

# The World of Parliaments

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Parliamentarians who speak out against abuse and promote human rights in their own countries may do so at great risk. For 30 years now, the IPU Committee on the Human Rights of Parliamentarians has been defending the human rights of legislators all over the world.

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#### **The Conference of New or Restored Democracies: the challenges ahead**

The International Conference of New or Restored Democracies (ICNRD) held its sixth session in Qatar. It is faced with two major questions: what place should parliaments and civil society have in a movement that was purely governmental at its outset? What capacity does it require to follow-up on the plans of action that are regularly adopted at its conferences?

## **Mrs. Anne-Marie Lizin, President of the Belgian Senate:**

**"Parity must be the goal for each one of us"**

Ms. Anne-Marie Lizin is the first woman to preside over the Belgian Senate. Prior to taking up that position, she was a member of the European Parliament and a member of the Belgian Lower House. Opening the meeting of parliamentary gender committees, convened by the IPU at *The House of Parliaments*, she explained the importance of establishing committees on gender issues and elaborated on how women are struggling to achieve parity. Interview on page 2.



Photo IPUH/Sigardo

## **SUCCESS OF PARLIAMENTARY TV CHANNELS PROVES INTEREST IN PARLIAMENTARY ACTIVITIES**

Public interest and the considerable media coverage of the debates among the three hopefuls to be nominated socialist candidate for the forthcoming presidential elections in France, broadcast by two French parliamentary channels, *Public Sénat* and *La Chaîne Parlementaire*, is sufficient proof that the country's political leadership needs to be closer to the people. There is a need to close the gap between citizens and their representatives, at all political levels. The participants at the Geneva Conference therefore stressed the importance of providing more information and increasing coverage of parliamentary activities.

See pages 3-4-5.



Photo Italian Chamber of Deputies

The Office of the Global Centre for ICT in Parliament was inaugurated in Rome by the IPU President, Mr. Pier Ferdinando Casini, the Speaker of the Egyptian People's Assembly, Mr. Ahmed Fathy Sorour, and the Italian Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mrs. Patrizia Sentinelli. See page 6

## **INTERVIEW WITH MRS. ANNE-MARIE LIZIN, PRESIDENT OF THE BELGIAN SENATE:**

**Q: Despite your tight agenda, you came to Geneva...**

**Anne-Marie Lizin:** I was particularly interested in this seminar. First of all, I congratulate the IPU for compiling these statistics. For the first time, we have these splendid charts with figures of women in parliament and I suggest that all women use them in their countries. Today, there are 60 parliaments with a committee on gender issues. That means that women in parliament are trying to work together to overcome differences between political parties. All of us know what local politics means and that it is not easy to overcome differences, but it is very important to try and do so. There is a positive trend towards the creation of a special mechanism for achieving equality between men and women or for improving the situation of women.

**Q: Should political parties be more involved in this issue?**

**A.-M. L.:** Political parties are very important. We have to press for change at the local and parliamentary levels so that we can show that women in politics are doing something different. At least we can share a common position: that men and women are equal. In these committees, women and men legislators can address issues such as quotas or parity. In Belgium and France there is talk now about parity. It was first directed to participation in lists of candidates at all levels of election. It was not easy, because parity is a sensitive issue in any parliament, but it must be the goal for each one of us. The crux of the problem is the power within parliament. Parliaments that want to be powerful can do so, at least immediately after an election, when a majority is needed to form a government. And women legislators who want to play their role can do so. This is the way to change the mentality in a country for the future.

**Q: Why is it important to have more women in parliament?**

**A.M.L.:** Because they will reflect on and propose laws along the lines of equality, which is very important for the advancement of society. Laws on violence against women are an innovative measure in parliaments. Such laws penalize violence against women and create a sense – within the police and the justice ministry – that domestic violence cannot go unpunished. This is a novelty in Europe and in other countries. Other examples include combating female genital mutilation

and promoting the rights of women migrants in wealthy countries.

**Q: Can tradition be a barrier to women's empowerment?**

**A.M.L.:** In some cases, tradition underlies the difficulties encountered and justifications advanced for differentiating between men and women. Often, it is used as a powerful tool to justify weakening women's positions. Nowadays, in the 21st century, there is no longer a man anywhere who does not know that his wife is his equal. Yet some men pretend not to know that, saying that God said this or that, citing such and such a book or referring to some practice or the other. Everywhere men know that we are their equals and those are just delaying tactics to put off the time when they will lose a bit of their power.

**Q: Do we need to work closer with traditional and religious leaders?**

**A.M.L.:** Yes, everyone needs to be sensitized, including traditional establishments, religious leaders, kings and traditional leaders. We have to convince them that their girl children need to overcome illiteracy. The role of religious institutions is important because four centuries ago in Europe and in other parts of the world still today, religious institutions were afraid of losing their domination and ability to provide guidance – which are elements of revealed religions, and therefore not subject to question at a first glance. One must be allowed to question them while respecting each other's choice. Religion is a personal choice and not something that should be imposed.

**Q: In western countries, the presence of women in positions of power has been virtually non-existent. That is changing today with the arrival on the scene of Ségolène Royal, Nancy Pelosi, Hillary Clinton, Angela Merkel and yourself. How would you explain that shift?**

**A.M.L.:** I can only speak for myself. I think that societies in which the majority of citizens are older allow women with experience to accede to power. These are not young women of 25 years who gain power, but women who have a long political career and who know what making decisions in delicate situations means. Nancy Pelosi is a good example. Today there are mature societies that enable women to take up leading political functions. See also page 8.

