

The World of Parliaments

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Interview with IPU President, Mr. Pier Ferdinando Casini

"In the Middle East, parliamentary diplomacy needs to keep the momentum of dialogue going"

Q: Mr. President, the IPU promotes parliamentary diplomacy. Recently you were in Iran, Jordan and Lebanon. In Iran, you were received by President Ahmadinejad, the Speaker of Parliament, Mr. Haddad-Adel, the Secretary of the Guardian Council, Ayatollah Jannati, and by Foreign Minister Mottaki. What was your message to your Iranian hosts?

P.F.C.: I urged them to respect the United Nations Security Council resolution on suspension of their uranium enrichment programme, stressing if they did,

Iran could play a leading role in bringing stability to the region. I said that dialogue and negotiation were the only possible avenues through which Iran and other countries could reach an agreement and solve their differences. I added that the Parliament had played an important role since it was elected to represent the people. I also mentioned Israel's right to exist. Our Iranian counterparts reiterated their commitment to pursuing a course of dialogue and negotiations to resolve the nuclear issue, adding that the bottom line of any agreement must contain recognition of their right to enrich uranium for the purpose of nuclear energy. They said they were willing to provide guarantees that enriched uranium would be used exclusively for peaceful purposes and that Iran would submit to an inspection and monitoring regime.

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"The implementation of resolution 1701 should be accompanied by a political process leading to the strengthening of the State of Lebanon and the cessation of external interference", said the IPU President, Pier Ferdinando Casini, visiting Lebanon with the Secretary General, Anders B. Johnsson.



FOR THE FIRST TIME, UK HOUSE OF LORDS HAS A SPEAKER

For the first time in history, the United Kingdom House of Lords has a Speaker. On 28 June 2006, Rt. Hon. Baroness Hayman was elected as the first Lord Speaker of the House of Lords, by a secret ballot of all members for a five-year term. On 4 July, she replaced a government-appointed Lord Chancellor as head of the Judiciary. "This is a tremendously exciting new role for me because there is an awful lot of history to sitting on the Woolsack, and it is a great privilege. Obviously I am not doing it as the Lord Chancellor, but there has never been a

woman in this role before and that is an enormous privilege", said Lady Hayman in an interview to *The House Magazine*.

The primary role of the Lord Speaker is to preside over the proceedings in the House of Lords. The Lord Speaker is also expected to act as a non-political spokesperson for the House at home and abroad. A former Minister of State at the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, Baroness Hayman said that there was an important job to be done as external ambassador for the House.

INTERVIEW WITH PRESIDENT CASINI

Q: What were the highlights of your visit to Amman and Beirut?

P.F.C.: We were in Amman on 11 September for the inauguration of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean (PAM). The establishment of this new Assembly is the manifestation of the shared belief around the Mediterranean in dialogue as a preferred means of resolving differences. It represented the culmination of a 15-year-long process, during which the IPU had facilitated political dialogue among members of parliament on security and cooperation issues in the Mediterranean. The Assembly has furthermore endorsed a statement by its President, Mr. Abdelwahed Radi, calling on the Israeli authorities to release the Speaker and several members of the Palestinian Legislative Council who were recently imprisoned. In Lebanon, we met the Prime Minister, Mr. Fouad Siniora. We agreed that implementation of resolution 1701 should be accompanied by a political process leading to the strengthening of the State of Lebanon and the cessation of external interference, as well as the withdrawal of Israeli forces once all Lebanese prisoners and Israeli citizens were released, and that a solution should be found to the problem of the Sheba Farms.

Q: The Amman meeting coincided with the commemoration of the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks. What was your message?

P.F.C.: We wanted to express our solidarity with the victims of those terrorist attacks and with the American people. I also made a call for dialogue to build trust among peoples, cultures and religions and as a means of settling conflicts and differences.

Q: Regarding the crisis facing the Middle East, what can the world organization of parliaments do?

P.F.C.: Parliamentary diplomacy is a new force to be reckoned with in the world today. Added to traditional government diplomacy operating at the multilateral and bilateral levels is the emerging presence of parliaments. Parliamentary diplomacy is important because governments come and go but parliaments remain. And also because in parliament both the majority and the opposition are represented. Similarly, the delegations to IPU Assemblies are composed of majority and opposition members of parliament of the country, which makes for a remarkably rich exchange at the international level. In the Middle East, parliamentary diplomacy needs to keep the momentum of dialogue going.

Q: IPU supports reconciliation processes, particularly in Africa. What is the status exactly?

P.F.C.: We were in Nairobi for our last Assembly in May earlier this year. In several African countries there is a problem of accessing parliamentary democracy. We support national reconciliation processes and the formation of parties represented on a political basis to replace the tradition of tribal or racial confrontations that still exist in certain countries. We have invited the major political organizations

– the Christian Democrat International and the International Socialist Organization inter alia – to participate henceforth in the work of the IPU as observers. Opening the door to major political organizations founded on an ideological basis means making the institution of parliament more dynamic, particularly in those parliaments where democracy is being implanted. Parliament should not be a meeting point for different tribes, but a melting pot for different ideas when a country's future is at stake. It should also foster dialogue on the basis of participation with all political institutions.

