

# The World of Parliaments

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The declaration on female genital mutilation issued in November 2006 by Al-Azhar University in Cairo, the most authoritative source on religion in the Islamic world, is an important step forward in the fight against female genital mutilation, said IPU President Casini. Dr. Gamal Serour, Director of the University's International Islamic Centre for Population Studies and Research, says this declaration will have a huge impact. Interview.

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#### "The level of development in labour and employment remains a challenge for Indonesia"

One of the subjects on the agenda of the 116th IPU Assembly in Nusa Dua (Bali, Indonesia) is employment in a globalized world. We asked the Indonesian Minister of Manpower and Transmigration, Mr. Erman Suparno, to give us his views. Interview.

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#### Combating impunity in Sri Lanka

On 24 December 2005, Mr. Joseph Pararajasingham, aged 71, a member of the Parliament of Sri Lanka and a prominent human rights activist, was shot dead. In 2006, President Rajapakse decided to address the problem of impunity by setting up a national commission to inquire into certain particularly grave human rights abuses. The commission's work will be monitored by an international body.

## Women in Parliament in 2006: More women make it to the top

A record number of speakers of parliament are women: 35 out of 262 presiding officers of parliament are now women. Women speakers were elected for the first time in Gambia, Israel, Swaziland, Turkmenistan and the United States of America. Where they were once concentrated in the Caribbean, women presiding officers are making inroads in all regions.

At the 51st session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women, held in New York in early March, nearly half of the world's women presiding officers met to examine their role in caring for the next generation of women, today's girl children.

The persons present in New York were (in this photo from left to right): Mrs. Dalia Itzik, Speaker of the Israeli Knesset and acting Head of State; Baroness Helene Hayman, Speaker of the United Kingdom House of Lords; Mrs. Fabiola Morales Castillo, Vice-President of the Congress of Peru; Uruguayan Senator Monica Xavier, President of the IPU Coordinating Committee of Women Parliamentarians; Mrs. Edna Madzongwe, President of the Senate of Zimbabwe; Mrs. Gelane Zwane, President of the Senate of Swaziland; Mrs. Christine Egerszegi-Obrist, President of the Swiss National Council; Mr. Anders B. Johnsson, IPU Secretary General; Mrs. Anne-Marie Lizin, President of the Belgian Senate; Mrs. Dillian Francisca Doro Torres, President of the Colombian Congress; Mrs. Alix Boyd Knights, Speaker of the House of Representatives of Dominica; Mrs. Margareth Mensah-Williams, Vice-President of the IPU Executive Committee and Vice-Chairperson of the National Council of Namibia; and Mrs. Barbara Prammer, Speaker of the Austrian National Council. Mrs. Syringa Marshall-Burnett, President of the Senate of Jamaica, also attended the New York meeting.

Photo United Nations/M. Garten

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Photo IPU/K. Jabre



## WOMEN IN PARLIAMENT

### Progress at regional level

Almost 17 per cent of parliamentarians worldwide are now women - an all-time high. In 1995, only 11.3 per cent of all parliamentary seats were held by women. The statistics on women in parliament, presented by the IPU in February following elections in 51 countries (61 chambers of parliament) in 2006, show women gaining ground in more than 60 per cent of the chambers that were renewed, winning 16.7 per cent of all parliamentary seats up for grabs in 2006. Of the women who won seats, 1,459 were directly elected, 63 were indirectly elected, and 35 were appointed.

Electoral gender quotas were used in 23 countries to bolster women's participation. In those countries with gender quotas, women took 21.7 per cent of seats as opposed to 11.8 per cent in countries without.

Three Gulf Cooperation Council States recorded significant political changes. In the United Arab Emirates, both women and men stood for election and voted for the first time in the country's history. Nine women entered parliament, taking 22.5 per cent of the seats. Women stood for election for the first time in Kuwait as well, but none won. In Bahrain, one woman was elected to the lower house for the first time in that country.

The Nordic countries continued to elect the highest numbers of women to their parliaments. Their regional average increased to 40.8 per cent after Sweden elected a greater number of women to parliament than in previous years.

The consistent rate of progress in the Americas over the past decade was largely sustained in all 20 parliamentary elections held in 2006. As a region, the Americas report 20 per cent average female representation, trailing only the Nordic countries, and ahead of Europe.

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

#### Share of female lawmakers hits new global high

The share of female politicians around the world reached a record high of almost 17 percent in 2006 - up nearly 6 percentage points during the past decade - a global parliamentary group said on Thursday. The Inter-Parliamentary Union also found women preside over 35 of the world's 262 parliaments - another record high - with females elected to the position for the first time in Gambia, Israel, Swaziland, Turkmenistan and the United States, where Nancy Pelosi is now House Speaker. But the rate of increase in female legislators has slowed, the group said.