## PARLIAMENTS AND BROADCASTERS

### The role of public broadcasters



On the right Mr. Boris Bergant (EBU)

**M**r. Fritz Pleitgen, EBU President, WRD Director General and founder of Phoenix, noted that "given the omnipresence of the media and its insatiable hunger for instantaneous, short-lived information, virtually every thought, idea or statement emanating from parliament or any other given political forum is subject to immediate publication. In fact, it has become virtually impossible for parliamentarians to resist this 'law of nature', assuming of course that they wish to do so in the first place".

EBU Vice-President, Mr. Boris Bergant, enumerated the four main characteristics of what is public service broadcasting in the true sense of the term. "The first prerequisite is that it should be independent of politics, economic interests, all sorts of lobbies, but at the same time open to all of them. The second is pluralism. We should be plural in presenting our cultures: modern, classical, mass and elite. We should be open to all minorities, which is one of the main tasks of public service broadcasting". The third prerequisite is credibility. "But credibility can be established only if we are also making quality programmes. The fourth prerequisite of public broadcasters is accountability. This also entails transparency, including the financial sense of the word. Because we are financed by the public, we are accountable to this public", he said.

Follow-up on pages 4 and 5.

## Editorial

### The need to close the gap between citizens and parliament

**S**ome 180 specialists from parliaments, parliamentary channels and public broadcasters, coming from 80 countries and meeting in Geneva underscored the need to create a direct link between citizens and the media, and to close the gap between citizens and parliament - the body that represents citizens in their entirety: an interesting challenge indeed.

It is a fact that citizens must be kept informed and parliaments must reach out to the people and better communicate with them, but are parliaments ready to do that without any interference?

In any democracy, public institutions must be transparent and accountable to the people and public broadcasting of parliamentary proceedings can foster that transparency and accountability. The first ever conference on parliamentary broadcasting convened in October by the IPU, the European Broadcasting Union (EBU) and the Association of Secretaries General of Parliaments (ASGP) provided some useful insights in that regard.

The debates, moderated by Mr. Luis Rivas, Euronews Director of News and Programmes, and Ms. Esther Mamarbachi, anchorwoman at the Swiss French-language television station, TSR, pointed to the need to follow up this process which could give greater visibility to parliaments and to their world organization, the IPU.

Mr. Peter Vickers, EBU Head of Marketing and Business Management, Eurovision Operations Department, suggested that a forum be established where parliamentary channels could exchange content freely. This should be done on a reciprocal, free copyright basis. Eurovision would be the platform that delivers this content, either live or in edited form, so that citizens all over the world could follow important decisions taken in different parliaments of the world.

IPU Secretary General, Mr. Anders B. Johnsson, his EBU counterpart, Mr. Jean Réveillon, and ASGP President, Mr. Anders Forsberg, met recently in Geneva to discuss follow-up of the Geneva Conference. As soon as they receive the responses to questionnaires sent out by the three institutions to their respective members, concrete proposals will be made to follow up on this unique initiative, which will herald a new era for parliaments, televisions and broadcasters.

L.B.



From left to right: Mr. Fritz Pleitgen (EBU), Mr. Giacomo Mazzone (EBU), Mr. Anders B. Johnsson (IPU) and Mr. Anders Forsberg (ASGP)



## PARLIAMENTS AND BROADCASTERS

### The challenge of broadcasting parliamentary proceedings

In the words of Mr. Dan Landau, former Head of the Knesset Network, "the fact is that parliaments find it difficult to convey any parliamentary message, because it is considered boring by the media, especially the commercial media. It just doesn't sell. Parliament suffers from the poor image of its members, but politicians will never miss a chance to get some free TV time. So count them in to begin with but be aware of the need to limit their control over content. He added that politicians will tend to see things in political terms: left versus right, minority versus majority, coalition versus opposition; this is what parliament is all about. "So before you know it, you might find that your nice little new television channel is becoming a pawn in the political game".



Mr. Dan Landau and Mr. Luis Rivas (Euronews)

Photo: IUG Cabrera

### Sensitive context



Mr. Joe Phaweni and Mr. Carlos Hoffmann

Photo: IUG Cabrera

Mr. Carlos Hoffmann, Secretary General of the Chilean Senate, explained that "the core issue is how to effectively ensure the right and aspirations of citizens to contact and interact with the authorities or their legislators. The socio-historical context of the debate is particularly sensitive, for it is characterized by an obvious crisis of political legitimacy at the global level and the attitude of citizens to politics is - more or less - one of dissatisfaction, disenchantment and apathy, according to numerous studies conducted throughout the world."

Mr. Joe Phaweni, Head of the Policy Management Unit at the South African Parliament, said that the majority of South Africans live in rural areas. "They are poor and unemployed. Electricity

and its benefits are new developments to many of those people in rural areas. So owning a television set is a luxury that most people in rural areas cannot afford. Therefore, at this stage of our development, as a new democracy, we cannot talk of a parliamentary television broadcasting channel if the intention is to reach the people in those far-flung areas. Parliamentary activities affect the lives of citizens; the public should therefore engage and actively participate in parliamentary processes".

### Cooperation with networks

According to Mr. Peter Knowles, BBC Parliament Controller, "offering parliamentary debate and related journalism on a consistent basis is extremely important. We run programmes in strips across the week: four, five or seven days a week, in the same place, at the same time. That is extremely important in terms of helping digital viewers moving between hundreds of different channels to find what they are looking for. I would urge all people concerned with running parliamentary channels to think very hard about what kind of cooperation agreement could be made with networks to get that kind of trailing".