Q: Let's talk about the fight against terrorism. How to combat terrorism while respecting the rights of citizens?

P.F.C.: This is the major challenge of the third millennium. In theory, democracy should be able to defend itself without resorting to extraordinary measures. I am proud that my country has fought and won the battle against terrorism without having to resort to any special laws. But in certain circumstances, citizens must understand that reducing their rights a little means heightening their security. The rights affecting the private lives of citizens are fundamental, but if the fact of reducing a little our right to privacy means more effective and efficient defence and national security, then I think it's a sacrifice that citizens must make. However, if liberty must be compromised to better guarantee security, that is unacceptable. Genuine peace can only be based on liberty and citizens' rights.

Q: What can be done to ensure that the rights of parliamentarians are better respected?

P.F.C.: The Committee on the Human Rights of Parliamentarians is one of the IPU's most important features. As we saw at our Assembly in Nairobi, certain political problems can sometimes be overcome to uphold a higher principle: the right of parliamentarians to have their rights safeguarded. Our Committee, which also has close ties with the United Nations, must be strengthened. The battle for ensuring respect for the rights of prosecuted members of parliament should be waged not only in Geneva, but also by parliaments in the major capitals of the world.

Q: Can political parties do more to foster gender partnership in politics?

P.F.C.: Parties can do more but institutional rules are also useless sometimes. For instance, the fact that it is mandatory to include women in delegations to IPU Assemblies is a concrete measure for promoting the presence of women. If no woman is included in a delegation, the voting rights of that delegation are somewhat diminished. This is a very important principle that has led to the establishment of quotas in certain parliaments. If the truth be told, I believe that quotas should be avoided because they run the risk of becoming an exclusive domain. But it is probably equally true that, in certain circumstances, when women participate in politics only sporadically, quotas could provide an effective temporary solution.

INAUGURAL SESSION OF THE PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY OF THE MEDITERRANEAN

The IPU organized the Inaugural Session of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean (PAM) in Amman on 10 and 11 September 2006, at the invitation of the Parliament of Jordan. The Inaugural Ceremony took place under the patronage of His Majesty, King Abdullah II.

The Speaker of the Jordanian House of Representatives, Mr. A. Al-Majali, presided over the Session which proceeded to elect Mr. Abdelwahed Radi, Speaker of the House of Representatives of Morocco, as President of the PAM. "The Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean marks an important step because there are several problems to tackle. We are concerned with peace, security, stability in the Middle East and in particular a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, but also questions related to democracy and human rights, and any issue likely to prompt the men and women of the Mediterranean to start a new era in our relations. We would like to place much greater emphasis on what unites us rather than on what divides us", said Mr. Radi, who was elected to preside over the PAM for a two-year term of office.

The Assembly also decided to locate its headquarters in Valletta, Malta, and hold, in principle, the PAM's Second Session at its new headquarters in November 2007.



IPU President, Mr. Pier Ferdinando Casini, taking the floor at the PAM.

Editorial

A chance IPU must take



IPU President, Mr. Pier Ferdinando Casini, was received by Mr. Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, President of the Islamic Republic of Iran, in Teheran, in September 2006.

The President and Secretary General of the IPU recently visited the Middle East. They met with high-level Iranian and Lebanese officials and proposed IPU's services as a forum of dialogue on the occasion of the inter-parliamentary assemblies, particularly those held in Geneva. Wishful thinking or realistic proposal?

At a time when conflicts are raging or threaten to erupt in many regions of the world, parliamentary diplomacy far-removed from the media spotlights may prove useful - for those States whose governments have reached a standstill and whose people are living in a state of anxiety - to emerge from tense political situations that erode their daily existence and jeopardize their future.

IPU Assemblies bring together legislators from some 150 parliaments the world over. They represent a forum that is conducive to bilateral meetings between countries in conflict. And the setting is well-suited, since the world organization of parliaments counts among its Members almost every parliament of these countries that have direct stake in securing a peaceful solution in these situations.

The world organization of parliaments is not in a position to end conflicts, but it can play a role in encouraging informal talks between officials likely to convince their governments to make peace or prevent war.

L.B.

HUMAN RIGHTS

"Torture is unacceptable under any circumstances"

"If we are to protect democracy in our countries, we need to guarantee respect for certain principles which are non-negotiable, and the prohibition of torture is one of them. Torture is unacceptable under any circumstances and in any situation", said legislators from more than 40 countries, meeting at The House of Parliaments in September 2006.