WashingtonPost.com - Reuters story - 1 March 2007

Less than three per cent of legislators in the Pacific Island states are women - the lowest regional average in the world. No women won seats in the elections held in the Solomon Islands and Tuvalu in 2006.

### Maintaining a critical mass

Four countries maintained or surpassed the critical mass of 30 per cent parliamentary representation by women after elections in 2006. Sweden elected the highest number of women ever to its parliament. Women now hold 47.3 per cent of parliamentary seats there — the second highest percentage in the world after Rwanda, where women occupy 48.8 per cent of seats in the lower house. Sweden has been a world leader in women's parliamentary representation for several decades, recording progress at each election.

Challenging Nordic dominance is Costa Rica, which elected a parliament of 38.6 per cent women. Costa Rica is now the only Latin American country ranked among the top five nations in electing women to parliament. Close behind is the Netherlands, which has maintained a rate of female representation of over 33 per cent for the past ten years, and Austria, which, although registering a slight decrease, elected more than 32 per cent women. In December 2006, 19 parliaments had reached the critical-mass target established in the Beijing Platform for Action of 30 per cent women in decision-making positions.

Guyana, Peru and Uganda are all within reach of the critical mass. All three have reformed the electoral process to promote the participation of women, and in all three, greater numbers of women won seats in 2006.

### Missed opportunities in post-conflict States

Reversing earlier trends, some of the biggest losers were post-conflict States undergoing electoral and parliamentary reform. In recent years, elections in Afghanistan, Burundi, Rwanda, Mozambique, South Africa and Timor-Leste had resulted in significant increases in the number of women in parliament. In 2006, however, women gained only 8.4 per cent of seats in the newly established lower house of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and 4 per cent of seats in Haiti's lower house. Indeed, fewer women now hold political office in the Democratic Republic of the Congo than in the previous transitional assembly. Although the debate on electoral reform there and in Haiti included women's political participation, no special measures were adopted to guarantee women's presence in parliament.

The lower house of Bosnia and Herzegovina remained unchanged in this regard, with women accounting for 14.3 per cent of parliamentary seats, the same proportion as in the outgoing assembly. See detailed ranking: <http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/world.htm>.

### *Zero Tolerance for violence against the girl child*

Every year the IPU organizes a parliamentary event at the United Nations in New York, in the context of the spring session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW). At this year's event, over 150 legislators from around the world focused on legislation to combat discrimination and violence against the girl child. They underlined the urgent need to develop, adopt and implement strong laws that cover all types of violence against the girl child, physical and psychological, but also in more sensitive spheres such as violence in the home.

Exploitation, domestic violence, prostitution, trafficking, sexual abuse and female genital mutilation are the daily lot of millions of girl children and teenagers in all regions of the world. Zero tolerance for violence against the girl child is a must. If adults want to stop the increasing violence among children and young people at school or in the street, they must start by setting an example and putting an end to all kinds of violence against their own daughters and sons at home.

It is not normal for a brother to beat his sister. It is not normal to inflict sexual mutilation on a girl child or a teenager. These acts must be punished. Parliamentarians can make the difference.

Not only does legislation have to be reviewed on a regular basis, it must be enforced to meet the real needs of the girl child. Women legislators have a leading role to play, but partnership with men is also important. Adults and young people must learn that respect for women starts with respect for girls. Men can play a more active role in spheres where they have been traditionally less active. Last but not least, society must make it clear to all men and women that educating and enabling girls is a priority. Parliaments can deliver. They have the power of the purse.

L.B.

### *For the first time in history, a woman was voted Speaker of the Austrian National Council*

Among the women speakers present in New York was Mrs. Barbara Prammer, who was elected Speaker of the Austrian National Council on 30 October 2006. Women were elected members of the Austrian Parliament for the first time in 1919. In those days, only a handful of women were parliamentarians. Speaker Prammer, who in the course of her political career has also served as Federal Minister in charge of women's issues, expressed the hope that the proportion of female members of the Austrian Parliament will continue to increase.

In January 2007, women also headed parliaments in the following countries: Albania, Antigua and Barbuda (both chambers), the Bahamas, Belgium, Belize, Burundi, Colombia, Dominica, Gambia, Georgia, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Israel, Jamaica, Japan, Lesotho, Peru, the Netherlands (both chambers), New Zealand, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia (both chambers), South Africa, Swaziland, Switzerland, Trinidad and Tobago, Turkmenistan, the United Kingdom, the United States of America, Venezuela and Zimbabwe.



Photo IPU/M. Bustos Letelier



Photo U. Battaglia

IPU President Pier Ferdinando Casini and the President of the Fondazione Mediterraneo, Mr. Michele Capasso, awarded the Mediterranean Prize to Queen Rania Al-Abdullah of Jordan, in February 2007 in Rome. The prize pays tribute to Queen Rania's work to promote the education of girls and thus integrate the various sectors of Arab society into the global development process.

## FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION

### "Al-Azhar University declaration against FGM is an important step forward"

On 6 February, International Day of Zero Tolerance for Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), IPU President Pier Ferdinando Casini called on legislators to step up action to combat female genital mutilation, particularly in regions where the procedure is widely performed. "Legislation should be not only enacted but also enforced in all the countries concerned. But punishment is not sufficient. It is important to change mentalities and work for better development. In that respect, the declaration issued in November 2006 by Al-Azhar University in Cairo, the most authoritative source on religion in the Islamic world, is an important step forward in the fight against female genital mutilation". For Dr. Gamal Serour, Director of the University's International Islamic Centre for Population Studies and Research, this declaration will have a huge impact. Interview.

**Dr. Gamal Serour:**

### "Many women go out of their way to please their husbands"



Photo Al-Azhar University

**Q: Dr. Gamal Serour, Al-Azhar University, the most authoritative voice on religion in the Islamic world, has recently issued a declaration against female genital mutilation. Why is this important?**

**Dr. Gamal Serour:** Female genital mutilation has no religious basis in either the Koran or the authentic Hadiths, the sayings of the Prophet Mohammed. Science has shown that it results in complications to children's health and lowers the quality of their lives. It is therefore forbidden and should not be practised by either traditional practitioners or paramedical staff. This declaration was included in the book we published in collaboration with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and was made by the rector of Al-Azhar University and the Grand Sheikh of Al-Azhar.

**Q: What impact will the declaration have?**

**G.S.:** It will have a huge impact everywhere, and in the Islamic world in particular. Al-Azhar University enjoys great respect among Muslims all over the world, and a declaration coming from it has special significance for all Muslims. It made its position known during the conference organized in 2005, in Senegal, by the African Parliamentary Union and the National Assembly of Senegal, in cooperation with the IPU and UNICEF. That position was very well received by all the participants. The International Islamic Centre, Al-Azhar University and the United Nations Population Fund have issued another document on female genital mutilation in collaboration with the

Eastern Mediterranean Office of the World Health Organization. The document contains a critical analysis of female genital mutilation and concludes that as there is no authoritative reference to the practice in Islamic law and it is harmful to girls, it should not be performed.

**Q: How long do you think it will take to eradicate this practice?**

**G.S.:** It will take decades, because the practice is deeply ingrained in the culture of certain nations, particularly in Africa and Asia. We have to convince



Photo National Assembly of Senegal

The Al-Azhar declaration was well received by the participants at the conference organized

all the people that this traditional practice has no benefits whatsoever. This is why it is very important to work closely with religious and traditional leaders, and with the chairpersons of the ethics committees of the International Federation of Gynaecology and Obstetrics (FIGO). FIGO has published its recommendations, which are addressed to professional and religious leaders, and to members of parliaments.

**Q: It seems that after the Dakar Conference things are moving in the right direction. What do you expect from legislators?**

**G.S.:** I would expect them to keep working on the issue, particularly in regions where female genital mutilation is widely performed, and I would recommend that they enact legislation and ensure it is respected.

**Q: Is it more difficult to convince men or women to abandon female genital mutilation?**

**G.S.:** We have to work with both, because in developing countries women suffer from prejudice and suppression. Many go out of their way to please their husbands. Unless their husbands are also convinced that it is a harmful practice, women will

unfortunately continue to have the procedure performed, even though they know it is harmful and is of no benefit to them. But because women want to satisfy their partners, to be able to get married and become accepted members of society, they will continue submitting themselves to harmful practices. Unless we are able to convince both men and women of the dangers of this practice, I do not think that we will succeed in our fight against female genital mutilation.

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

#### Parity: an uphill battle

France has made more progress in thirty years than in two centuries, but it is bringing up the rear compared to other European democracies. The Inter-Parliamentary Union has just established the global average of women in national parliaments. In single or lower chambers, 17.1 per cent of members of parliament are women: 40.8 per cent in the Nordic countries, 20 per cent in the Americas, 17.6 per cent in Europe (outside the Nordic countries), 16.5 per cent in Asia and 9.5 per cent in the Arab countries. As at 31 January 2007, only 35 of the world's 189 parliaments were presided over by women.

*Le Monde*, Editorial, 8 March 2007

#### Limited progress towards gender equality

Although more women than ever before are in work or looking for work, the past decade has seen only limited progress towards gender equality in wages and status, the International Labour Organization said on Thursday [...] The ILO pointed out that women's share of global employment, at 40 per cent, is little changed from ten years ago, while the labour force participation rate - the proportion of women working or seeking work - is no longer rising. Only half of working-age women over 15 are employed, against seven in 10 men. Women made up a record 17 per cent of the world's parliamentarians last year, up from 11 per cent in 1995, according to the Geneva-based Inter-Parliamentary Union which groups 148 national parliaments, writes Frances Williams. Nordic countries continued to elect the highest numbers of women, with an average of 41 per cent, followed by Costa Rica (39 per cent), the Netherlands (33 per cent) and Austria (32 per cent).

