

The World of Parliaments

Quarterly Review of the Inter-Parliamentary Union

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Special guest :
Mr. Mélégué Traoré,
President of the National Assembly of Burkina Faso

*“Parliaments must become more involved
in the foreign policy of States”*

Q : Is Parliament still the venue for politics?

Mélégué Traoré : Politics never left parliament. Indeed, parliament is the ideal forum for politics. As far as globalisation is concerned, international financial flows and the complexities of trade might give the impression that not only parliaments but also governments have been eclipsed. Throughout the world, the political currents and structures that run States appear to have been completely overtaken by events, but these appearances are deceptive, for when all is said and done the decisions that must be taken are indeed taken - by governments. And in the final analysis, governments cannot take them without the assent of parliamentary assemblies. So there is no contradiction between the globalisation movement and the role of parliaments. What there may be is a change in the functions, duties, practices and activities of parliaments.



Mr. Mélégué Traoré,
President of the National Assembly of Burkina Faso

Q : How can we raise awareness of parliaments' activities on the international scene?

M.T. : It is important to reassert the role of parliaments within the nation State before seeking a wider understanding of the role of parliaments internationally. This is just as important for old nations, where parliamentary politics is well established – and sometimes so deeply engrained as to become trivialised – as it is for the new States and new democracies in Africa, where parliament has taken its place as a pivotal institution. A few years back, owing to the single-party regime, when a parliament did exist, it was a sort of appendage of the executive branch. At the end of the 60s and until the middle of the 90s, when states of emergency and military coups prevailed, parliament either did not exist or existed so intermittently that its institutional authority all but disappeared. And without an institutional memory, parliament does not amount to much. Since the democratic renewal in Africa, parliaments have become the major forum for the people to voice their views. How can we boost parliaments' international standing? I believe that parliaments must become more involved in States' foreign policy. Traditionally, parliament's function with regard to foreign policy has been to vote credits for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and to authorise the ratification of

(Cont'd page 2)

In this issue

Editorial	3
First world parliamentary meeting on trade ...	4
Committee on the human rights of parliamentarians	6
Parliamentary Developments	8
Historical focus	10
Mission in the Middle-East	12

international agreements. Parliament's foreign policy role has consisted of exercising oversight *a posteriori*. Parliament must broaden this role so that it can intervene *a priori*. This can be seen within the framework of the policy of humanitarian intervention, where citizens can offer their opinions or lend their approval, and this can only be done through parliament. Parliaments must also be the forum from which independent initiatives spring.

There is no gainsaying that parliaments have helped greatly to ease the tense relations between certain African States, for parliament has one enormous advantage over governments – its procedures are more flexible. Parliament encompasses both the opposition and the majority. When a delegation from the Parliament of Burkina Faso travels abroad, it is always composed of majority and opposition MPs, radical and moderate, which means that when we express ourselves it is Burkina Faso that is expressing itself by consensus. This is not the case with Government. Parliament is becoming the forum for diplomatic initiatives, and this is where parliamentary diplomacy has to operate. Today, parliament has taken on a broader role in West Africa, southern Africa and Central and South America. Inter-State relations in West Africa would be infinitely more difficult without the very intense inter-parliamentary activity conducted on a bilaterally or multilaterally. And this is where the Inter-Parliamentary Union must play a new role.

Q : So Parliaments can be a sort of link, a messenger between "political decision-makers" and citizens?

M.T. : Yes. The MP is a link, an institutional bond between the population and government, who generally claims to act behalf of the former. And parliaments must continue to play this role. Even the smallest village in Burkina Faso, Mali or Senegal is attached to central government through parliamentarians. In countries where the administration falters or where the government is not able to reach out to all of the villages throughout the country, only the parliamentarian can provide the link between the central power and this or that distant hamlet or village. This is especially important in view of the fact that in our country, parliamentarians are often elected according to their region of origin, not the place in which they live. This role is essential; it is particularly evident with development projects. Govern-

ments take action in the most remote areas of Africa because needs have been expressed by parliamentarians. Parliaments and parliamentarians act as mediators between citizens, singly or in groups, associations and government. The decision-makers are parliaments and parliamentarians. There is a need to go beyond mediation – parliament must also be the place where decisions are taken. With parliament's help, problems such as AIDS can become international issues. Epidemics flare up regularly in Africa, Latin America, Asia and the Middle East, and it is the responsibility of parliaments to put such things on the agenda. This also holds true for the developed countries. In Europe, the debate on public health and food quality would never have developed as it has by virtue of government action alone. These debates can only spring from the impetus provided by associations and by the institution that represents citizens, i.e. parliament.

Q : The Inter-Parliamentary Union is attempting to give a parliamentary dimension to international cooperation, to the UN and the WTO. How can it do so in practical terms?

M.T. : If we require democracy within a State, if we believe that - say - the British people make their grievances heard through the House of Commons and that the policy carried out by Mr. Blair's government must be overseen by parliament, then we must also accept the same principle at the international level. The inter-State structures set up at the sub-regional level, for example in West Africa, Central Africa, southern Africa, East Africa and North Africa, and at the regional continent-wide level, or in Latin America, Asia, the Middle East, Europe and even North America, and the creation of sub-regional and regional bodies, must move in tandem with the impetus provided by parliaments. At this level, international structures require a parliamentary dimension. Naturally, the same holds true at the world level, e.g. as far as the United Nations is concerned. This is where the Inter-Parliamentary Union comes in. The IPU has to be more ambitious. Naturally, if the IPU is to be able to fulfil its mission, if it is one day to become the parliamentary arm of the United Nations, for example, it must contribute something new, for there is no point in simply duplicating what governments do. The IPU must provide something new in the choice of topics, challenges and approaches. And in order to do so, the

Union must rethink its structures. It is clear that we can no longer define the Union as being part of the association-based movement, and this process has picked up speed since the Conference of Presiding Officers of National Parliaments held at UN Headquarters in New York last August.

Q : The 106th Inter-Parliamentary Conference is scheduled to take place in Burkina Faso. What will be the focus of this event?