Mr. Terry Murphy (C-SPAN) and Mr. Peter Knowles (BBC Parliament)

Photo: IUG Cabrera

(Follow-up on page 5)

## **C-SPAN: A PIONEER**

**M**r. Terry Murphy, C-SPAN Vice-President of Programming and Executive Producer, explained that C-SPAN is unique in the parliamentary channel set-up. "We are a private, not for-profit, non-commercial, non-governmental network. All of our money comes from the telecommunication companies that carry us. They pay us about 4.5 cents per subscriber, our budget is between US\$ 35 and 40 million a year, and we have approximately 260 employees. It took us a long time to get there. All our

employees are based in Washington D.C. and we now have three television channels, a radio station that can be heard throughout the United States and up to twelve Internet sites on which we broadcast on a daily basis. Our coverage of the parliament or Congress only accounts for about twenty per cent of our programming. The other part of our programming is devoted to congressional meetings. On any given day, there are about forty congressional meetings taking place in Washington and we can only cover about four or five of them. We decide which four or five to cover. Since we are a private company, that decision is ours".

## **SMALL CAN BE USEFUL**

**M**r. Dawood Kuttab, Director of the Institute of Modern Media at the Al Quds University in Ramallah, believes that sometimes, being a small outfit can be very useful. "Most Palestinians didn't even know what their members of

parliament looked like. Putting them on television was very exciting for us and just the opposite of what we had heard all along: that parliament is very boring. It gave us a chance to know what people looked like and who they were. People had never heard about them in the past, they had never seen them, so we decided to take the initiative. When I wanted to broadcast from the Palestinian Parliament, I had three arguments with the Speaker. He wanted to control the broadcasting and I knew that if he controlled it, it would become a kind of propaganda and it would not be what the public wanted. The Speaker wanted it to be broadcast at night - although sessions are usually held in the day - and I said that it had to be live. The third problem was that he wanted it to be edited and I said that it had to be unedited gavel-to-gavel. These are the three principles I stuck to, because I felt that unless we got that, it would not provide the public service that was required".



Mr. Dawood Kuttab and Mrs. Esther Mamarbachi

Photo: IJUG Cabrera

## **BROADCASTERS BELIEVE IN INDEPENDENT EDITORIAL DECISIONS**

**T**he Rapporteur of the Geneva Conference, Mr. Eric Fichtelius, Executive Producer and Editor of SVT 24 Direct (Sweden), advised parliamentary officials to listen attentively to the experiences of broadcasters present. "Our unanimous feeling is that we believe in independent editorial decisions. There are one billion Internet users today and that number is growing every day. Ten years ago, we couldn't have any frequencies, and now we have so many frequencies to use. Internet provides us with marvellous opportunities, and digital distribution, both on terrestrial transmission stations and satellite, gives us so many more frequencies, and is opening up the whole market for political or parliamentary broadcasting".

Mr. Fichtelius said that combining webcasting with documentaries on a parliament's home page would provide "an interesting political tool for citizens, with protocols from parliaments, documents from the opposition and the government, background documents, and MP voting records". He concluded by mentioning a German study on why people hate politicians. The researchers studied how politicians were presented on television and it turned out that "if a leading politician was allowed to speak for himself, in his own voice, showing his own face, people would respect him much more than if he did not".



Mr. Erik Fichtelius

Photo: IJUG Cabrera

(Follow-up on page 6)

## IPU-UN COOPERATION

### Office of the Global Centre for ICT in Parliament inaugurated in Rome



Photo: Italian Chamber of Deputies

Mr. Pier Ferdinando Casini, Mr. José Antonio Ocampo and Mr. Ahmed Fathy Sorour.

The President of the IPU, Mr. Pier Ferdinando Casini, and the United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs, Mr. José Antonio Ocampo, inaugurated in Rome, in November, the Office of the Global Centre for Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) in Parliament.

The Centre was inaugurated in the presence of the President of the Senate and the Speaker of the Italian Chamber of Deputies, Mr. Franco Marini and Mr. Fausto Bertinotti. The Speaker of the Egyptian People's Assembly, Mr. Ahmed Fathy Sorour, and the President of the Pan-African Parliament, Mrs. Gertrude Mongella addressed the gathering, along with the Italian Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mrs. Patrizia Sentinelli.

The new Centre seeks to promote the utilization and mainstreaming of information and communication technologies (ICT) in parliamentary activities in order

to make parliaments more open, transparent and efficient, but also to enhance inter-parliamentary cooperation. The Global Centre for ICT in Parliament also aims to strengthen the role of parliaments in promoting organic laws and strategies for the development of the information society.

Established in Tunisia last year during the second phase of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS), the Centre promotes the exchange of information and experiences among parliamentarians, parliamentary staff, national and international institutions, the private sector and civil society organizations. It intends to also promote partnerships and joint initiatives in the sphere of new information and communication technologies.

The Centre, an initiative supported by the Italian and Egyptian parliaments, came into being thanks to the IPU, the world organization of parliaments, and the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs. It is being funded by the Directorate General for Development Cooperation under the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The Italian Chamber of Deputies has furthermore undertaken to convene in spring next year the first ever inter-parliamentary conference at the Global Centre.

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# Hearing helps shape a culture of conflict prevention



Panelist Rosario Green Macías (Mexico) and the IPU President.

With a record attendance of some two hundred members of parliament, the 2006 Parliamentary Hearing at the United Nations focused on the dual issue of conflict prevention and post-conflict peace building. The event took place at the New York Headquarters of the United Nations on 13 and 14 November and brought together key decision-makers within the United Nations in the area of peace and security and parliamentarians from relevant select committees for a frank exchange of views.