*Financial Times.com* - 8 March 2007



in Senegal in 2005 by the APU, the National Assembly of Senegal, the IPU and UNICEF.

## INTERVIEW

**Indonesian Minister of Manpower and Transmigration, Mr. Erman Suparno:**

### "The level of development in labour and employment remains a huge challenge for Indonesia"

One of the subjects on the agenda of the 116th IPU Assembly in Nusa Dua (Bali, Indonesia) is employment in a globalized world. We have asked the Indonesian Minister of Manpower and Transmigration, Mr. Erman Suparno, to give us his views. Interview.



Photo Indonesian Ministry of Manpower and Transmigration

**Q: What is the impact of globalization on the employment agenda in Indonesia?**

**Mr. Erman Suparno:** Globalization has produced many opportunities and challenges in the world of work. The opportunities for the developing world, including in Indonesia, are the chances

to obtain and fill job opportunities overseas, through the placement of Indonesian overseas workers. So far, Indonesia has placed approximately four million overseas workers. The Government of Indonesia has from time to time encouraged bilateral cooperation in the form of memoranda of understanding on the placement and protection of migrant workers, for example with Asian and Pacific countries such as Korea and Malaysia and with Middle Eastern countries like Kuwait and Jordan.

**Q: Concretely, what does bilateral cooperation mean?**

**E.S.:** In the bilateral agreements, Indonesia encourages non-discrimination, equal rights at work, and protection of workers for the duration of their employment contract. In most cases, Indonesian overseas workers stay for two years, as stipulated in the contract of employment, unless otherwise agreed. In 2006, the President of the Republic of Indonesia, H.E. Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, established a National Board for the Placement and Protection of Indonesian Overseas Workers, which answers directly to the President but whose day-to-day work is coordinated with the Minister of Manpower and Transmigration. This new structure will hopefully reduce the number of individual cases of Indonesian overseas workers and at the same time promote awareness among all stakeholders of how better to manage Indonesian overseas workers. In the meantime, in order to encourage better employment services, Indonesia is going to establish an on-line international labour market for easy use by job seekers. The impact of globalization may also introduce people to work in the informal sectors. For this reason, the government encourages the participation of the informal sector in creating jobs and promoting entrepreneurship at the local level.

**Q: Can you please elaborate on the concept of decent work?**

**E.S.:** ILO has introduced the concept of decent work, which comprises four pillars: job creation, rights at work, social

protection and social dialogue. The concept has been well received in Indonesia, as our 1945 Constitution and its amendments accommodate the concepts of decent lives and decent work. In reality, this concept was introduced soon after independence, although its implementation has been uneven. The level of development in the area of labour and employment remains a great challenge for us. Indonesia agreed to the Asia Decent Work Decade 2015, which was declared during the 14th ILO Asian Regional Meeting in Busan (Korea) in 2006. In order to promote decent work, the Government of the Republic of Indonesia has adopted a national action plan on decent work that is to be approved by the social partners and which contains 23 indicators. Moreover, starting this year, the Government will promote Decent Work Awards for district and municipal governments, in recognition of their achievement of decent work goals. The implementation of ILO core conventions is not particularly smooth and some obstacles remain in terms of community awareness of the commitment fully to implement the conventions' provisions. A significant effort has been made by the Government to promote legal measures. For example, in 2000 the commitment was made to enact Law No. 21 on Trade Unions, which provides that all workers may set up unions at all types of enterprises and even that there may be more than one union in one enterprise.

**Q: What are the main challenges faced by your country in the practical implementation of ILO Convention No. 182?**

**E.S.:** ILO Convention No. 182 (1999) was ratified by Indonesia in 2000. Pursuant to this ratification, the Government has drawn up a national action plan, which includes the establishment of a national action committee under the Ministry of Manpower and Transmigration. So far, 11 provinces and 52 districts/municipalities have set up similar committees. The establishment of these committees is geared towards eliminating the worst forms of child labour in the fishing, footwear, mining, illegal drug and sex industries. Priority programmes were launched in 2002, and regional activities started with the assistance of ILO's International Programme for the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC). These programmes have been able to alleviate the plight of children who work in those industries, including by preventing children from working and pulling them out of the worst forms of child labour. Some obstacles remain, for instance, the fact that most of the children concerned come from communities which live below the poverty line.



Unemployment in Indonesia could rise sharply in 2007 in the wake of several recent natural disasters

Therefore, other programmes should be encouraged that promote decent work for their parents, i.e. managerial and entrepreneurship capacity-building. Other obstacles include lack of awareness among local authorities of their responsibility in terms of child labour.