M.T. : We must demonstrate that parliamentarianism and parliamentary democracy exist in Africa. Burkina Faso intends to continue what was started in Cairo in 1997 and in Windhoek the following year: show that parliamentary diplomacy works in Africa. We intend to show that an event of this size in Africa does not need to copy the organisational arrangements made elsewhere. I do not wish to imply that the other continents are not hospitable. Every people has its own unique talent. With our limited means, we are going to try and offer a warm reception to the Conference delegates. Everything depends on how these limited means are managed. We would like two questions to be taken up in Ouagadougou. The first concerns the women MPs. The Meeting of Women Parliamentarians is a stroke of luck for us, because Burkina Faso is probably one of the African countries with the strongest women's associations. Women's village groups are responsible for the bulk of development in Burkina Faso. We hope that the debate in the Meeting of Women Parliamentarians on 9 September will involve the women's associations of Burkina Faso, so that the women MPs bear testimony to a reality that can serve as an example and usher in a true debate on problems of concern for today's women – be they American, French or German. Not only the problems of African women who live in big cities, the intellectuals, but also the problems of women who live in small villages will be addressed. Another subject we would like to see taken up is the key issue of AIDS and the impact of epidemics. AIDS must be analysed not only in terms of the number of fatalities but also its deeper impact on the African nations. Studies have shown that a number of African countries are ultimately threatened with extinction because of AIDS. Some nations have been hit so hard that their population is gradually shrinking. We hope that there will be a genuine debate on this issue. ■

IPU moves ahead in Middle-East and International trade

The Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) has just organised two events which demonstrate how important a role parliaments can play on the international political scene. The mission by the Committee on Middle East Questions to Jordan, Israel and the territories controlled by the Palestinian Authority, together with the first parliamentary meeting on international trade, convened in Geneva, underscore parliamentarians' commitment to the issues which are a source of concern today for the world's citizens: the escalation of violence between Israelis and Palestinians, and the impact of economic globalisation.

In visiting Tel Aviv, Jerusalem, Gaza, Ramallah and Bethlehem, the IPU's Middle East Committee, chaired by French MP Yves Tavernier, achieved a twofold goal: establishing frank and constructive contacts with the representatives of almost all political currents in Israeli and Palestinian society, and - more important - proving that parliamentary diplomacy can be effective when the inter-governmental dialogue is deadlocked.

Israeli Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Shimon Peres stressed that the IPU mission was "the most important channel" at a time when the situation between Israelis and Palestinians has once again reached boiling point. Receiving the members of the IPU mission when the peace process is completely deadlocked, the Presiding Officers of the Knesset and the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC), Avraham Burg and Ahmed Qurie "Abu Ala", immediately agreed to the proposal by the President of the IPU Committee to meet as soon as possible under the auspices of the world organisation of parliaments to resume the political dialogue.

It is noteworthy that the IPU mission was received and backed by the main Israeli and Palestinian political leaders, including Shimon Peres, the Chairman of the Palestinian Authority, Yasser Arafat, Dan Meridor (Head of the Knesset Committee on Defence and Foreign Affairs), Joshua Matza and Zev Boim (Likud), Yossi Sarid (leader of the Israeli opposition), Naomi Chazan (Deputy Speaker of the Knesset), Avshalom Abu Vilain (Meretz), Meir Sheerit (Minister of Justice), Hashem Mahameed (Israeli Arab MP) and the Palestinian MPs Ziad Abu Amr and Salah Tamari, not to mention the presiding officers of the two Jordanian Chambers, Abdulhadi Majali and Zaid Al Rifai, and the



The IPU Committee on Middle East questions met the President of the Knesset, Mr Avraham Burg. From left to right: Mrs O.A. Starrfelt (Norway), Mr A. Philippou (Cyprus), Mr A. Burg (President of the Knesset), Mr Y. Tavernier (France, President of the Committee) and Mr R. Ahaouandjinou (Benin).

President of the Palestine National Council, Saleem Al Zahnoun, whom the mission met in Amman.

The IPU again made its mark when, for the first time, it brought together international trade specialists at a parliamentary meeting where 182 MPs from 71 countries had a chance to enter into a dialogue with WTO Director-General Mike Moore. The former New Zealand MP emphasised that the IPU meeting gave MPs "an important opportunity to build a bridge between institutions like the WTO, to which you belong and fund, and the people". The same people will no doubt appreciate Mike Moore's remark stating that: "parliamentary committees should aggressively scrutinize the WTO and other international organisations".

By moving ahead in the Middle East and in the field of international trade, the IPU has espoused the ambition expressed by the President of the National Assembly of Burkina Faso, Mélégué Traoré, namely that Parliaments become more involved in foreign policy, a field usually reserved for governments, and in the technical spheres of economic globalisation, which until now has been the exclusive domain of economists and financial specialists. This twofold commitment represents an ambitious challenge that the world's oldest multilateral organisation is duty-bound to meet. ■ (see also page 12)

L.B.

WTO Director General dialogues with mps at IPU Meeting on international trade

The 182 MPs from 71 national parliaments, gathered together in Geneva at the initiative of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) on 8 and 9 June 2001 for the first ever world parliamentary meeting on international trade, adopted a final declaration in which they underscored the need to intensify their activities in national parliaments aimed at overseeing and influencing government policy in relation to trade negotiations. A total of 315 delegates were present at the meeting. ■



Photo: H. Salgado

From left to right: Mr Anders B. Johnsson, IPU Secretary General; Mr Mike Moore, WTO Director General and Mrs Najma Heptulla, President of the Council of the IPU.

“Proactive role of parliaments in the field of international trade” says President of IPU Council

The President of the IPU Council, Dr. Najma Heptulla, who is also the Deputy Chairperson of the Indian Rajya Sabha (Upper House) explains the achievements of the first parliamentary meeting on international trade organised by the IPU in Geneva on 8 and 9 June.

Q: What is the result of this first parliamentary meeting on international trade?

Dr. Najma Heptulla: «There was a gap between the parliamentarians and the multilateral trade negotiations. The parliaments were never taken into confidence, and this culminated with the Marrakech Agreement. When the final document came before the public and the parliaments, fears were expressed. There have been demonstrations all over the world, both in developed and the developing countries and in the parliaments. In democracy, governments have to

face parliaments and either they face them now, taking them into confidence, or they face them after. We, in the IPU, feel it is much better that MPs are involved from the beginning [in the trade negotiations] so that the work of governments become easier. We can give inputs from our perspective as people's representatives as we represent both the majority in the government and the minority in the opposition.