"As parliamentarians, we must ensure that the necessary procedural safeguards are put in place to prevent torture at all times. We pledge to do everything within our power to ensure that our parliaments, if they have not yet done so, ratify the Convention against Torture (and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment)

and its Optional Protocol which provides for visiting mechanisms to prisons and detention centres. We must also adopt the necessary implementing laws. We must ensure that torture is defined as a crime in our criminal codes, that the appropriate punishment is meted out to torturers and that testimony obtained under duress cannot be used as evidence in court", said legislators at the end of a three-day seminar, organized by the IPU, the International Commission of Jurists (ICJ) and the Association for the Prevention of Torture (APT).

Following the seminar, several participants gave *The World of Parliaments* their impressions.

"Members of parliament should preserve the integrity of the Judiciary"

Mrs. Louise Arbour,
former Prosecutor at the International Tribunal for former Yugoslavia and Rwanda and currently United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

Q: What do you expect from legislators ?

L.A.: Members of parliament should preserve the integrity of the Judiciary and pay attention to general questions, but without interfering in specific cases. When they make laws, they must respect and optimize freedoms and fundamental rights. They must also take heed of any distortions that may occur within the Judiciary.

Q: Are you going to work more closely with parliamentarians ?

L.A.: We have undertaken a few joint initiatives and I hope that my Office will continue along those lines. Historically, we have attempted to advance human rights before the courts. We have worked a great deal with the judicial systems and we must capitalize on this power that parliamentarians possess. While they do make laws there are also voices of opposition among them. It is a select forum and we should become increasingly involved with members of parliament.



Photo: IPU/L. Bañin

"Corruption is a universal problem"

Mrs. Eva Joly,
former magistrate and currently Special Adviser to the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD)

Q : You said that there is North-South corruption. What do you mean exactly?

E.J.: Corruption is a universal problem. Many Western Europeans feel that corruption takes place

in Kenya or in southern African States, and that it is not something that concerns Switzerland, Norway, Germany or France. For me, that is far-removed from reality. Our western firms quoted on the stock markets are sometimes, even often, riddled with corruption. Contracts are awarded through local corruption



Photo: IPU/L. Bañin

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channels. This state of affairs leads to significant losses for developing countries because the economic conditions are not optimal, a situation that often works to the advantage of western firms.

Q: What can legislators do?

E.J.: It is important to establish a solid and independent Judiciary with competent, not corrupt judges. Members of parliament are the only ones who can do that and who can appeal to donors for bilateral aid. Legislators can appeal to development banks for aid to themselves set up this important institution - the Judiciary - which is absolutely crucial for development.

Q: Do magistrates have the means to combat corruption?

E.J.: Given the current state of justice in the world, I would say no. But at the same time, I think that unless we establish a strong Judiciary, we stand little chance of being able to contain corruption. It is an inadequate albeit inevitable step.

"Ensure that institutions for human rights and prevention of torture are put in place"

Mrs. Martine Brunschwig-Graf, Swiss member of parliament and President of the Association for the Prevention of Torture

Q: What can parliamentarians do to ensure that justice is served?

M.B.G.: Parliamentarians should pass laws that respect fundamental rights. Regarding their oversight function, they should pay attention and listen. Some parliaments provide for the right of petition. They can therefore receive information from average citizens who feel they have been wronged. Efforts should be made to ensure that the necessary national institutions – for human

Developing countries need to establish institutions, including the Judiciary. Justice holds an important place because the other institutions depend on it. Without a functional justice system, commercial contracts and work contracts cannot operate, no more than respect for human rights, which is imperative".

Q: Many people don't believe any more in justice. What do you respond?

E.J.: The solution lies in three words: education, awareness and punishment. "But to do that, political will is needed". Is there still cause for hope? "Hope lies in some developing countries where persons endowed with remarkable qualities set up institutions. There are small successes and Norway's activities on the bilateral level consist precisely of identifying those persons who carry the torch of hope in their countries and helping them to deal with the pressures they have to endure".

rights or the prevention of torture - are put in place.

Q : What can be done to ensure that the separation of powers is respected?

M.B.G.: There is a line of tension that will never be broken surrounding the separation of powers between the judicial branch and the mandate of having to hold to scrutiny policies implemented in all spheres, including the sphere of justice. Some parliaments, like the Swiss parliament, appoint judges, and must therefore ensure that these judges are above reproach.



Photo: PVL-Bain

"The situation in many prisons is inhuman"

Mr. Ira Robbins, Professor at the Washington College of Law

Q: What is your message to the legislators ?

Prof. I. R. : My message to parliamentarians is to look at the private prisons, to look at corrections, and to look at sentencing, which is too narrow. Criminal justice policy has to be comprehensive. Every decision that is made by one hand affects the other. For example, at the legislative stage, if parliamentarians enact a mandatory minimum

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sentence for a particular crime, let's say five years for a low-level drug crime, it has ramifications throughout the system, including at the correctional level. It all has to be looked at as a comprehensive package of laws that affect justice and not a little bandage in small corners of the system for what we see as a little problem.

