also President of the National Commission for Peace and Reconciliation

Q: For the first time in 30 years Afghanistan has a parliament. What are the main challenges facing this institution and what can the international community do to assist it?

Prof. Sebghatollah Mojaddedi: As you are aware, due to a 30-year long gap in the activities of a democratic parliament in Afghanistan, the current parliament has to face many challenges and problems. Current problems facing the Afghan Parliament may be summarized as follows: inappropriate building and inadequate space for Parliament to meet the needs of the general sitting, committee sessions and general secretariats. The Upper House has formed 16 committees and the Lower House has set up 18 committees. In the present parliament building there are only 12 rooms for committee sessions. Thus, a total of 34 committees from both Houses are using these rooms on a tight schedule, which has a negative impact on the work of the committees. In the Afghan Parliament there are separate secretariats for both Houses, which have 13 departments altogether.

Q: Can you give us concrete examples?

Prof. S.A.-M.: We are facing serious problems in terms of accommodating the secretariat staff owing to insufficient office space. In most parliaments around the world, members are provided with their own offices furnished with modern IT equipment, but in Afghanistan no member is provided with such facilities. The Upper House of the Afghan National Assembly has formed eight groups. One of the problems we

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



Photo IPU/M. Chungong

The Speaker of the Meshrano Jirga of Afghanistan, Prof. Sebgatollah Mojaddedi

have is that we have no office space to accommodate those groups. With a few rare exceptions members of the Afghan Parliament have no parliamentary knowledge and experience. Therefore, vocational training in Afghanistan and abroad is urgently needed. In our opinion, the IPU can be of great assistance to parliamentarians in the area of capacity-building. As you know, modern democratic parliaments can exist when they are supported by active and strong secretariats to provide legislative, administrative and logistical services. Therefore, promoting capacity-building for parliamentary staff is also needed. We believe that the IPU can provide assistance in this regard. For the purpose of upgrading parliamentary activities, the Afghan Parliament needs to become acquainted with other parliaments of the world by becoming a member of the IPU. The general secretariats of the Afghan Parliament should also seek membership with the Association of Secretaries General of Parliaments. We think that the IPU could be helpful in this respect.

Q: Parliaments have an important role to play in post-conflict reconciliation. How do you see this process working in Afghanistan?

Prof. S. A-M: Afghanistan has undergone decades of war and turmoil. During those three decades of conflict, especially during the civil war, the parties directly or indirectly involved became used to solving any kind of disagreement through tension and hostilities. Intolerance of others' opinions has become part of the tradition of those who were engaged in

the fighting. One of the main achievements of the elected Parliament of Afghanistan is the resolution of differences through debate in a friendly and democratic manner. It is clear that the current Parliament of Afghanistan is composed of members with different views. There is a hope that members of the Afghan Parliament, by putting the national interest before their individual interests, will be able to strengthen the process of peace and national reconciliation. It is worth mentioning that the National Commission for Peace and Reconciliation, established one and a half years ago and which I chair, along with the Afghan National Assembly, is a useful instrument for speeding up the process of national reconciliation. Thus far, approximately 1,800 opposition elements have joined the peace process in Afghanistan.

Q: The IPU promotes partnership between men and women in politics. What steps is your parliament taking in this direction and is there anything the IPU can do to offer its support?

Prof. S. A-M: In relation to the gender issue and equal participation of women in running the day-to-day activities of parliament, the Afghan Parliament has achieved satisfactory results; participation of women in the Afghan Parliament is visible. Women represent approximately 27 per cent of the Afghan National Assembly, while, six of the 16 committees in the Upper House are chaired by female members.

Exploratory mission to the Parliament of the Republic of the Congo

For much of the 1990's the Republic of the Congo was embroiled in conflict and civil war. This considerably hindered the parliament's ability to build institutional experience and tradition.

In an attempt to fill this gap and in response to a request from the parliamentary authorities of the country, the IPU dispatched in April 2006 a needs-assessment mission to Brazzaville. The mission was organized in cooperation with the French National Assembly and was intended to review the functioning of the parliament, identify bottlenecks and needs and propose solutions that could be implemented inter alia with external support.

The mission held wide-ranging discussions with members and staff of both the Senate and National Assembly. It observed that the multifarious difficulties facing the parliament included organizational lapses such as the lack of autonomy over human resource management within parliament. There is no real parliamentary service and staff are seconded on loan from the civil service and the offices of some Bureau

members. This situation impedes the parliament's ability to function independently of the Executive. The problem is compounded by the fact that each election leads to changes in the Bureaux of each House and consequential changes in staff. Institutional memory is thus lost.

The Parliament is also in dire need of equipment and space. Currently, standing committees share meeting rooms, many staff members work in corridors and parliamentarians have to rent office space outside parliament.

The mission has proposed a series of activities designed to alleviate these difficulties and help parliament to better perform its functions and thus increase its ability to contribute to effective governance. Success in accomplishing these aims will depend on the commitment of the Congolese Parliament in updating its working procedures and in particular putting in place a full-fledged parliamentary service. Support from the international community will also be crucial for the parliament to improve its long-term ability to carry out its representative, law-making and oversight functions.