Q: Is there a consensus on that proposal?

N.H.: I had discussions with many delegations from the developing and the developed countries. They all want to be focused on bridging the gap. The developing countries feel that the gap between rich and poor should be narrowed, because the fruits of globalisation are part of the globalisation....The IPU can be a catalyst, a bridge to help our governments, our peoples and the WTO.

Q: What is the message of the MPs gathered in Geneva?

N.H.: The parliamentarians' job is to satisfy, to whatever extent we can, our electorate for sustainable development, better job, better medical facilities, health services, education. These are the major issues we are worried about, and we do not want to see imbalance in the world, it is not good for anybody: either for developing nor for developed countries. Because in any case the market is one. We have to develop so that the purchasing power in developing countries improve and the produced goods could be sold in the developing world, and the developing world's agriculture products could find better market in the developed countries...Today, there must be a two ways traffic and not only one.

IPU Meeting on international trade – Final Declaration

We believe that globalisation brings both opportunities and challenges to all countries and peoples. To attain benefits for countries and regions of different levels of development, however, international trade - like international financial and economic arrangements - must be designed to promote human welfare everywhere and preserve cultural diversity.

The focus must be on people-centred development. This concept includes increased market access for the exports of developing countries, and greater scope for debt reduction allied with increased development assistance and better access to technology; it must be built upon an equitable world trading regime and sound international financial institutions. There is also a need to ensure that trade rules and practices do not undermine sustainable development goals.

From these perspectives, we are committed to strengthening the rules-based world trading regime with the World Trade Organisation (WTO) at its centre; access to WTO should be open to new members on a non-discriminatory basis in order to achieve universal membership. We hope to see the resolution of outstanding implementation issues from the Uruguay Round and greater focus on development in future trade negotiations.

This task falls to governments. It is they who negotiate international trade rules and arrangements on behalf of States. Concurrently, it is the duty of Parliaments to scrutinise government action in this as in other fields and to enact appropriate legislation. As the legitimate representatives of the people who have been elected to protect their interests and represent their views and aspirations, we are entirely committed to carrying out these responsibilities to the full.

To this end, we need to intensify our activities in national parliaments to oversee and influence government policy in relation to trade negotiations. At the international level, we need to complement these activities by meeting to obtain and share information, exchange views and experiences and discuss the structure, working methods and issues facing governments at the WTO.

We call on the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) to work with other parliamentary assemblies and organisations in assisting us to meet these challenges. We invite the IPU to hold a parliamentary meeting on the occasion of the Fourth WTO Ministerial Conference and to present plans for a programme of activities which, on the above basis, seeks to build a parliamentary dimension to international trade negotiations and arrangements.

Promoting openness, fairness and predictability in international trade for the benefit of humanity

By Mike Moore,
Director General of the World Trade Organisation (WTO)

The current WTO drive to forge closer contact with parliamentarians reflects my personal experience and beliefs. I believe that parliaments and their members have a critical role to play in bringing international institutions and ordinary citizens closer together. In turn, the IPU as the international organization of parliaments worldwide can help its members to provide a comprehensive and cohesive parliamentary response to the challenges of international governance. It is important for parliamentarians and legislators to know about the institutions they own and fund. To assist you, we have prepared a new publication, *WTO Policy Issues for Parliamentarians*, which is being sent to all parliaments¹. It is imperative that elected representatives gain the confidence of citizens that they are closely following global issues as they evolve in international institutions. Early in my term I suggested to IPU that we should hold seminars to explain to legislators our role, to point out that we do not own governments, they own us. My staff have been working closely with the IPU to prepare such an event. The result - an IPU Parliamentary Meeting, *For a free, fair and equitable multilateral trading system: Providing a parliamentary dimension*, to be convened on 8 and 9 June this year - is thus very much welcomed. I have accepted the invitation to participate and I look forward to engaging in dialogue with all of you.

A big debate is raging about the benefits of globalization. In this debate the role of trade is both praised and criticized. It is defended by governments as the best way forward to achieve greater economic prosperity for their citizens, and yet shunned when the competitive forces of trade hit too close to home and when citizens blame trade for changes they do not like. Yet, governments know they cannot effectively serve their people and their peoples' interests without the cooperation of others. This is true for international trade just as it is for many other global issues. Governments cannot ensure clean air and a clean environment, run an airline, organize a tax system, attack organized crime, solve the plagues of our age without the cooperation of other governments and international institutions.

The challenge is how to work together internationally for the benefit of ordinary people everywhere. International trade is an important cross-border issue. Even more so nowadays, since trade policy touches on sensitive issues like the environment and food safety, which are becoming the very stuff of politics in the post-Cold War era. And the WTO, with its many ambitious and wide-ranging agreements and its uniquely binding dispute-settlement mechanism, is a particularly advanced instrument of international co-operation. It is also the only set of binding international instruments and rules already in place to control trade in the global economy and to ensure that the trading interests of large and small countries are equally respected. Our agreements are negotiated by Ambassadors and Ministers who represent their governments and who, in turn, are responsible for advancing their government's agenda. We operate by consensus and every member government has veto power. Openness, fairness and predictability are at the heart of the multilateral trading system.

There is, however, an urgent need for governments to ensure accountability and ownership of intergovernmental organisations such as the WTO to their peoples. This is where parliaments can make a vital contribution. The WTO is above all an intergovernmental organization. So it is mainly accountable to the people through their governments. Ministers hold us accountable every two years. Governments are in turn accountable to parliaments and the latter have a constitutional responsibility to represent the people and to pass legislation. Elected parliamentarians are the measurable and accountable representatives of civil society. I fear that if parliamentarians do not engage in the critical global issues and be perceived by the public to represent their interests and concerns, then others who do not have the same legitimacy most certainly will.

We live in an age of many contradictions. Advances in information and communications technology have made the world more accessible to ordinary people. Globally, we are now more prosperous and relations between states more peaceful than ever before in world history. Yet, the very international institutions and agreements which help build this new age of cooperative international relations are the source of increasingly virulent criticisms. It is a good thing that voters and consumers want more information and control, greater accountability and greater ownership. But it is

unhealthy and dangerous if their feelings of anxiety and alienation, made more stark by the process of globalization, lead to a retreat from international institutions, treaties and agreements.