**Q: What are the most topical labour and social policy issues relating to the activities of multinationals in your country that require attention as a priority from national legislators?**

**E.S.:** The Government of Indonesia is fully aware that international investors play a significant role in encouraging better economic performance indicators. Presidential Instruction No. 3 of 2006 is part of the effort being made to ensure all the ministries concerned avoid placing any regulatory obstacles in the way of investors wanting to do business in Indonesia. Multinational enterprises are well treated in Indonesia. Their presence has contributed significantly to the country's economic growth. In terms of labour issues, there are no specific regulations or laws governing these companies, which, in principle, are treated like all other local and national enterprises. This equal treatment is based on the ILO principle of non-discrimination. The Ministry of Manpower and Transmigration has taken some steps to implement Presidential Instruction No. 3 by simplifying the process for expatriates to obtain a work permit.

### **The challenge of guaranteeing the right and aspiration of citizens to be in touch with parliament**

At a conference on Public Broadcasting and Parliaments held by the European Broadcasting Union (EBU) at the European Parliament in Brussels in February 2007, IPU President Pier Ferdinando Casini recalled that the relationship between public broadcasters and parliaments is of crucial importance to democracy.

In a video message broadcast in the presence of the European Parliament President, Mr. Hans-Gert Pöttering, EBU President Fritz Pleitgen, and the President of the Association of Secretaries General of Parliaments (ASGP), Mr. Anders Forsberg, Mr. Casini declared that "public institutions in any democracy must be transparent and accountable to the

people. Broadcasts of parliamentary business foster the transparency and accountability that we, as politicians, owe to those who elected us. Many of you quite rightly emphasized this at the first Conference on Broadcasting of Parliamentary Business, organized last October in Geneva by the IPU, the EBU and the ASGP".

For ASGP President Anders Forsberg "it is also a matter of striking a balance between Parliament's responsibility and the responsibility of the parties and legislators themselves. Parliamentary administration should facilitate, be progressive, follow technical developments and provide new possibilities. And of course, parliaments should provide interesting debates and hearings. We have to be flexible in our planning and cover subjects of great interest for the citizens".

At an international conference entitled *The policymaking role of parliaments in the development of the information society*, held in Rome on 3 and 4 March 2007, IPU President Casini also pointed out that "the information society is a major revolution in many of our countries. It has the potential to greatly improve our lives. But it has not yet kept all of its promises. There is an urgent need for parliaments to play a more active and more decisive role in its development".



◀ **Recent IPU Publication**

# Combating impunity in Sri Lanka

Photo J. Pfundheller



From left to right: Prof. C. Fasseur, Netherlands, Andreas Mavrommatis, Chairman of the United Nations Committee against Torture, Arthur Gene Dewey, former United Nations Deputy High Commissioner for Refugees, Justice Bhagwati, former Chief Justice of India and member of the United Nations Human Rights Committee, Dr. Bruce Matthews, Canada, Prof. Ivan Shearer, Australia, member of the United Nations Human Rights Committee, Bernard Kouchner, former French Minister of Health, Prof. Yozo Yokota, Japan, and Marzuki Darusman, Indonesian MP and former Attorney General. Two members are not on the photo, namely Sir Nigel Rodley, United Kingdom, Prof. of Law and former United Nations Special Rapporteur on Torture, and Dr. Kamal Hossain, Bangladesh, former Minister of Foreign Affairs.

On 24 December 2005, Mr. Joseph Pararajasingham, aged 71, a member of the Parliament of Sri Lanka belonging to the Tamil National Alliance and a prominent human rights activist, attended the midnight Christmas Eve mass in St. Mary's Cathedral in Batticaloa. After receiving communion, he was shot dead by unidentified gunmen inside the Cathedral, in the presence of some 300 people.

His wife was also struck by two bullets and taken to hospital in critical condition. Although the Cathedral is located in a high security zone and additional security personnel were on duty at the time, the investigation into the murder has so far produced no result. At the time, the IPU condemned Mr. Pararajasingham's murder and expressed deep concern at the lack of any progress in the investigation.

Mr. Pararajasingham's murder comes after the August 2005 murder of Foreign Minister Lakshman Kardigamar. In common with Mr. Kardigamar's killing, it is a product of the ethnic conflict and political violence that have ravaged Sri Lanka for the past 24 years. Unfortunately, hopes that the ceasefire agreement of 2002 between the Government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) heralded a lasting settlement of the conflict have proved vain, since the peace negotiations were called off in April 2006. Since then, the country has seen a new surge in violence, with an alarming increase in the number of disappearances and abductions. The prevailing impunity merely exacerbates this state of affairs.

In 2006, President Rajapakse decided to address this problem by setting up a new and unique mechanism: a national commission which will inquire into certain particularly grave human rights abuses and whose work will be monitored by an international

body - the International Independent Group of Eminent Persons (IIGEP) - to ensure that the process is transparent and meets internationally accepted human rights standards. Early this year the preparatory work was completed and the National Commission of Inquiry (NCI) and the IIGEP have been constituted.