Q: Are you worried about the situation of prisons in today's world?

I.R.: Yes and no. The situation in many prisons is inhuman. We, as a world society, incarcerate too many people. I don't think that we have gone to the heart of the question, because we look for politically

expedient solutions. Am I worried in the long term? Not as long as people talk about the issue, such as at the seminar that we are having here this week. To the extent that people are talking and asking good questions and thinking important thoughts, whether or not they agree with the speaker, then I think that over time, dialogue can lead to some reasoned enlightenment on these issues.



Photo: Iria Robbins

"Human rights inextricably linked to democracy"

Mr. Roberto Garretón, human rights defence attorney (Chile), former United Nations Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Democratic Republic of the Congo

Q: What message would you like to send to parliamentarians?

R.G.: The question of human rights is inextricably linked to democracy. It is a political issue, although many would prefer for it to be a humanitarian one, and an important one for the society we would like to construct. The role of parliamentarians is crucial. A Spanish philosopher once said that either law serves life or it serves no purpose at all. I believe that parliament either serves life or no purpose at all. If parliament only legislates on repressive measures, controls the nation or relieves the State of its duty to uphold economic and social rights, we will never build a democratic society.

Q: What does parliament need to bear in mind when passing a law?

R.G.: It needs to ask itself whether the law in question is in favour of or against human rights. If it is in favour, I vote for it and if it is not, I vote against it. Or I table amendments so that it goes in favour. For example, criminal liability. This is a highly important issue because whatever age is set, if a minor commits a crime, someone may request that the age for criminal liability be lowered. Or if a violent crime is committed, someone may call for a return of the death penalty. What matters most

is the process of cultural development of human rights as a building block of social order and in this regard, there has been remarkable progress.

Q: What are you saying exactly?

R.G.: What did human rights defenders have in terms of international tools in 1945? Nothing. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights has brought with it a host of international instruments designed to protect human rights and reduce the power of the State. But in the economic and social spheres, we need a strong State, one with resources, one that can foster a solid economy. The human rights culture, which started in 1945, attained great heights until what we Chileans refer to as Tuesday 11 September II. Because the first Tuesday 11 September took place in Chile in 1973, and then came 11 September 2001. Many great nations started to question the human rights culture. And if we look at the themes under discussion at this seminar, the regression is evident. The trend, for example, was to lessen the influence of military tribunals so that persons may be tried through due process in "natural" courts established for that purpose and strides were being made in that area. Some countries got rid of them altogether in peace time, such as Belgium, and there are other countries, such as France, where military tribunals are presided over today by civilian judges who have received special training.



Photo: IJUL, Bain

IPU AND INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

"Implementation of commitments on the least developed countries"

"The Inter-Parliamentary Union shares the view of this conference that progress in the least developed countries (LDCs) is occurring, but at too slow a pace", said the Deputy Speaker of the Parliament of Tanzania, Mrs. Anne S. Makinda, addressing the High-level Meeting of the United Nations General Assembly, in September, on behalf of the world organization of parliaments.

She mentioned that "what is needed is both a qualitative and quantitative leap forward if we are to raise living standards and lower inequalities in countries where the vast majority of people still go without basic necessities and are simply denied the opportunity to make a decent living, send their children to school, fight disease, live in peace and in a clean and safe environment, and participate in decision-making".

As a member of parliament from Tanzania, one of the 50 LDCs, Mrs. Makinda explained how, at the parliamentary level, "we can advance the Brussels Programme of Action in the next five years and beyond". For the world organization of parliaments, the crux of the matter is that the LDCs will only be able to mobilize their own human, natural, and financial resources for development, and make the best of external support, when their principal decision-making organ - parliament - assumes its rightful role in the development process.

Mrs. Makinda went on to say that in spite of some progress in recent years – with more regular and fairer elections, and an overall improvement in the performance of parliaments – LDC parliaments are still very far from being able to exercise effective oversight of government action as well as their legislative and budgetary roles. Distortions in the political process have thus affected the economic and social spheres, explaining at least in part why income poverty remains basically the same as five years ago in most LDCs, in spite of higher economic growth.

"Parliaments in many LDCs continue to be faced with a series of grave difficulties among which is the overbearing attitude of the executive branch, sometimes backed by the military. Indeed, many LDC parliaments continue to endure the legacy of rubber stamping. They are also plagued by inefficient practices and working methods and lack of cooperation with civil society. There is also a disconnect between the people and their representatives and the latter are not always seen as articulating the interests of the former. In addition, independent media organizations, properly acquainted with parliamentary procedures, are scarce, making it



Photo: United Nations

difficult to have a balanced and fair view of parliamentary proceedings", said Mrs. Makinda.