A glance at history tells us that the past 50 years of trade liberalisation are incomparably better than the protectionist nightmare of the 1930s. Indeed, the last 50 years has seen unparalleled prosperity and growth and more has been done to address poverty in these last 50 years than the previous 500. Since 1960, child death rates have halved in developing countries; malnutrition rates have declined by 33 percent; and the proportion of school children who do not go to school has dropped from around half to a quarter. Further, the number of rural families without access to safe water has fallen from nine tenths to one quarter.

Experience shows, and studies confirm, that countries that are more open to trade grow faster than those that are not, and so have less poverty, better jobs, better hospitals, and better schools. That is why over the past 15 years, developing country after developing country has unilaterally made liberalisation the keystone of its economic policies. The multilateral trading system proved its worth again only a few years ago when it helped keep markets open in the wake of the financial crisis that started in Asia and then swept the world, thus helping to prevent a global recession.

All institutions are imperfect and each can be improved. The GATT, now the WTO, is over 50 years old. It is correct that we review our work and debate our future direction. We need to improve constantly on what we have already. For me, one important challenge is to reconnect the WTO with ordinary people. Some of this is up to the WTO Secretariat. The WTO's External Relations Division deals with enquiries from members of parliament most days. I hold regular meetings with parliamentarians. I make a point of testifying before parliamentary committees as often as possible. I have made contact with global parliamentary associations like the Inter-Parliamentary Union and regional assemblies in an attempt to inform and involve. But most of the job remains with governments and parliaments. Your meeting, *For a free, fair and equitable multilateral trading system: Providing a parliamentary dimension*, is an important opportunity for members of parliament to commence bridging the gap between the WTO and the people. You have my full support and we will be there to assist you in your discussions. ■

¹ Copies of this publication can be requested from either the WTO External Relations Division, Tel +41 22 7395254/5466, Fax +41 22 739 5777, e-mail parlbulletin@wto.org or from the Inter-parliamentary Union (IPU).

The Committee on the Human Rights of Parliamentarians

The IPU's Committee on the Human Rights of Parliamentarians meets four times yearly behind closed doors. It is composed of five parliamentarians representing the various geopolitical regions of the world, and examines cases involving human rights violations committed against some of their fellow MPs.

Composition

Mr. Juan Pablo Letelier (Chile, President),
Mr. Mahinda Samarasinghe (Sri Lanka, Vice-President), Mrs. Ann Clwyd (United Kingdom) and Mr. Mahamane Ousmane (Niger).
One post is vacant at present.

Aims

It was in 1974, when a series of coups d'Etat had led to the dissolution of many parliaments and to serious violations of the fundamental rights of their members, that the Inter-Parliamentary Union took the decision to set up a procedure corresponding to its vocation of protecting parliamentarians against breaches of their fundamental rights and thus of defending the institution of parliament itself. Thus, a *«Procedure for the examination and treatment, by the Inter-Parliamentary Union, of communications concerning violations affecting the human rights of parliamentarians»* was adopted in 1976. Since then, the Committee on the Human Rights of Parliamentarians has been responsible for investigating the communications received.

The fundamental aim of the IPU and its Committee on the Human Rights of Parliamentarians is to see to it that any parliamentarian whose personal situation has been the subject of a complaint is treated in a way that is in conformity with the international and constitutional human rights guarantees in force in the country in question and that, as the case may be, this parliamentarian obtains reparation for the damage and harm incurred. In order to achieve this goal, the Committee initiates a dialogue with the authorities and acts as a mediator between them and the plaintiffs. By analysing, in the light of law in general and human rights standards in particular, both complaints and observations and information received from both sides, the Committee forms an opinion which it then expresses in the form of decisions. In its concern to shed light enabling it to settle each case satisfactorily, the Committee may hold hearings, particularly on the occasion of statutory IPU Conferences, and send on-site mission to gather first-hand information. These missions can also take the form of trial observation, as was recently the case with Mr. Alpha Condé from Guinea (see box).

Twice a year, on the occasion of the Union's Statutory Conferences, the Committee reports to the Council (IPU governing body). In principle, the Committee follows a confidential procedure, but can go public with cases it is examining, particularly when very serious violations are involved, when there is an imminent threat to the life of the MP in question, or when a satisfactory settlement to a case is a long time coming. The Committee then presents to the Council a public report together with a draft resolution. This enables it to mobilise all of the Union's Members to

The IPU and the Alpha Condé affair

Mr. Alpha Condé, President of the Rally of the Guinean People (RPG), a member of the National Assembly and a candidate in the presidential election of December 1998, was arrested on 15 December 1998 prior to the proclamation of provisional election returns in *flagrante delicto*, i.e. without the lifting of his parliamentary immunity. At the time, he was accused of «attempting to leave the country clandestinely» and «assault and battery on members of the public order force». In January 1999, other charges were added, such as «attempt to cross borders clandestinely, fraudulent export of foreign currency, attempt to recruit mercenaries and breach of State security».

The on-site IPU mission conducted in January 2000 noted serious irregularities and violations of the Code of Penal Procedure during the investigation. The Committee's fears as to the regularity of the proceedings were confirmed by a trial observer mission, which concluded that «Mr. Condé and his fellow defendants did not enjoy a fair trial (...) and their guilt has not been established". The IPU therefore called on the authorities to release Mr. Condé and his fellow defendants immediately and unconditionally. He was finally released on Friday, 18 May 2001.



obtain the cessation of the arbitrary acts or just reparation. Unlike other mechanisms for the protection of human rights, the Union and its Committee keep on examining a case until a satisfactory settlement has been reached.

The Committee, which is due to hold its next session at IPU Headquarters in June 2001, is currently examining 53 cases concerning 207 MPs in 35 countries. At the 105th Conference of the Inter-Parliamentary Union in Havana, the Committee on the Human Rights of Parliamentarians submitted to the Council 24 cases concerning 141 MPs, former or serving, from 18 countries.