Catalysts for this year's Hearing were the establishment of a new United Nations Peacebuilding Commission, which is already beginning work in Burundi and Sierra Leone, and the release of a major new report by the United Nations Secretary-General on conflict prevention.

As in past years, the purpose of the discussion was to help parliamentarians better understand both the action and thinking of the United Nations on a critical issue, while also providing their own political input.

At the end of the two-day interactive debate, participants,

As experience has shown, the UN cannot act alone. It needs allies who can open up new paths of dialogue and understanding and help address grievances within a fractured body politic. We, the parliamentarians and the political leaders closest to the people on the ground, are best situated to provide support and, in some cases, lead the way.

**Mr. Pier Ferdinando Casini, IPU President, addressing the Parliamentary Hearing**

including several Speakers of Parliament, emerged with a series of recommendations on ways and means for parliaments to play a greater role in helping the United Nations and national governments move from a culture of reaction to conflict to one of prevention of conflict. As noted in the report of the Secretary-General, such a shift would not only save countless lives but would also cost relatively little to implement. Participants agreed that if the world could afford to spend nearly a trillion dollars on the military, it surely could spare more resources on eliminating the causes of conflict.

If there is one overarching conclusion of the Hearing, it is that parliaments must assume greater ownership of the peace-making and reconciliation process at the national level. In practical terms, this will entail investing more in education to empower citizens and assist in national dialogue, implementing more inclusive economic and social policies to quell popular discontent, including more women in national reconciliation processes and in decision-making in general, enacting more stringent measures to control the circulation of small arms, and working to eliminate corruption in politics, as well as in the military and the judiciary, so as to restore the people's confidence in the institutions of the State - the locus of peaceful dialogue.

Chaired by IPU President, the meeting began with introductory remarks by the President of the General Assembly, Sheikha Haya Al Khalifa (Bahrain), and by the Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations, Mr. Mark Malloch-Brown (on behalf of Secretary-General Annan).

Following a recent resolution of the General Assembly, beginning this year the Parliamentary Hearing was elevated from being an IPU event hosted by the United Nations to being a joint IPU-UN event. The change, which the IPU welcomes, will require direct coordination with the United Nations in the planning and organization of the event in future years.

Countries emerging from violence and upheaval face unique and formidable challenges in finding a durable path of reconciliation, development and peace. In establishing the new intergovernmental Peacebuilding Commission, the United Nations General Assembly and Security Council have created a dedicated institutional mechanism to address these special needs; our challenge is to make the most of this new capacity.

**Message of United Nations Secretary-General Mr. Kofi Annan**

## WOMEN

### Parliamentary committees discuss ways to achieve gender equality

How can parliamentary committees mainstream gender and promote the status of women? In this day and age where equal rights are far from being attained and women's rights still need to be protected, what can parliamentary committees do to move things forward? For the first time, the IPU brought together 100 members and chairpersons of committees on gender issues from 40 countries for a three-day seminar.

"The IPU has recently focused its attention on parliamentary mechanisms that contribute to the advancement of women's rights and gender equality. We hope that this meeting of parliamentary gender committees will be the first of a series of annual meetings on gender issues" said IPU Secretary General, Mr. Anders B. Johnsson, in his welcome address to participants.

The seminar provided a forum to debate issues relating to the functioning of these parliamentary bodies, their mandates, membership and working methods. There is no single model for such committees; they vary from country to country depending on parliamentary practice and history.

Participants examined the specific powers of parliamentary gender committees and agreed that one of their most important functions is that of parliamentary oversight and of holding governments to account. The development of gender-sensitive budgets and the role of committees in overseeing implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) were also discussed.

For further information see: <http://www.ipu.org/parline-e/Instancewomen.asp>.



Mr. Anders B. Johnsson, Mrs. Monica Xavier and Mrs. Anne-Marie Lizin opening the Seminar

Photo IPU/S. Saggado

#### VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

The main theme discussed at the meeting of chairpersons of parliamentary committees dealing with gender issues was violence against women. Echoing the appeal made by IPU President, Mr. Pier Ferdinando Casini, to all parliaments on 25 November, International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women (VAW), participants agreed to scale up action to combat this serious problem. Strategies to combat violence need to be holistic in their approach, going beyond mere criminalization, prevention and assistance measures, to include initiatives aimed at changing the environment in which women live, examining health care issues, housing, security, domestic legislation, and stereotyping in the media.

Effective policies to combat VAW require accurate data. Establishing common global or regional indicators was raised as an objective. Participants agreed that the response to violence against women had to be multi-sectoral and should build on the contribution of all stakeholders. This will require a solid legal framework to combat violence and impunity, ensuring adequate financing of policies and overseeing proper implementation. Participants also underlined the role of education and awareness-raising.

Society has to mould new generations which do not look at violence and gender inequality as a natural state of affairs.

#### THE URUGUAYAN EXAMPLE

Ms. Monica Xavier, President of the Coordination Committee of Women Parliamentarians, spoke about the experience of her country, Uruguay. "Mr. José Saramago, the Portuguese writer who was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1998, said that his idea of a utopia was when men came to realize that violence against women is something that needs to be overcome. As most governments are run by men, I was not sure whether there would be some protest or demonstration against domestic violence or violence against women. I was very pleased when Uruguay took the initiative to draw up a charter encouraging all citizens to change their behaviour. On 27 November, there was a demonstration, which interestingly enough attracted many men from different levels of our government: ministers, senators, deputies, and men from other walks of life. Their presence showed that it is possible for men to change their mentality regarding violence against women. This was the start of a commitment. But a lot still remains to be done".