In selecting the members of the IIGEP, President Rajapakse sought the help of a number of States, the United Nations and the IPU. Three of the crimes into which the NCI will have to inquire concern the murders of members of parliament: Mr. Kardigamar, Mr. Pararajasingham and Mr. Nadarajah Raviraj, who was shot in Colombo in November 2006. The IIGEP member who was invited to join the Group at the proposal of the IPU is Mr. Marzuki Darusman, a member of the House of Representatives of Indonesia, former Attorney General and former President of the Indonesian National Human Rights Commission.

The IIGEP, composed of 12 members and chaired by the former Chief Justice of India, Justice Bhagwati, met for the first time in Colombo from 12 to 14 February. Apart from discussing matters regarding its own functioning, the IIGEP established initial contacts with the members of the NCI to determine how both bodies could best work together in discharging their respective mandates.

Both the NCI and the IIGEP face great and manifold challenges. To mention but one, the NCI will have to develop an effective witness protection system, as yet non-existent in Sri Lanka. Only then will potential witnesses come forward with testimony. But there is a strong will to make a success of this process - the only one of its kind - and see it through. This would no doubt help pave the way for a resumption of negotiations, the only path to lasting reconciliation and peace in Sri Lanka.



## IPU-UN COOPERATION

### "I strongly recommend to use iKNOW Politics"

The Vice-President of the IPU Executive Committee, Mrs. Margareth Mensah-Williams, participated in the launch of the first virtual network linking women in politics throughout the world, at United Nations Headquarters in New York in early March. "It is important that we take stock of the different approaches and tools available to bolster women's access to politics, and to support their participation in decision-making once there. iKNOW Politics is an important initiative. It is a testament to the effectiveness of working in partnership to support change; making use of the latest technology to bring people together across regions and time zones", said Mrs. Mensah-Williams, who is also the Vice-Chairperson of the National Council of Namibia. See: [www.iknowpolitics.org](http://www.iknowpolitics.org).



Photo IPU/Julie Ballington

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

##### Women in politics connected by a new network

The first network of women in politics from around the world has been set up by the United Nations. Called the International Knowledge Network of Women in Politics (iKnowPolitics), the network is the joint brainchild of the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA), the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM).

TV5 Monde - 28 February 2007

## New Development Cooperation Forum seeks to breathe new life into ECOSOC

Don't feel humbled if you have never heard of ECOSOC, the United Nations Economic and Social Council. Though one of the main bodies of the United Nations, ECOSOC has long been overshadowed by its big brother next door, the Security Council, and of course by their shared parent, the General Assembly. It is partly to bring this essential body out of its relative obscurity and to restore its rightful role as a global decision-making centre on development issues that it will soon undergo a major overhaul.

ECOSOC reform stems from a decision made by the heads of State and Government at the 2005 World Summit. At its core lies the creation of a new Development Cooperation Forum (DCF) whose mandate is to bring together under the same roof all stakeholders and players, at both the giving and the receiving end of development.

The DCF will meet every two years during the ECOSOC Substantive Session in July. It will provide an opportunity for United Nations Member States, multilateral and bilateral donor agencies, civil society and private sector representatives to engage in interactive debate. The new forum will also invite representatives of private foundations, whose impact around the world has grown exponentially in recent years.

In a nutshell, the aim of the DCF is to restore order and rationality into the dispersed, confusing and often wasteful world of donor agencies. The result should be more streamlined development aid and, more importantly, higher and more effective aid expenditure.

If truth be told, no one today can be certain how well taxpayers' money is being spent when it arrives in a developing

country. Given that the number of donor agencies worldwide has mushroomed in recent decades, there is no way systematically to ensure that they do not duplicate each other's efforts or work at cross purposes. All too often, the conditions attached to aid disbursements to developing countries turn out to be unnecessarily stifling and counterproductive.

With its broad membership and far-reaching mandate, the new DCF will hopefully become a major player in the world of development. Given that discussions about aid are ultimately within the purview of parliaments (as part of the budgetary process, but also as part of their general oversight function in respect of foreign relations), the IPU is currently engaged in discussions with the United Nations on how best to introduce a parliamentary dimension into the new forum's work. This is in line with the recommendation made last year in the United Nations General Assembly resolution on cooperation between the IPU and the United Nations, encouraging the IPU "to play an active role in support of the Economic and Social Council, particularly in the implementation of the new functions devolved to the Council by the 2005 World Summit".

Another aspect of ECOSOC reform is the creation of an Annual Ministerial Review (AMR) to provide more authoritative policy guidance in the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals. In the context of the IPU's evolving partnership with the United Nations, as well as of its own reform agenda – which includes the establishment of an IPU Committee on United Nations Affairs – both organizations have expressed a strong interest in taking this institutional cooperation to a new level.