Frequent violations

As words are parliamentarians' working tools, it is not surprising to note that the majority of the violations reported can be traced to the exercise of freedom of expression, particularly critical remarks which MPs, almost always in the opposition, have made about the other branches of government. The Committee is faced with a growing number of cases of imprisoned MPs who have been stripped of their political rights following proceedings and trials which are questionable but often have the appearance of legality, or who are subjected to various kinds of harassment or hindrances to the free exercise of their parliamentary mandate. In some cases, MPs pay for their commitment to human rights with their lives. In January 2000, Mr. Tengku Nasrihuddin Daud (Indonesia), a member of a parliamentary fact-finding committee on human rights violations in Aceh, was murdered. To date, the inquiry has not yielded any results. This is also the case with Mr. Jaime Hurtado (Ecuador), assassinated in February 1999 in broad daylight as he was leaving the morning sitting of Parliament.

Yet another case is that of Myanmar, where not only individual MPs but also parliament, as such, has been prevented from meeting from 1990 to this day.

They said:

Mr. Lim Guan Eng (Malaysia, October 1999)

«I am grateful for the IPU's efforts, especially the on-site mission here. I cannot adequately express how much the IPU efforts meant to me, the international recognition that I am still an MP even though this is not acknowledged by the Malaysian Parliament».

Mr. Ngarléji Yorongar (Chad, July 1999, former presidential candidate)

«The IPU mission to N'jamena played a decisive role in my release. I was enheartened when the IPU took up my case. An institution like the IPU, which brings together all of the world's parliaments, can only act as a deterrent... I encourage you to pursue your efforts to help prisoners who, throughout the world, are still rotting in dictators' jails».

Mr. Alpha Condé (Guinea, former presidential candidate, after his release in May 2001)

«I would like to express all of our gratitude to the IPU and to salute the fight for liberty which it waged alongside us during all these years of suffering».

MAIN RESULTS OF HAVANA CONFERENCE ON GENDER PERSPECTIVE



Swedish MP, Mrs Viola Furubjelke, who presides the Coordinating Committee of the Meeting of Women Parliamentarians explains the main results of the 105th Havana Inter-Parliamentary Conference on gender perspective.

Q : What was the high point of this Meeting of Women Parliamentarians?

Viola Furubjelke : The major benefit of this Conference had to do with our working methods. In the Women's Meeting, we used to have a huge plenary where we would sit for hours delivering prepared speeches with no dialogue. At this Conference, for the first time, we split up into working groups and studied in depth the topics that we were to discuss later on. We had an opportunity to experience a more interactive way of working, and by doing so I believe that we changed the focus in the debate held in the Women's Meeting from the national interest to the common interest, namely that of women. The discussions held focused on the item concerning international law in armed conflicts from a woman's perspective, and since the participants had to work spontaneously, they refrained from reading out their country reports. But it was a plenary that was much more difficult because women felt that they had to give testimony from their own countries. So this is the most important thing: we have changed the focus from reading statements in the national interests of each and every one to discussing the common interests of women in a very interactive way.

Q : There was also a panel discussion on CEDAW. How can we follow up on that ?

V.F. : I believe that this is really a good thing to continue with and the women felt that they had an opportunity to learn a lot more about the existing tools that women have, to work for and claim their rights. The CEDAW Convention is a complicated instrument with its Optional Protocol, and women have to learn about the mechanisms for using it. We can go further and we can choose another item, and the proposal has already been made that the Ouagadougou Conference take up violence against women. There could also be a panel discussion on HIV/AIDS. One of these panels will be set up in Ouagadougou, and we will continue with this kind of deeper discussion on a more limited item.

Q : What was the main achievement of the 105th Conference ?

V.F. : I would say the final resolution accurately reflects the resolution of the Women's Meeting. The women MPs have enhanced their coordination and fine-tuned their strategic approach so that they have managed to achieve a very good gender perspective in this resolution, and at least eight paragraphs in the final version have been taken directly from the resolution of the Women's Meeting.

Parliamentary Developments

AUSTRALIA

On 9 May 2001, the Australian Parliament celebrated the centenary of its founding in an exceptional joint sitting. The ceremony, attended by some 7,000 persons, took place in the Royal Exhibition Building in Melbourne, the same building where, a century previously, the Duke of Cornwall and York, the future George the Fifth, inaugurated the first Federal Parliament, which was established on 1 January 1901 and brought together the first MPs elected by the young nation.

BELARUS

On 16 April 2001, President Lukashenka's decree banning foreign financial assistance for election-related activities or even seminars went into effect. The decree, which was issued on 12 March 2001, prohibits the use of foreign aid for activities intended to change the constitutional system or overthrow State authorities. In particular, the decree bans the use of foreign funds for the preparation of elections, rallies, strikes, seminars, «propaganda materials,» and «other forms of propaganda-related activities among the population.»

BULGARIA

Bulgaria's Central Election Committee officially registered King Simeon II's movement to run in the 17 June 2001 parliamentary elections. The National Movement for Simeon II will form a coalition with the Bulgarian Women's Party and the Movement for National Revival. The coalition will have the name of the King's movement. King Simeon II was forced to create the coalition with the two registered parties after the Sofia City Court refused to register his movement because it did not meet all the necessary requirements. The Supreme Court upheld the verdict following an appeal by the King.

CZECH REPUBLIC

On 24 January 2001, the Constitutional Court upheld a complaint by President Havel and 33 senators against an amendment to the electoral law that had previously been passed by the Chamber of Deputies. The Court ruled that the bill violated constitutional provisions as it introduced elements of a majority system whereas the Constitution provides for a proportional representation system. Accordingly, the court abolished an amendment that would have divided the Czech Republic into 35 instead of nine electoral districts on the grounds that it would have made it more difficult for smaller parties to gain representation and benefited the Czech Social Democratic Party (CSSD) and the Civic Democratic Party (ODS), the sponsors of the amendment. A provision stating that electoral alliances had to gain five per cent of the vote for each member of the alliance was upheld.

FRANCE

On 15 May 2001, the President of the Republic approved Organic Law No. 2001-419 amending the expiry date of the powers of

the National Assembly, now fixed on the third Tuesday in June in the fifth year following its election. This provision will apply to the National Assembly elected in June 1997. Previously, the powers of the National Assembly expired on the first Tuesday in April of the fifth year following its election.