## INTERNATIONAL TRADE

### Wake-up call for political decision-makers to oversee government action

Over two hundred parliamentarians representing more than 70 countries who gathered in Geneva at the initiative of the IPU and the European Parliament, lamented the fact that despite the promise of greater flexibility, major parties to the negotiations have shown little of it and talks in the key areas of agriculture and non-agricultural market access have not progressed since the Hong Kong Ministerial Conference.

"This is a wake-up call for all political decision-makers, not least those of us who, as members of parliament representing the interests of the people, have the duty to oversee government action in the field of international trade and promote fairness in trade liberalization", they said. The complete text of that Declaration may be viewed at: <http://www.ipu.org/splz-e/trade06/-declaration.htm>).

The legislators present in Geneva called for a strong commitment on the part of all major players in the trade negotiations, including the European Union, the United States and the G20, and urged them to reach a balanced agreement on all main negotiating topics of the Doha Round, while placing a special emphasis on the need to ensure meaningful and sustainable economic gains for developing countries, and in particular for the least-developed countries.

#### **"World stability linked to international trade negotiations"**

At a meeting with the press, the IPU President said that although negotiations are in the hands of governments, one could not help but realize that "for some time now, parliaments have been playing a major role in the field of international trade, and in particular - but not only - agriculture. We are convinced that in the future, a determining factor of world stability will hinge on the

challenge posed by the international trade negotiations". He added that the role of parliaments and parliamentarians, in this area, did not overlap with the role of governments, or constitute any "interference" with the autonomy of governments.

Mr. Manuel António dos Santos, Vice-President of the European Parliament, said: "as Pascal Lamy recalled in addressing our Conference, the current situation is not good. We support the efforts of the WTO Director-General to overcome this difficult situation. In keeping with his request, we can bring pressure to bear on our respective governments and the European Parliament can press its Member States to help overcome this problematic situation".

#### **Mr. Pascal Lamy, WTO Director-General:**

#### **"Parliamentarians are influencing the position of negotiators everyday"**

"I am quite impressed by the time and attention that parliamentarians have devoted to international trade during this conference", said WTO Director-General, Mr. Pascal Lamy, during the press conference that took place after his hearing with legislators, on 1 December 2006.

"It is the first time that so much attention has been given to the dialogue with ministers, experts and myself. I am glad about that, because we have arrived at a crucial moment for the multilateral trade Round launched five years ago. Parliamentarians have the final say. They will decide in the end whether or not they accept whatever deal is concluded. But they also have a big say in the negotiation process".

Referring to many WTO Member States, he said "parliamentarians are influencing the position of negotiators everyday. Negotiators operate within what we call an "authorizing environment". In many countries - not in all, but in many - parliaments have a major role to play in defining this authorizing environment. What we need now is for ministers to come back to the table when they are ready. We know that this will not happen tomorrow, and that this will not be possible without parliaments and their authorizing environment providing them with greater flexibility, at least for the players, the richest nations and those which will have to make the biggest effort to unlock these negotiations".



From left to right: Mr. Anders B. Johnsson, Mr. Pier Ferdinando Casini, Mr. Pascal Lamy and Mr. Manuel António Dos Santos.

### Thirty years defending free speech

Parliamentarians who speak out against abuse and promote human rights in their own countries may do so at great risk. For that and other reasons, in 1976, the IPU took a highly innovative step: it set up the Committee on the Human Rights of Parliamentarians whose sole focus is to prevent, stop and ensure compensation for abuses affecting individual legislators.

The creation of that body addresses a paradox of parliamentary life: while the public stature of parliamentarians allows them to have a powerful voice in the national debate, it also puts them in a very vulnerable position in a number of countries. The Committee's philosophy is simple: only if there is respect for the human rights of parliamentarians can legislators, in turn, effectively promote the liberties of those they represent.

Over the course of its 30-year existence, the Committee has built a solid track record of providing concrete and effective relief to individual parliamentarians who have suffered abuse. What better way to pay tribute to the Committee's work than to tell the stories of two victims for whom its intervention has been critical? That is exactly what happened at the interactive panel discussion on the Committee on the Human Rights of Parliamentarians held in Geneva during the 115th Assembly of the Inter-Parliamentary Union.

Among the keynote speakers at the panel was Mr. Alpha Condé, a former presidential candidate in Guinea, who was arbitrarily arrested in December 1998. The Committee was immediately seized of his case and sent a delegation to Guinea, which visited him in prison. IPU observers attended his trial proceedings in 2000 and produced a highly critical report thereon. According to Mr. Condé - who was released in May 2001 - his current freedom resulted "largely thanks to the work of the Committee".



Mr. Alpha Condé

Mr. Hipólito Solari Yrigoyen, a former Argentinean senator, provided a poignant account of the persecution – including attempts on his life, abduction and imprisonment – which he endured during the reign of Argentina's military government for speaking out against human rights violations. The Committee had played a crucial role in helping address those abuses. When democracy was restored in Argentina, Mr. Solari Yrigoyen became a member and later the President of the Committee, seeking to do for others what the IPU had done for him.

The turn of events in Mr. Solari Yrigoyen's life also serves to underscore the importance of parliamentary solidarity to the Committee's work. Indeed, the Committee's success hinges in large measure on follow-up by parliaments of IPU resolutions on public human rights cases. Many do indeed take action. However, much more needs to be done. Ms. Ann Clwyd, majority leader in the House of Commons of the United Kingdom and former member and President of the Committee, closed the series of panel presentations by saying that parliamentarians had the opportunity to ensure that their colleagues in other countries did not languish in prison, adding that "since parliamentarians had freedom of speech, they should use it to defend those who did not".