IPU to train team of stenotypists for Equatorial Guinea's House of Representatives of the People

On 6 March 2006, IPU launched a programme to train stenotypists with the assistance of the Africa Script company. The two-year training programme is designed to equip the parliament of Equatorial Guinea with a team of qualified professionals who will be able to produce the transcripts of parliamentary debates. These records are indispensable for parliamentarians to carry out their mandate and for the public to be kept aware of parliamentary activities, thereby fostering transparency – a key element of democracy.

At this early stage, the trainees have been busy learning the phonetic writing method of stenotyping in Spanish. To date, over 80 per cent of trainees have already mastered this writing method. They are also urged to broaden their general knowledge base and progressively increase their speed in preparation for stenotyping phonetic recording.

The training programme has been well-received and according to the trainees, "it should make an impact on parliamentary activities, and also on the professional development of the staff concerned".

Parliamentary developments

BULGARIA

On 30 March 2006, the Parliament adopted constitutional amendments designed to strengthen the country's judicial system and limit parliamentary immunity. Following the amendments, Parliament has the ability to remove the Attorney General and members of the Supreme Court of Appeal and the Supreme Administrative Court, including the Chief Magistrate, by a two-thirds vote in case of grave violations and failure to carry out their functions. Meanwhile, the Attorney General may now ask for parliamentary immunity to be lifted for "all" crimes, not just for "grave crimes committed in flagrante delicto", as was previously the case. The amendments on parliamentary immunity follow recent allegations of paedophilia and misuse of State funds by members of parliament.

IRAQ

The newly-elected Council of Representatives, which had been adjourned immediately after

its first session on 16 March 2006, reconvened on 22 April 2006 and elected Mr. Mahmoud Al-Mashhadani as its new Speaker. On the same day, the Council re-elected Mr. Jalal Talabani as President of the Republic, who then appointed Mr. Jawad Al-Maliki, former Deputy Speaker of the Transitional National Assembly, as Prime Minister. On 20 May 2006, the first permanent government since the fall of President Saddam Hussein was approved by Parliament and sworn in.

NEPAL

Following a wave of street protests, King Gyanendra, who had assumed absolute direct power over the kingdom on 1 February 2005, agreed to reinstate the House of Representatives, the Lower House of the Nepalese Parliament on 24 April 2006. The House had been dissolved on 22 May 2002 in order to hold early parliamentary elections, which were then postponed indefinitely. Consequently, the country had not had a



The first session of the reinstated House of Representatives, held on 28 April 2006.

functioning parliament as the Nepalese Constitution stipulates that the Upper House of the Nepalese Parliament, the National Assembly, cannot be convened without the House of Representatives.

The reinstated House of Representatives held its first session on 28 April 2006. On 13 May 2006, it elected Mr. Subash Chandra Nemwang of the Communist Party of Nepal as the new Speaker, replacing Mr. Tara Nath Ranabhat, who had resigned on 26 April 2006 over his role during the absence of parliament. On 18 May 2006, it unanimously passed a nine-point proclamation on the sovereignty of the Nepalese people. This proclamation stipulates that the House is vested with all legislative functions of the State while executive rights are assumed by the Council of Ministers (cabinet), which is accountable to the House of Representatives. The proclamation further reduces the King's power, by vesting the House with the right to make laws related to the succession to the throne and revoking the Privy Council (Raj Parishad), one of the King's advisory bodies, which had been active in political affairs and had advised the King to take the direct power over the kingdom in February 2005.

The reinstatement of the House of Representatives thus enables the National Assembly to meet with its remaining 18 members, whose mandate is due to expire in July 2007.

NIGERIA

On 16 May 2006, the Senate rejected proposed constitutional

amendments that would have allowed the country's President and State Governors to seek a third term in office. To be adopted, the amendments required the approval of a two-thirds majority in both Houses of Parliament and in State assemblies.

SERBIA AND MONTENEGRO

On 21 May 2006, the Republic of Montenegro voted by referendum for independence from its State Union with Serbia. The State Union had been formed in March 2003 under the EU-brokered Belgrade Agreement of March 2002 as the successor State to the former Yugoslavia. With a high voter turnout of 86 per cent, the final results in the referendum registered 55.5 per cent of votes in favour of independence, narrowly surpassing the required majority of 55 per cent. Based on the Constitutional Charter of the State Union of Serbia and Montenegro, Serbia will become the successor of the State Union, while Montenegro will have to seek international recognition as an independent State.

Following the referendum, the Montenegrin Assembly formally declared independence from the State Union with Serbia on 3 June 2006. On 5 June, the Serbian Parliament recognized Serbia to be the successor of the State Union, at a session that was boycotted by opposition members. The Assembly of Serbia and Montenegro, which was the parliamentary institution of the State Union, will thus cease to function shortly.

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