GUYANA

An Electoral Code of Conduct was approved on 3 March 2001 and was signed by all parties that contested the 19 March 2001 general elections. This document sets out the standards to guide relationships between political parties and requires that candidates, agents, members, and supporters of contesting parties to be on their best behaviour throughout the campaign period.

KENYA

On 20 February 2001, the Speaker of the National Assembly initiated a review of the rules governing parliamentary conduct after a fight between Members. He established a House subcommittee to review Standing Orders and legislation covering Members' conduct. The public has been invited to suggest disciplinary measures.

MADAGASCAR

On 18 March 2001, the first elections for the 60 elective seats in the reinstated Senate were held. President Didier Ratsiraka abolished this body when he took power in 1975, replacing it with a Supreme Revolutionary Council, whose members he selected. The Senate was reintroduced officially in 1992 under the Constitution of the Third Republic. The 60 elected members were joined by 30 more senators appointed by the President.

NIGERIA

On 30 April 2001, a debate was initiated on the Constitution and amendments thereto proposed by a government appointed committee. Among the proposed amendments is the prolongation of the term of office of the President of the Republic and the regional governors from four to five years. The present Constitution was drafted at the end of the military regime of General Abdulsalami Abubakar in May 1999.

Also in April 2001, two new political associations, the National Solidarity Association (NSA) and the National Frontiers (NF), formally announced their entry onto Nigeria's political stage. The NSA's membership is drawn largely from among friends and associates of former President General Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida, who led the country from 1985 to 1993. The leaders of the NF include ex-governors and military chiefs as well as Chief Edwin Ume-Ezeoke, a former Speaker of the House of Representatives.

POLAND

On 30 April 2001, President Aleksander Kwasniewski signed into law a new election bill that had previously provoked controversy

between its sponsors (the Solidarity Electoral Action along with smaller parliamentary groups) and the opposition Democratic Left Alliance (SLD). The new law changes the method of allocating seats in Parliament to ensure broader representation for parties with fewer votes. The new law also regulates party finances and bans corporate financing of political campaigns.

REPUBLIC OF CONGO

On 12 April 2001, the delegates at a national convention on inter-Congolese dialogue, in Brazzaville, approved the draft Constitution which, according to an official timetable, must be put to a referendum before the end of 2001.

The draft Constitution makes provision for a presidential regime with a Head of State who is elected by direct universal suffrage for seven years and eligible for re-election once. Legislative power will be entrusted to a bicameral Parliament, composed of the National Assembly and the Senate.

SINGAPORE

On 20 April 2001, the Parliamentary Elections Bill was passed by the Parliament. Under the new bill, the right to vote has been extended for the first time to overseas Singaporeans, although ballots can only be cast in Beijing, Canberra, Hong Kong, London and Washington, where the Embassies are considered large enough to handle the voting. Voting via computers has also been approved for selected constituencies and recounts will only be allowed when the difference between candidates is no more than two per cent of the votes cast in a constituency.

UNITED KINGDOM

On 16 April 2001, the Electoral Commission, created under the (2000) Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act came into being. This Commission is responsible for:

- monitoring compliance with the new rules regarding campaign spending for elections and referenda;
- reviewing laws and practices relating to elections and referenda; and
- maintaining a register of political parties.

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

On 24 May 2001, Senator James Jeffords of Vermont left the Republican Party, becoming an independent and giving control of the Senate to the Democratic Party for the first time since 1994. In the Senate, there are now 50 Democrats, 49 Republicans and one independent. The Republicans have the support of Vice President Dick Cheney, who as President of the Senate is able to cast tie-breaking votes.

ZAMBIA

In March 2001, the National Assembly passed an amendment to the Electoral Law. According to this amendment, the compilation, maintenance and updating of the register of voters have to be done on a continuous basis.

RENOVATION OF THE VILLA GARDIOL FIRST STONE LAID AT NEW IPU HEADQUARTERS



Photo: IPU/G. Opocensky

Villa Gardiol, the future House of Parliaments.

The Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) and the *Fondation des immeubles pour les organisations internationales (FIPOI)* have laid the first stone in the renovation of the Villa Gardiol, the new Headquarters of the Inter-Parliamentary Union, on Wednesday, 6 June 2001 at 4.30 p.m. at the Villa Gardiol, which is located at Chemin du Pommier (Grand-Saconnex/GE) and is to become the House of Parliaments.

The ceremony has taken place in the presence of Mrs. Najma Heptulla, President of the IPU Council, Mr. Anders B. Johnsson, Secretary General of the IPU, Mr. Laurent Moutinot, Geneva State Councillor, Officer in charge of the Department for Town Planning, Equipment and Housing, and Mr. François Nordmann, Swiss Ambassador to the international organisations and President of FIPOI.

Last year, the Swiss Federal Council approved a SF 9.5 million loan to FIPOI for the renovation and enlargement of a building destined to become the new headquarters of the Inter-Parliamentary Union. The decision was subsequently confirmed by the Swiss Parliament in 2001.

Switzerland's Federal Department for Foreign Affairs (DFAE) had the following to say: «Through this gesture, the Swiss Federal Council is supporting, on the one hand, an international organisation which counts for Swiss MPs and, on the other hand, Geneva as a centre for international cooperation.» The loan will be used to renovate the Villa Gardiol and expand the future "House of Parliaments" through the addition of an annex. The new building will have public areas and reception rooms, two conference halls, a cafeteria, a library and some fifty offices. The loan is interest free and repayable over 50 years, while the land has been provided by the Canton of Geneva. The project which the jury for the IPU architectural competition chose is the work of the Brauen and Wälchli firm in Lausanne.

Historical focus

William Randal Cremer: Co-founder of the Inter-Parliamentary Union and Nobel Peace Prize (1828-1908)¹

The life of Sir William Randal Cremer is something of a rags-to-riches story. Born in 1828, in abject poverty, and with only a scanty education which ended at age twelve when he went to work in the shipyards, Cremer made his way upward with his exceptional skills as an organizer, becoming one of the first representatives of the working class in Parliament, a leader of the emerging international peace movement in the late nineteenth century and the winner of one of the very first Nobel Peace Prizes.