Underlying all this is a lack of resources and skills to empower parliaments and their members. Resources are critically needed to acquaint newly-elected parliamentarians with the rudiments of their job, hire qualified support staff for constituency and legislative offices, build infrastructure like parliamentary libraries and research services, and enable parliaments to broadcast what goes on within their walls to the public outside. In this connection, the potential offered by the new information and communication technologies still needs to be harnessed with a view to greater efficiency.

The international community needs to increase its technical assistance to parliaments as a share of total funding. Donors must be more focused on the critical role of parliaments in the further development of the LDCs and in the achievement of the goals of the Brussels Programme. It is crucial that funds earmarked for building the capacities of parliaments be given to and managed directly by them, thus facilitating their transition toward greater independence from the executive branch. This does not preclude the need to ensure accountable management of such resources.

Mrs. Makinda also stressed that "we should not underestimate the importance of inter-parliamentary cooperation at the regional level, which in some cases is already bearing fruits. We need to help parliaments learn from one another, compare experiences, and exchange information on best legislative practices and policies. Parliaments should also be seen increasingly as forums that can assist in peace-building and conflict resolution in those LDCs that are either prone to or are emerging from conflict. She concluded her speech by pledging that the IPU would continue to support LDC parliaments with its expertise and by mobilizing additional resources in partnership with the United Nations.

SESSION OF PARLIAMENTARY CONFERENCE ON WTO IN DECEMBER

Members of the Steering Committee of the Parliamentary Conference on the World Trade Organization (WTO), urged the members of the WTO to demonstrate strong political will to resume trade negotiations without further delay. The Parliamentary Conference on the WTO brings together members of parliament who specialize in trade issues and is convened by the IPU and the European Parliament. Meeting at The House of Parliaments, in September, the Committee noted that the decision taken in July this year to suspend the WTO negotiations has effectively dashed all hopes for the Doha Round to be concluded by the end of 2006. This situation has been a wake-up call for political decision-makers and legislators call upon the United States, the European Union, the G20 members of developing countries, and others to play a constructive role in achieving this objective and to deliver an outcome that is centred on development. The Parliamentary Conference will meet in Geneva on 1 and 2 December 2006 to assess the benefits of the WTO negotiations to all countries and how they meet their development objectives.

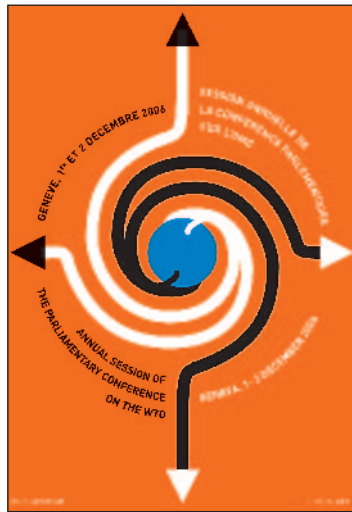


Photo R.J.J. Ballin

JAPAN RESPONDS TO IPU APPEAL FOR AFRICA

The IPU thanked the Japanese delegation to the IPU for taking action to follow up on the call that was made at the 114th IPU Assembly in Nairobi for urgent food relief to combat drought-induced famine and poverty in Africa. The Japanese Government has decided to provide assistance to the Horn of Africa region, and specifically 550 million Japanese yen (approximately US\$ 4.79 million) will go to Kenya to buy an estimated 7,407 tonnes of rice and 330 million Japanese yen (US\$ 2.88) will be given to Uganda to buy an estimated 4,226 tonnes of rice. Both aid packages are expected to be provided through the World Food Programme (WFP).

IN MEMORIAM

A former IPU President, Sir Michael Marshall, has passed away

Sir Michael Marshall passed away on 6th September 2006. President of the IPU Council from 1991 to 1994 and honorary life president of the world organization of parliaments, this Conservative Member of the United Kingdom' Parliament "saw that MPs could study together, regardless of party allegiance, race or creed", wrote Times on Line, in its 18 September 2006 edition. Sir Michael was born in Sheffield and educated at Bradfield College, Harvard and Stanford universities. He was the first MP with a Harvard MBA to be elected. A frequent traveller, Sir Michael continued to lead an active life after Westminster, despite being diagnosed with cancer eight years ago. A popular speaker, he addressed no fewer than 33 legislatures, lectured in management studies and gave talks on board cruise ships. The IPU sent his wife Caroline, and his family, sincere condolences and expressed its profound sympathy on his passing.

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IPU assistance sought to forge consensus between SLFP, UNP

The Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), a worldwide organization of parliamentarians working for peace and co-operation with its Secretariat based in Geneva, has been invited to assist in forging a consensus among political parties in the south, especially between the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP), the main constituent of the United Peoples Freedom Alliance (UPFA) government and the main opposition United National Party (UNP), said Mr. Mahinda Samarasinghe, Disaster Manager Minister to the press in Colombo Sunday. Currently the leaders of SLFP and UNP have been holding discussions to forge a consensus on six specific matters including the ethnic crisis. Two rounds of talks between these parties were already held and the third round of talks, expected to be the final one, is to be held on October 3 in the Jayawardhanapura parliamentary complex building, sources said. Mr. Mahinda Samarasinghe said he handed over the invitation of the government to IPU Secretary General during his visit abroad with the President to extend his assistance to facilitate the process between the two parties.