## PARLIAMENTARY DEVELOPMENTS

### BANGLADESH

The parliamentary elections due to take place on 22 January 2007 were postponed on 11 January when the caretaker government declared a state of emergency in the wake of street protests in which at least 40 people were killed. The opposition insisted that the voter list included 10 million names with errors or duplications, accounting for 13 per cent of the 93 million registered voters. On 30 January, the High Court ordered the suspension of all election-related activities until the voter registration process could be completed.

### DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO

The re-establishment of both chambers of parliament and the formation of a new government marked the end of the transition process which had begun in 2003. Indirect elections for the 108-member Senate were held on 21 January 2007 and the composition of the government was announced on 5 February. The latter is headed by the Prime Minister, Mr. Antoine Gizenga, and comprises six ministers of State, 34 ministers and 20 deputy ministers.



Photo IPUM/Chungang

The newly established parliamentary institutions in the DRC face the big challenge of reforming the country's public administration after years of conflict.

### ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF IRAN

On 2 January 2007, the Islamic Consultative Assembly passed a bill raising the voting age for parliamentary and presidential elections from 15 to 18 years, despite government opposition. The bill was approved by the Council of Guardians on the following day and will first be applied in the next parliamentary elections, due to be held in February 2008.

### KYRGYZSTAN

On 30 December 2006, the Kyrgyz Parliament adopted a new Constitution giving expanded powers to the President, including the right to form a

government during the transitional period until 2010. President Kurmanbek Bakiev subsequently signed the constitutional amendments into law on 15 January 2007. The Speaker of Parliament, Mr. Marat Sultanov, said the new Constitution would promote the country's stability, while the opposition For Reforms alliance strongly opposed the bill. On 8 November 2006 Parliament had voted for a different constitution that would have reduced the President's powers in favour of Parliament (see ISSUE No. 24 DECEMBER 2006).

### MAURITANIA

Elections have been held for both chambers of parliament, which had been dissolved following the August 2005 coup d'état. Indirect elections to the Senate were held on 21 January and 4 February 2006, and 53 senators, including nine women, were elected. Three additional members representing Mauritians abroad will be designated by the 53 elected members. Presidential elections are scheduled to take place on 11 March 2007, and both chambers of parliament are expected to convene in May 2007.

### NEPAL

After numerous postponements, an interim constitution was promulgated by the House of Representatives on 15 January 2007. The interim constitution is the result of the peace agreement of 8 November 2006 between the ruling alliance of political parties and Maoist rebels. After its promulgation, the House of Representatives dissolved itself in favour of a unicameral 330-member interim legislature, called the Legislative Parliament. This interim legislature comprises all members of the previous parliament (with the exception of three members who had been appointed by the King), 83 Maoists and representatives of the ruling alliance. It is due to be replaced by the unicameral 425-member Constituent Assembly to be elected by mid-June 2007.

### SENEGAL

On 31 January 2007, the National Assembly adopted a bill re-establishing the Senate. The upper chamber had been abolished by a January 2001 referendum called by President Abdoulaye Wade, only two years after its establishment in 1999 under former President Abdou Diouf. The previous Senate was composed of 60 members (48 indirectly elected and 12 appointed by the President); the new Senate will have 100 members, whose mode of designation will be specified in other legislation.

During heated debates in the National Assembly, the ruling Sopi Coalition argued that the improved economic situation and the increased national budget would be able to finance a bi-cameral parliament, while the opposition Alliance of Progressive Forces (AFP) argued that the money should be spent on rural development. The Socialist Party (PS) accused the government of using the bill to strengthen its coalition ahead of the upcoming parliamentary elections, which were due to take place at the same time as the presidential elections, in February 2007, but were postponed until June for what the Government termed financial reasons.

### UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

The first ever elections in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) were held in December 2006 for 20 of the 40 seats in the Federal National Council. A total of 450 candidates, including 65 women, contested the elections. Since there are no political parties in the UAE, all candidates ran as independents. The 6,689 voters - approximately 0.8 per cent of UAE citizens - were selected by the country's rulers and included 1,189 women. The newly elected members convened

alongside the 20 appointed members on 12 February 2007. The Federal National Council now has nine female members (one elected, and eight appointed).

### VENEZUELA

The National Assembly held an extraordinary session on 31 January 2007 at which it approved a bill granting President Hugo Chávez the power to rule by decree for 18 months. Because the main opposition parties boycotted the 2005 elections, President Chávez's ruling Fifth Republic Movement (MVR) and its allies control all 161 seats in the National Assembly.

The President received wide powers in areas including territory, defence, science, transportation and State institutions. A similar measure in November 2000 had given him the power to rule by decree for one year on more limited social, economic and administrative matters. President Chávez, who was sworn in for a third consecutive term on 10 January 2007, said that the special powers were necessary to create a socialist society.