Randal Cremer (he preferred to drop the William) was born to poor working-class parents in a small town in Hampshire, England. Not long after his birth, his father deserted the family, leaving his mother to raise three young children in poverty. At fifteen Cremer was apprenticed to a carpenter, and it was as a journeyman carpenter that at the age of twenty-four he came to London to seek his fortune. This he found in the trade-union movement, where his leadership qualities were soon recognized. At the age of thirty he was helping organize the campaign for a nine-hour day, and he went on to become a national leader of the carpenters' union and a member of the London Trades Council.

With other working-class leaders Cremer was drawn into campaigns on international questions of the day: support of the North in the American civil war, of the Poles in their revolt against Russia, and the welcoming to England of Giuseppe Garibaldi, the hero of the Italian Risorgimento. These activities led to the establishment in 1864 of the International Working Men's Association, in which Karl Marx and other socialists from the continent took part. Cremer was elected general secretary in 1865, but resigned after two years, later maintaining that the organization had come under the direction of «men who cared more for their isms than for the cause of real progress.»

He even stood for Parliament, unsuccessfully, in 1868. His election manifesto included a phrase familiar to peace activists of the time: the demand for «the establishment of an International Board of Arbitration to settle disputes among nations, so as to lead to a general disarmament of standing forces, and the establishment of an era of peace.»

It was the Franco-Prussian War which led to Cremer's involvement with the peace movement. On July 21, 1870, two days after the outbreak of the war, a public meeting of working men was held in London to oppose any intervention by Britain in the conflict. A «peace committee» was appointed of which Cremer was general secretary. In December this became the Workmen's Peace Association (WPA), with the declared aim of «advocating the settlement of all international disputes by arbitration, and the establishment of a High Court of Nations for that purpose.» As secretary of the WPA Cremer became a full-time peace activist for the rest of his life. He always insisted that his own peace activities were «in the domain of practical politics.»

In such pursuit, he tried again in 1874 to win a seat in Parliament, but failed. After the reform bill of 1885 broadened the franchise, however, he won the election to represent Haggerston in London's East End and entered Parliament at the age of fifty-seven as a Liberal along with ten other working-class representatives.

Cremer was now in position to push the arbitration cause in «practical politics» in Parliament, where he came to be called the «member for arbitration.» In 1888 the WPA was retitled the International Arbitration League (IAL) and its base of supporters was broadened with representatives from other levels of society. Already Cremer had started working in Parliament to revive the old idea of a treaty of arbitration with the United States. In 1887 Cremer secured the signatures of 232 MPs, one third of the total membership of the House of Commons, to memorials to the President and Congress of the United States in support of such a treaty, and then he led to Washington a deputation to present the memorial to President Grover Cleveland. No treaty resulted, but the United States Congress adopted similar resolutions in the next few years.

These developments encouraged French parliamentarians, led by the veteran peace activist, Frédéric Passy, to initiate similar action in the Chamber of Deputies for a French-American treaty of arbitration. Cremer noted the effort and wrote to Passy, suggesting a meeting of French and English legislators. Cremer said that if Passy could get an invitation issued, he would bring to Paris 200 MPs. Passy approved the idea and wrote Cremer that it would be a great event if only half a dozen MPs turned up. At a preliminary meeting with Cremer in attendance, Passy's

colleagues decided to invite all the MPs who had signed the address to Cleveland to a conference in Paris to discuss Anglo-French and Anglo-American treaties of arbitration.

The meeting took place in October 1888. Cremer brought along eight colleagues, not 200, but it was enough. Passy provided 25 deputies and one senator, and presided. The group decided to plan a similar meeting for the following year, this time inviting legislators from other parliaments, hoping that the World Exposition would be an attraction and setting the date so that those who would attend the scheduled Universal Peace Congress of peace societies might remain a few days longer for the conference.

Although this preliminary meeting in 1888 could be considered the beginning of the IPU, it was this subsequent conference, held on June 29-30, 1889, which really brought the organization into being. A total of 96 parliamentarians from nine countries² were present, the great majority from France (55) and Britain (28). Passy had presided over the Peace Congress, and he was the organizing spirit in Paris behind the parliamentary conference and chaired its meetings. Cremer saw to it that the meeting was held in what he felt would be the most appropriate place.

When he came to Paris a few days early to check on the arrangements, Cremer was dismayed to find how modest was the hall booked for the meetings. He immediately hurried off to the more pretentious Hôtel Continental and, with IAL funds, engaged the Salle des Fêtes, said to be one of the handsomest auditoriums in Paris. With no time to notify anyone of the change, Cremer stationed men at the original meeting place, with placards telling everybody where to go.

If the opening of this historic meeting might have been attended by some confusion as to where it was being held, at least the new organization could be born with a touch of grandeur. The name chosen at the christening was the Inter-Parliamentary Conference for Arbitration, which was apt, for arbitration was the main topic of discussion and the subject of most resolutions adopted.

Along with the audacity of holding such a meeting at all, the participants displayed a certain sense of caution. The most important resolution asked governments to conclude treaties agreeing to submit all differences to arbitration, without, however, «impairing their independence and without admitting any interference in anything concerning their internal constitution.» Only in later years were other subjects than arbitration placed on the agenda, and the original name remained until 1899, when the Conference became officially the IPU. In 1892 the Inter-Parliamentary Bureau was established at Berne, with a voluntary general secretary. It was Cremer, who before he died in 1908, initiated the process by which Christian Lange became the first paid general secretary and the organization placed on a firmer footing financially by Andrew Carnegie.

The documents show that Passy and Cremer were the two co-founders of the IPU. An odd couple they were, the French member of the landed gentry with aristocratic antecedents and the English carpenter raised in poverty, but the dire need they felt to bring peace to the world banded them together.

Cremer dearly wanted the Nobel prize, not for the money, but for the recognition. In April 1903 Hodgson Pratt wrote Passy that Cremer was feeling an injustice had been done him when he was passed over for the peace prize in 1901 and 1902, so to soothe Cremer's feelings, Pratt had been pushing Cremer's candidacy.