TamilNet - 01.10.06

Inter-Parliamentary Union to facilitate dialogue

The Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) has established contacts to facilitate dialogue between Iranian and US officials on the nuclear issue. The IPU would like to organize informal discussions from 16 to 18 October in Geneva. "We would like to make ourselves useful. We have excellent relations and we can facilitate dialogue", IPU Secretary General, Anders Johnsson, told ATS, confirming information contained in an article carried in the Tribune de Genève. Mr. Johnsson has recently returned from a trip to Iran where he and IPU President, the Italian Pier Ferdinando Casini, met President Ahmadinejad in Tehran along with other leaders of the Islamic Republic. "We proposed to facilitate dialogue to all our Iranian counterparts and they said: we are interested", said Johnsson. "Everyone in Tehran, President Ahmadinejad included, wants to reach an agreement through negotiation", the IPU chief added.

Agence Télégraphique suisse (ATS) - 14.09.06

Release Palestinian legislators now

Israel has abducted and imprisoned 33 members of the Palestinian Legislative Council including the Speaker and five ministers, among which is Deputy Prime Minister. We consider the imprisonment of democratically elected representatives of the Palestinian Authority as an attack on the fundamental principles of democracy. The Palestinian legislative elections in January 2006 were declared fair by international observers. Following the

elections, Jimmy Carter said: «Among the 62 elections that have been monitored by us at the Carter Centre, these are among the best in portraying the will of the people.»

We support the demand by the Inter-Parliamentary Union that the Palestinian parliamentarians be released immediately. Signed by the following MPs: Norman Baker, Roger Berry, Peter Bottomley, Richard Burden, Martin Caton, Katy Clark, Michael Connarty, Jeremy Corbyn, David Drew, Andrew George, Neil Gerrard, Helen Goodman, Paul Holmes, Mike Hancock, Kelvin Hopkins, Stewart Hosie, Lynne Jones, Christine McCafferty, Kerry McCarthy, John McDonnell, Shahid Malik, Angus Robertson, Clare Short, Marsha Singh, Phyllis Starkey, Mike Weir and Derek Wyatt.

Guardian Unlimited - 13 September 2006

Casini: Iran must respect United Nations demands

Pier Ferdinando Casini urged President Ahmadinejad to respect the United Nations resolution on the suspension of its uranium enrichment programme. Casini is currently visiting Tehran in his capacity as President of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU). The former Speaker of the Italian Chamber of Deputies also defended Israel's right to exist and stressed that if Iran respects the Security Council resolution, it could play a major role in the region in the future.

Yahoo Italia - ANSA - 11.09.06

Drilon elected to head IPU committee

Senate President Franklin Drilon was elected on Tuesday, 11 July, as President of the Committee on the Human Rights of Parliamentarians of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), the international body that investigates cases of human rights violations concerning lawmakers throughout the world. Drilon was elected to the post during the 114th session of the IPU human rights committee. He is the first Filipino legislator to be elected to the position since the IPU was established in 1889. "It is a privilege to be elected President of the IPU Committee on the Human Rights of Parliamentarians. I intend to give my best efforts to the worldwide campaign for the protection of members of the legislature. Respect for human rights, not only of members of parliament, but also of the ordinary citizen, is a basic pillar of democracy. We must all do our part to uphold civil and human rights", Drilon said. The IPU's Committee on the Human Rights of Parliamentarians was established in 1976 and holds regular meetings four times a year. "It was created to ensure that the human rights of the world's parliamentary community - composed of more than 40,000 members - are respected", he added.

The Manila Bulletin Online - 12.07.06

TECHNICAL CO-OPERATION UPDATE ¹

The IPU runs a technical cooperation programme to assist parliaments in building up their capacity to discharge their constitutional responsibilities. Latest news.

Ecuador:

Working for modernization of the Parliament

At the request of the Speaker of the National Congress of Ecuador, the IPU dispatched a needs assessment mission to Quito from 19 to 23 June 2006. The mission identified areas where the international community could provide assistance to the Congress in the short-medium- and long-term. A project is being designed on the basis of the mission's findings. It will include activities to build the awareness and capacity of both members and staff of the Congress as well as to modernize the procedures of the institution. Streamlining human resource management and developing outreach, including through ICTs, will also be areas of focus.