#### **Tribute to Ms. Josi Meier**

The IPU was deeply saddened to learn of the death of Ms. Josi Meier, a distinguished member of the Swiss Parliament, in November. Ms. Meier was the first woman President of the Swiss Council of States. She was also a member of the IPU's Committee on the Human Rights of Parliamentarians, and later became its President. For 10 years, between 1988 and 1998, the Committee benefited from Ms. Meier's vast experience in the field of law and parliamentary practice, especially her sense of justice and her dedication to the cause of human rights. Her political finesse and subtle sense of humour helped to defuse the tensions that sometime arose between the Committee and its counterparts representing national authorities. Those qualities went a long way in helping Ms. Meier to facilitate the satisfactory settlement of a large number of cases. The IPU would like to pay tribute to Ms. Meier's commitment, not only in the area of human rights, but also in the promotion of women in politics. Her struggle in that area has paved the way for women and there again, she proved herself to be a shining example.

## Legislators from South-East Asia and Asia-Pacific discuss security challenges

The security architecture of Asia is outdated and ill-suited to the current security context. Indeed, the mismatch of regional mechanisms and conventional tools in the form of traditional State alliances is not designed to tackle present-day transnational security threats. Parliamentarians can help address this gap by pressing for the establishment of effective regional institutions that are in tune with today's security agenda.

Parliamentarians can also encourage the creation of a regional parliamentary mechanism to oversee security developments and assist in the establishment of a regional study and research centre on human security. Those were some of the recommendations made at the first ever regional seminar on security sector reform for parliamentarians from South-East Asian and Asia-Pacific countries, which took place in Phuket, Thailand, on 1 and 2 September 2006. The seminar was convened by the IPU and the Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces and hosted by the National Assembly of the Kingdom of Thailand.

Legislators generally emphasized the fact that times had changed from the days when civilians were not allowed to deal with security matters. Security having become a collective responsibility, parliamentarians - as representatives of the people - must be involved in order to ensure transparency and accountability. They also have an important role to play in legislating provisions that guarantee fundamental rights in security operations. This is particularly important in the national context, but also increasingly so in the international context, where security forces are called upon to carry out peacekeeping duties in other countries.

Unfortunately, recent events in Thailand have belied the strong message that came across during the seminar, namely that in a democracy worthy of the name, the security forces, including the police and the armed forces, should be under civilian control. The IPU hopes that parliamentary democracy will be restored rapidly in this country.

See also page 15.

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

#### France boosts women politicians

The French cabinet has approved a proposal to encourage parties to promote more women into politics. Ministers are hoping to get the bill passed into law before next year's presidential and general polls, though it will not take effect till 2008. It aims to ensure women are represented in local and regional governments. It comes as Ségolène Royal, the Socialists' candidate, is bidding to win next year's election and become France's first female president... France introduced a law in 2000 aimed at creating parity between the sexes in parliament. The law says all parties must either ensure that 50% of their candidates in nay poll are women, or face financial penalties. Only 12.2% of French MPs are women, which puts France in 84th place in a global table of 135 countries, according to data compiled by the Inter-Parliamentary Union.

**BBC News - 28 November 2006**

#### International Call for Action to Combat Violence Against Women

The United Nations, governments and humanitarian organizations are calling for stepped up action to combat violence against women. To mark the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women, activists are demanding that countries enact and enforce legislation against a wide range of abuse from rape to wife battering. Women's rights campaigners agree there is no region of the world, no country and no culture in which women are free from violence. They say acts of violence against women are among the most important obstacles to the advancement of women and are a fundamental violation of their basic human rights. Kareen Jabre, an official at the Inter-Parliamentary Union - an organization of 148 national parliaments, says tradition and culture often act as stumbling blocks to women's rights. She notes violence against women exists everywhere. It is a cross cutting issue...

**News Voice of America Com - 25 November 2006**



### A parliamentary perspective on the ICNRD movement

The International Conference of New or Restored Democracies (ICNRD) movement began in Manila, Philippines, in 1988. The Sixth Conference (ICNRD-6) took place in Doha, Qatar, from 29 October to 1 November 2006. Now that the dust has settled, it is time to look back at events that took place at ICNRD-6 and look ahead to the period leading up to ICNRD-7, which is scheduled to take place in 2009.

At this important point in its history, the ICNRD movement is faced with two major questions: what place should parliaments and civil society have in a movement that was purely governmental at its outset? What capacity does the ICNRD require to follow-up effectively on the declarations and plans of action that are regularly adopted at the movement's conferences?

#### Parliaments and the ICNRD process

ICNRD-6 was only the second conference in the movement's history to have formal parliamentary participation, whereas civil society organizations have participated in ICNRD since 1997. The contribution of parliaments and civil society was explicitly recognized by United Nations General Assembly resolution 60/253 of 2 May 2006, which welcomed the "comprehensive tripartite character (government, parliaments, civil society) of the Sixth International Conference of New or Restored Democracies, which will allow for greater interaction and cooperation in the common effort of promoting democracy." The Parliamentary Meeting in Doha clearly provided more opportunities for substantive debate than the half-day parliamentary event at ICNRD-5 held in Mongolia in 2003. ICNRD-6 constituted, therefore, a greater recognition of parliaments as key players in the field of democracy.