**More than 1500 reports on parliamentary elections available on IPU web site**

Since 1967, the IPU has been reporting on the results of parliamentary elections worldwide. These election archives are now fully available to researchers and students in the PARLINE database on national parliaments (<http://www.ipu.org/parline-e/parlinesearch.asp>). To access the election archives, select a parliamentary chamber and follow the "Archive of past elections results for this chamber" link at the bottom of the page. The archives date back to the very first edition of the Chronicle of Parliamentary Elections, which celebrates its fortieth anniversary in 2007.

## Recent IPU Publication

**PANORAMA OF PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS 2006**  
AN ANNUAL PUBLICATION OF THE INTER-PARLIAMENTARY UNION

*"In any State the authority of the government can only derive from the will of the people as expressed in genuine, free and fair elections held at regular intervals on the basis of universal, equal and secret suffrage."*

Declaration on Criteria for Free and Fair Elections, unanimously adopted by the Inter-Parliamentary Council at its 114th session (Paris, 20 March 1994)

The Panorama of parliamentary elections 2006 provides an overview of all direct elections to single, lower and upper chambers of national parliaments in 2006. It presents a snapshot of the world's parliamentary elections in images and figures, highlighting electoral events of particular interest or significance.

One of the year's highlights was undoubtedly the first multiparty elections in the Democratic Republic of the Congo in more than 40 years. For most of the time President Mobutu was in power (1965-1997), only one political party existed and could field candidates at elections. The transitional parliament appointed in 2003 oversaw the adoption of a new constitution and electoral law. In July 2006, after numerous postponements, 24 million registered voters were able to choose freely from among 9,709 candidates contesting the 500 parliamentary seats at stake in the National Assembly.

Despite the considerable logistical challenges, and with the support of more than 17,000 United Nations troops, the elections went relatively smoothly. Seventy per cent of registered voters took part. In all, 69 political parties won seats in the National Assembly. Forty-two women (18.4%) were elected, less than the 12 per cent of women in the outgoing Transitional National Assembly. The establishment of the new parliament was completed in January 2007 with indirect elections to the Senate, marking an important step on the road to democracy in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

**2006 AT A GLANCE**

- Direct elections were held in 44 countries for 52 parliamentary chambers.
- 8,263 of the world's 43,779 parliamentary seats were renewed through direct elections.
- Women obtained 1,409 of these seats, increases in the number of women were registered in more than 40 per cent of the chambers that were renewed.
- More than 400,000,000 people voted in parliamentary elections, around one in 16 of the world's estimated population of 6.3 billion people.
- The parliaments of Thailand and Fiji were dissolved as a result of military coups.
- 9 of the 44 countries recorded voter turnout of over 90 per cent.
- 20 countries returned their governments to power. In 9 countries, the ruling parties left office following parliamentary elections.

**ELECTORAL SNAPSHOTS**

Lyons Mubutu Filing Station in Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of the Congo

Women cast their ballots in Guluwoko during parliamentary elections in Mozambique

An indigenous woman votes at a polling station in Caric, Peru

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## TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

# The Parliament of Equatorial Guinea moves towards greater transparency



Photo IPU/L. Marzal

The IPU is providing tangible support to Equatorial Guinea's House of People's Representatives. Eleven trainees, including six women, won a competitive test to be trained as stenotypists in a 17-month programme launched in March 2007. The trainees also take courses in Spanish and general culture.

**P**arliaments have long endeavoured to provide as much information as possible on their activities, for the sake of the transparency that is key to any democracy. By the same token, people are constantly demanding greater access to information on the activities of their elected representatives.

One means by which parliaments can provide information is to record and publish their deliberations. Besides allowing citizens to learn about the work of parliament and to take part in it, if they wish, transcribing parliamentary debates provides parliamentarians with a crucial means of performing their oversight duties. It also serves to build up an institutional memory.

While many parliaments use highly specialized and sophisticated technology to transcribe debates, many others, notably in developing countries, do not. The Parliament of Equatorial Guinea falls into the latter category, as the IPU realized in the course of its project, financed by the European Commission and the Government of Equatorial Guinea, to assist the Parliament. In an effort to remedy this shortcoming, the IPU launched a programme to train a dozen stenotype operators and précis-writers. The programme will end in July 2007, after 17 months of intensive courses dispensed by two instructors.

In order to ensure their training is used to the best advantage, the trainees have access to state-of-the-art information technology (stenotype machines and computers), thanks to which they can familiarize themselves with Transcription of Computer-Aided Stenotopy (TCAS) techniques.

The programme has recently been evaluated, and the results indicate a very high success rate among the participants. This means the Parliament of Equatorial Guinea will have a team of agents familiar with the most modern transcription techniques. In order to guarantee the investment's long-term viability, the IPU is paying special attention to the maintenance of the material made available in connection with the programme. One of the trainees is to be placed in charge of maintenance and has received the requisite training.

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