Iraq:

Creating a conducive environment for a solid and democratic legislature

The IPU and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) convened a technical meeting in Amman, Jordan on 10 and 11 July 2006. The meeting was attended by members and staff of the Iraqi parliament as well as international experts and IPU and UNDP staff members. Participants reviewed the needs of the Iraqi Parliament. These needs are being addressed in a project under design. It will include activities to assist members of parliament to carry out their legislative functions and to modernize decision-making processes and support parliamentary committees in carrying out their mandate effectively. The project is

also expected to contribute to the effectiveness of the secretariat by building the capacity of the parliamentary service, improving systems and providing equipment and information resources. Implementation will begin in the near future. In parallel, the IPU and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights organized a two-day training programme at IPU Headquarters for members of the Parliament's Human Rights Committee. The session was intended to familiarize participants with the role and functions of a parliament, especially its human rights committee, in respect of the defence and promotion of human rights.

African parliamentarians: Role and priorities in promoting sustainable development

The IPU and the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR) organized a seminar in Yaoundé, Cameroon, from 26 to 28 June 2006. This seminar was hosted by the National Assembly of Cameroon and was the second in a series of seminars launched by the IPU and UNITAR under their Capacity-building Initiative for Parliamentarians on Sustainable Development. During the three-day seminar, some 100 members and staff from 20 parliaments discussed extensively the issue of parliamentary action in environmental management and more specifically drought, desertification and water management in the region. They further identified priorities which included the development of an African parliamentary network on environment, the harmonization of environment-related laws at the regional level and the promotion of peace on the African continent. Participants identified armed conflicts as a major impediment to the enforcement of laws and a direct cause of environmental degradation.



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

PARLIAMENTARY DEVELOPMENTS

BULGARIA

On 30 August 2006, the National Assembly adopted amendments to the Penal Code, stipulating a prison sentence of two to three years for persons attempting to sell their vote. People who vote several times will also be fined the equivalent of between 250 and 1,000 euros. The National Assembly rejected proposed amendments to introduce compulsory voting.

ITALY

A referendum held on 25 and 26 June 2006 rejected proposed constitutional amendments by 61.7 per cent of voters. In all, 53.6 per cent of the 43 million eligible voters took part in the referendum, the highest turnout for a referendum in the past ten years. The amendments, which had been approved by Parliament in November 2005, would have transformed the Senate into a federal body and reduced presidential powers in favour of the prime minister (see Issue N°20, February 2006). They would also have given Italy's 20 regions full autonomy in the areas of health, schools and local police. Opponents had argued that such measures would threaten national unity.

JAPAN

On 7 June 2006, the House of Councillors unanimously passed amendments to the Electoral Law allowing Japanese nationals living overseas to vote for constituency candidates. Previous amendments in 1998 had allowed Japanese nationals overseas to vote for candidates in the proportional representation part of Japan's mixed electoral system. However, overseas voting for constituency candidates was not permitted at that time, on the grounds that conveying information on candidates to citizens overseas would be too difficult. The 2006 amendments to the Electoral Law followed a decision by the Supreme Court in September 2005, which ruled such a restriction on the voting rights of citizens overseas to be unconstitutional. The revised law will first be applied to the elections to renew half of the membership of the House of Councillors, due to take place in 2007.

KUWAIT

On 17 July 2006, the National Assembly adopted an electoral reform bill reducing the number of constituencies from 25 to 5. Ten members will be elected from each constituency, instead of two as was previously done. Disputes over the electoral reform had triggered early elections in June 2006.

MAURITANIA

A referendum held on 25 June 2006 approved amendments to the 1991 Constitution by 96 per cent of votes. Over 76 per cent of the nearly 1 million registered voters cast their ballots. The revised constitution limits the president to a maximum of two consecutive 5-year terms of office, and fixes the maximum age of candidates at 75. It also specifies that these provisions can not be changed in the future. Parliamentary elections will be held on 19 November 2006 for the National Assembly and on 21 January 2007 for the

Senate. Presidential elections, scheduled for 11 March 2007, should end the country's transitional period following the bloodless coup of 3 August 2005, (see Issue N°19 November 2005).

MONTENEGRO

On 19 July 2006, the Parliament of the newly independent Republic of Montenegro adopted new parliamentary standing orders. They provide for a post of Deputy Speaker, to be filled from an opposition party member. While the proposal to elect the Deputy Speaker from members of ethnic minorities was rejected, the new standing orders allow members of ethnic minorities to address parliament in their own language.

Parliamentary elections were held on 10 September 2006. Based on the stipulation that there should be one parliamentarian for every 6,000 voters, the statutory number of members of parliament increased from 75 to 81, five of whom are to be elected from the ethnic Albanian community.

NEPAL

On 25 August 2006, a draft interim constitution comprising 172 articles was published. Once it is promulgated, the House of Representatives which had been reinstated in April 2006 following widespread protests against the King, will be dissolved. It provides for a Constituent Assembly, composed of a total of 225 members: ten each from the nine autonomous republic states and 125 directly elected members (one for every 200,000 persons). The Constituent Assembly shall be tasked with drafting a new constitution within a year.