The Qatari government was instrumental in promoting the Conference's tripartite nature and throughout the event, convened several meetings among the three parties to encourage the cross-fertilization that was otherwise lacking as a result of the fact that discussions in the governmental, parliamentary and civil society components were for the most part conducted in parallel.

Although each segment adopted its own outcome documents, an interesting development at ICNRD-6 was the adoption for the first time of a Joint Declaration and Joint Follow-up Mechanism.

Some would argue that the Joint Declaration is a very minimal statement of principles of a general nature; others would see it as a basis for developing a joint vision and understanding of democracy in the future. That some agreement could be reached between stakeholders was an achievement in itself.

Clearly, some governments were reluctant to open up the ICNRD movement to other stakeholders, and in particular to civil society organizations. From a parliamentary perspective, it would appear that ICNRD has everything to gain by embracing the diversity of viewpoints that parliaments and civil society can bring. Democracy is the result of the interplay between a complex set of institutions and practices, in which governments, parliaments, civil society and the media all have their specific role to play, with due respect for their individual mandates. To bring all stakeholders into the debate is to reinforce its effectiveness.

Furthermore, becoming a truly tripartite movement would give ICNRD a distinctive character on the international stage. It would also send a strong signal that the democracy gap in international relations can and must be narrowed through this type of innovative partnership, where the primary



From left to right: Mr. Anders B. Johnsson, Mr. Mohamed Bin Mubarak Al-Khulaifi (Speaker of the Advisory Council of the State of Qatar), Mr. David Beetham and Mr. Nour Eddine Bouchkouj.

representatives of the people have a say in promoting the democracy agenda.

Concerning the future development of the tripartite character of ICNRD, much will depend on the reactions and guidance of the United Nations General Assembly, as well as on the capacity of parliaments and civil society to demonstrate that they can be effective partners of governments, notably by ensuring effective follow-up to the decisions adopted in Doha.

### **Effective follow-up to ICNRD recommendations**

The governmental follow-up to some of the key recommendations of the ICNRD-5 (national plans of action to consolidate democracy, development of nationally-owned democratic governance indicators) was actively pursued by the host country, Mongolia. There is no reason to question the willingness of other governments to follow-up on decisions taken at the Conference. Rather, the question of the capacity of ICNRD as a movement to encourage follow-up and implementation needs to be raised.

In Doha, the establishment of a permanent Secretariat of the ICNRD, which has been regularly debated since 1997, was discussed by the governmental component. Certain governments took the view that what may begin as a small, flexible Secretariat would most likely grow into a bureaucratic international organization that would require significant financing and the matter was once again left in abeyance. The consistent refusal to "professionalize" the ICNRD leaves the movement faced with a chicken-and-egg situation: does effective follow-up capacity depend on the availability of resources, or can resources only be devoted to mechanisms that have proved themselves to be effective?

Beyond solving this equation, the challenge for ICNRD is to clearly identify the movement's objectives, to prove its comparative advantage over other international and regional initiatives to promote democracy, and to further clarify its relations with the United Nations.

The joint follow-up mechanism adopted in Doha is an intermediate solution whereby the governments have majority representation, with one representative each for parliaments and civil society. The Parliamentary Meeting, meanwhile, has decided to set up its own follow-up mechanism, to be known as the Parliamentary Meeting-Democracy Advisory Commission (PM-DAC). The principal task of the PM-DAC will be to support implementation of the recommendations contained in the Doha Parliamentary Plan of Action. These recommendations encourage parliaments to take specific action to become ever more representative, transparent, accessible, accountable and effective, and thus to contribute strongly to the development of democracy in their country. The Qatari Parliament, the IPU and the Arab Inter-Parliamentary Union have been entrusted with the responsibility of convening the PM-DAC, which will be funded by the Qatari Government.

One peculiarity of the Parliamentary Meeting is that parliamentarians attend on behalf of their parliament, but do not have the authority to speak in their parliament's name, unlike government representatives. Parliamentary delegations generally reflect the political configuration of each parliament and views therefore tend to be diverse and divergent within each delegation. The Parliamentary Plan of Action therefore limits itself to "encouraging" parliaments to take a certain number of measures, without any obligation for them to do so.

While follow-up can be driven by the organizers of the Parliamentary Meeting (IPU, Arab Inter-Parliamentary Union and Advisory Council of Qatar), and mechanisms such as the PM-DAC, the responsibility for acknowledging, considering, implementing and evaluating the recommendations contained in the Plan of Action ultimately lies with parliaments themselves. The level of parliamentary commitment to following up on the recommendations will be a key factor in determining the contribution that parliaments are able to make to strengthen the ICNRD movement.

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

### **Afghanistan:**

#### **Helping parliament strengthen democracy**

The IPU and UNDP continue to work closely to implement the third phase of their joint project to support the parliament. Activities including advisory support and staff training in the recording of parliamentary proceedings and the workings of a multilingual parliament were completed in October 2006 with the assistance of a senior staff member of the Belgian Parliament. The recently trained staff now have the important task of recording parliamentary proceedings, with a view to preserving institutional memory and promoting transparency in the work of parliament.

### **Burundi:**

#### **Improving the functioning of parliament**

In November 2006, the IPU, in consultation with the Parliament of Burundi, UNDP and the United Nations Mission in Burundi, finalized a project document in support of the parliament. The project document has been drafted based on the recommendations of an IPU assessment team fielded to Bujumbura in February 2006. It will be presented at a donor conference in early 2007. The overall goal of the project is to contribute to the establishment of a fully operational and efficient parliament that is representative, accountable, transparent and promotes national reconciliation. The project will provide capacity building for members and parliamentary staff on topics such as the role and function of a bicameral parliament; the budget process, including from a gender perspective; oversight of the security sector; and parliament's role in human rights protection and in the promotion of reconciliation. The project will also specifically promote and help to streamline the flow of information and communication, and enhance the documentation facilities and technical capacities of both Houses of the Parliament.

### **Pakistan:**

#### **A strategic approach to parliamentary development**

In late 2006, the IPU and the Parliament of Pakistan expanded the scope of their 2005 Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), under the framework of a joint IPU-UNDP assistance project. Under this MoU, the IPU fielded a resource person to Islamabad in November 2006 to assist in the design of a plan for the physical re-organization, refurbishment and management of the parliamentary library, research and information services, as well as to develop a proposal to streamline and consolidate the services of both Houses. The IPU will inter alia provide expert advice on an



Photo: Scottish Parliament/Jarret Gaetori/Islamabad parliamentary lodges

orientation/induction programme for members of both Houses and assist with the drafting of a parliamentary procedures handbook for members of the National Assembly.

### **Egypt:**

#### **Enhancing parliamentary outreach**

The IPU and UNDP Egypt are expected to sign a Memorandum of Understanding to work together on a project to strengthen the capacity of the Egyptian Parliament in the areas of legislation and oversight of WTO and other trade agreements. In particular, the IPU will provide assistance with a view to enhancing the parliamentary outreach of the People's Assembly. Activities include a review of committee hearing mechanisms and the elaboration of guidelines for the organization and management of public and expert hearings in the context of parliamentary committees. A workshop on comparative experiences in parliamentary outreach tools is also foreseen.

### **Sri Lanka:**

#### **Modernizing the institution of parliament**

The IPU Secretary General visited Colombo in October 2006 to review progress made in the implementation of the parliamentary modernization project developed following earlier IPU missions and to hold consultations with a view to reforming the parliamentary committee system. In November 2006, he returned to Colombo, accompanied by an expert from South Africa. During this second visit, they formulated a detailed proposal for the establishment of oversight committees within the Parliament of Sri Lanka. The proposal is currently under consideration by the Sri Lankan authorities and is expected to garner broad-based support. The IPU and UNDP will provide support for implementing the proposal.

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



## PARLIAMENTARY DEVELOPMENTS

### MAURITANIA

On 19 November 2006, Mauritania held its first parliamentary elections since the coup d'état of 3 August 2005. A total of 25 political parties participated in the elections to an enlarged 95-member National Assembly. Indirect elections to the Senate are due to take place on 21 January 2007, to be followed by presidential elections on 11 March 2007. At a referendum held on 25 June 2006, voters had approved a new constitution by 96.94 per cent. Among other provisions, the Constitution limits the President's mandate to two five-year terms. Turnout at the referendum was recorded at 76.46 per cent of the nine million eligible voters.

### KYRGYZSTAN

On 9 November 2006, President Kurmanbek Bakiev signed into law a new constitution limiting presidential powers in favour of the parliament. The draft had been approved on 8 November by 65 of the 68 members present in 75-member parliament, the Supreme Council. The new Constitution removes the President's right to dissolve parliament, and entrusts parliament with the responsibility of appointing the prime minister and the cabinet. Starting from the next elections scheduled for 2010, the statutory number of members of parliament will be increased to 90, to be elected by a mixed system (half are elected from single-member constituencies, and the other half using the proportional representation system). The adoption of the Constitution broke a long political stalemate between President Bakiev and the Supreme Council, accompanied by weeks of street protests. A compromise was reached on 7 November when the Supreme Council agreed to the President's proposal to increase the qualified majority of votes required to impeach the President from two-thirds to three-quarters of the members of the Supreme Council.

### RUSSIAN FEDERATION

On 15 November 2006, the State Duma, the Lower Chamber of the Federal Assembly, adopted a series of amendments to the electoral law on "Basic Guarantees of Election Rights and Russian Citizens' Right of Participation in Referendums." The amendments bar anyone convicted of extremist crimes from standing for election. They also abolish the requirement for a minimum voter turnout at elections, currently fixed at 25 per cent for elections to the State Duma, and 50 per cent for presidential elections. Opposition parties complained that the new provisions would strip voters of a "protest tool": boycotting elections. The

amendments also abolished early voting, which was seen as facilitating rigged election results.

### SERBIA

On 8 November 2006, the parliament, known as the National Assembly, ratified the country's new constitution, replacing the 1999 constitution drafted under former president Slobodan Milosevic. The 206-article Constitution had been unanimously adopted on 30 September by the 242 MPs present in the 250-member parliament, and approved by referendum on 28 and 29 October. Over 97 per cent of voters approved the Constitution, although turnout was recorded at a mere 54 per cent. The Constitution specifies that Kosovo is an integral part of Serbia. The referendum was strongly condemned by ethnic Albanians, who account for 90 per cent of Kosovo's two million inhabitants. On 10 November, President Boris Tadic announced that parliamentary elections would be held in Serbia on 21 January 2007.

### THAILAND

Following the coup d'état of 19 September 2006, the parliament was dissolved. An interim constitution was promulgated on 1 October 2006. It provides for a 242-member transitional legislative body, the National Legislative Assembly. Members of this Assembly were appointed by the King on 12 October 2006. The Assembly is composed of representatives of the government and the public sector (judiciary, military, police and State enterprises; the private sector (banks, industry and lawyers); the social sector (political parties, media, labour organizations and NGOs) as well as from the academic community.

*The World of Parliaments  
team wishes you a happy  
and prosperous 2007.*



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