NIGERIA

On 15 June 2006, President Olusegun Obasanjo signed into law the Electoral Act 2006. The new electoral law limits election expenses. The maximum amount for a candidate for the House of Representative is set at 10 million Nigerian naira (approximately 60,000 euros); and at 20 million naira (120,000 euros) for a senatorial candidate. It also prohibits individuals or entities from donating more than 1 million naira (6 000 euros) to any single candidate.

The law reinforces the powers of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), which is now empowered to appoint its secretary, fix election dates and introduce penalties for election-related offences. The new electoral law will be used for the first time in parliamentary and presidential elections scheduled for April 2007.

UNITED KINGDOM

On 4 July 2006, Baroness Hayman became the first ever Lord Speaker of the House of Lords. The elections, contested by nine candidates, were held on 28 June 2006. Baroness Hayman, a former Labour minister of health, was elected for a period of five years with 263 of the 581 valid votes.

WOMEN IN THE ARAB WORLD GET ORGANIZED

"In Kuwait, women are breaking down barriers"

Mrs. Rola Dashti holds a PhD in Population Economics from John Hopkins University (USA). Elected Chairman of the Kuwait Economic Society (first woman to chair the society since its establishment in 1970), she is also a member of the executive committee of Young Arab Leaders (Kuwait Chapter). President of the Women's Network in Kuwait, Mrs. Dashti ran for the elections which took place in Kuwait last July. She explained to *The World of Parliaments* why no woman was elected to parliament. Interviews

Q: Why did you decide to stand for election to parliament?

Rola Dashti: As a woman activist who has been fighting for years to grant women political rights, there was the issue of defining democracy in Kuwait and advancing it in the region with women's involvement in public life. It was our main political goal. Having women in parliament was the second step for me. One of the purposes of my candidature was to encourage women who are capable to come forward and to be engaged in the political process.

Q: What difficulties did you face?

R.D.: First of all the short period for campaigning - 33 days - was challenging. The second thing was the negative cultural and media attitude towards women in politics. The fact that they said: "this woman does not know politics; it is her first time; she has to run a couple of times until she gets in; no woman will win", made an impact. Because the more you say that no woman will win, the more it will influence the voters and affect the voting process in terms of voting for a woman. People think: why should I waste my vote? Then there are the ideological differences. The patriarchal and traditional conservative and extremist Islamists don't see a role for women in political life. They were an obstacle in terms of discouraging their women from voting for a woman,



Mrs. Rola Dashti (in white) campaigning for election to parliament.

because their role is not in the political process, they said. There were also false rumours, untruths and allegations against women candidates and the attacks on their banners, publications and posters. Some women lacked training and there was also political corruption in terms of vote-buying, which also affected women in taking up this big challenge.

Q: What next for the women in Kuwait and in the region?

R.D.: We do think that women will be part of the political process and will be elected to parliament, because this is the social dynamic we are working towards. On 25 November, there will be elections in Bahrain and we will reinforce our support network. I will go to Bahrain with a group of people to assist the women candidates, to share our experiences and to eliminate some of the negative experiences we went through, so they can overcome or be ready for them. The more we unite as a network of women in the region, the more quickly we will advance. In Kuwait, women are breaking down barriers. Some positive things have come out of the elections. The turnout of women voters was very high, comparable to that of men and the number of women who ran was unexpectedly high. The experience transcended different ideological and social backgrounds. Women brought to the campaign a gender dimension and issues important to them, and forced men to adopt them.

Conference for women in decision-making positions in the Gulf Cooperation Council States

Although the percentage of women in parliament in the GCC States is one of the lowest in the world, awareness-raising and mobilization campaigns have been stepped up in recent years with an ever increasing number of initiatives and events on the issue of women in politics. Despite the results of the latest elections in Kuwait where no woman candidate was elected to parliament, women continue to apply pressure and all eyes are now turned towards Bahrain's forthcoming elections in November. In preparation for these elections and in order to keep the momentum going, women in decision-making positions in the GCC States - ministers, parliamentarians, candidates and researchers - met in Manama in July 2006 for 2 days of debates. Organized by the Shura Council of Bahrain and the IPU, women from Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar and Saudi Arabia debated the challenges faced in running for election as well as mechanisms that could promote women's participation in politics.

Mobilization of Algerian women in view of the forthcoming elections

The Algerian Parliament, with the support of the United Nations Development Programme (UNPD) and the IPU, organized a meeting of Algerian women parliamentarians to discuss mechanisms to promote a more balanced participation of men and women in politics. In order to benefit from the experience of neighbouring countries, close to 40 women parliamentarians from seven countries of the Euro-Mediterranean area were also invited to attend the two-day meeting. During the debates, participants discussed the role of women in politics, particularly in the Arab world, and ways and means of strengthening their involvement in political life. The following themes were covered: the opportunities and challenges of political representation facing Arab women, participation of Algerian women in the political arena and experiences of other countries, mechanisms to promote women's participation in politics and the role of political parties.