In December 1903 it was announced Cremer had won the prize, which he well deserved. He had to postpone the required lecture until January 1905. Then 76, but ever conscientious, he made the long winter trip to Norway and spoke on «The Progress and Advantages of Arbitration.»

Dr Irwin Abrams
Antioch University, Yellow Springs, Ohio, United States of America

- 1 Fifth in a series published by the Inter-Parliamentary Bulletin on leading personalities in the history of the IPU; previous articles were on Christian Lous Lange (1/93), Albert Gobat (4/93), Frédéric Passy (1/94), and Fredrik Bajer (3/94)
- 2 Belgium, Denmark, France, Hungary, Italy, Liberia, Spain, United Kingdom, United States

Parliament, you say?

Dixit

The concept of representative parliamentary institutions, as a legitimate and workable mechanism for representing the popular will in the ordering of public affairs is deeply rooted in the human mind.

Pio-Carlo Terenzio¹
Former IPU Secretary general

Each national parliament reflects the history of the nation it represents and the State of which it is a part. For two centuries, the existence of a Parliament, the breadth of its powers and the influence of its deliberations have expressed the convolutions of history. In the eyes of European (and North American) doctrine, a composite parliament is one of the best criteria of real democracy.

Olivier Duhamel and Yves Mény²

The arena in which power is disputed is the parliamentary chamber.

Pierre Paul Royer Collard

A Parliament is useful for obtaining from the people what the king cannot ask of it.

Napoleon Bonaparte³

Parliament is generally viewed as the holder of legislative power. Yet, even in countries with strict separation of powers, interference can occur. In others, Parliament elects the Head of State; elsewhere, by setting itself up as a High Court, it participates in the judiciary. Such a variety of attributions, entrusted to assemblies which derive from elections and whose role is to deliberate, is a source of delay, uncertainty and even possible contradictions in decisions, some of which may call the very life of the nation into question. On the other hand, parliaments appears as the guarantors of freedom⁴.

No man can make a figure in this country, but by Parliament.

Earl Philip Stanhope of Chesterfield⁵

The House of Commons lives in a state of potential choice: at any moment it can choose a ruler and dismiss a ruler. And therefore party is inherent in it, is bone of its bone, and breath of its breath.

Walter Bagehot²

¹ *Parliaments of the world*

² *Dictionnaire constitutionnel*

³ *Le Petit Philosophe de Poche*

⁴ *Encyclopaedia Universalis*

⁵ *A Dictionary of Political Quotations*

- READ IN THE PRESS - READ IN THE PRESS -

PARLIAMENTARY MEETING ON INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Geneva (AFP). The Director General of the World Trade Organization (WTO), Mike Moore, encouraged parliamentarians to “aggressively scrutinize” the WTO, which “offers all countries – particularly the smaller and the weaker – a way of protecting their interests”.

For the first time, some one hundred MPs from all over the world met in Geneva within the framework of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) to discuss world trade and examine their role in relation to the WTO, five months before the ministerial conference in Doha (Qatar). They heard Mike Moore, a former New Zealand MP, who told them that they represented “civil society quantifiably and responsibly”. *Agence France Presse (AFP)*

Geneva (MAP). The national parliaments of the developing countries must become more involved in preparing international trade agreements and decisions that impact on the development of the multilateral trade system if such agreements are to coincide with the economic and social interests of these countries, argued the Moroccan Ambassador to Geneva at the IPU meeting on international trade... Morocco’s Ambassador to the UN, Mr. Nacer Benjelloun-Toumi, recalled that parliaments were the sole representatives of civil society that were democratically elected and were voted out of office when they failed to respond to the needs and interests of their constituents. In the light of this democratic legitimacy, the Moroccan diplomat felt that “parliaments should play an important role in all aspects of the negotiations taking place within the framework of the multilateral trade system”. *Agence Magreb Arab Press (MAP)*

Geneva (ATS). More than 200 MPs from 70 countries came together in Geneva to call for a more open and fairer commercial system. WTO Director General Mike Moore advocated the launching of a new round. The parliamentarians adopted a declaration in which they stressed the need to open up markets to exports from developing countries, further reduce debt and broaden access to technologies. Development must be given higher priority in future trade negotiations... The Geneva meeting is the first ever organised on this topic by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU). The IPU wants to tighten parliamentary oversight of international trade negotiations.

La Tribune de Genève

Geneva (AP). World Trade Organization chief Mike Moore on Friday urged parliaments to give greater scrutiny to the global trade body because it belongs to them. «Parliaments need to know about the institutions they own», Moore told a meeting of an association of the world’s legislators. «Parliamentary committees should aggressively scrutinize the WTO and other international organizations. We need this. It is healthy».

Some critics of the 141-nation WTO say the global trade rules it supervises undermine the sovereignty of countries and assert that the organisation mainly represents the interests of the rich. But Moore said the rule offered all countries – particularly the smaller and the weaker – a way of protecting their interests.

Associated Press

IPU MISSION IN THE MIDDLE EAST

Jerusalem (EFE). The Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) Committee on Middle East question asked the Palestinians and Israelis to resume their dialogue and apply the recommendations of the Mitchell Commission in order to achieve peace. The President of the Committee, French MP Yves Tavernier, urged Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, and the Chairman of the Palestinian Authority, Yasser Arafat, to “immediately end the violence” and “resume talks” in order to “improving the living conditions of the Palestinians and the security of the Israelis”. The peace talks for a final peace treaty were broken off last January.

Spanish Press Agency (EFE)

Paris (AFP). The presiding officers of the Knesset, Avraham Burg, and of the Palestinian Legislative Council, Ahmed Qurie (Abu Ala’a), have given their agreement in principle to meet in Paris, said French socialist deputy Yves Tavernier on Radio Shalom. “I have proposed a meeting with the Inter-Parliamentary Union to Mr. Burg and Mr. Abu Ala’a. They have agreed provided that such a meeting take place outside Israel. I proposed that the meeting be held in Paris, and an agreement was reached on this principle”, asserted Mr. Tavernier, who was reached in Jerusalem. The French MP is heading up a delegation of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), a multinational parliamentary body.

Radio Shalom (Israel)

Israeli and Palestinian representatives accept to meet under the auspices of the IPU

After receiving a preliminary report on the mission of the Committee on Middle East Questions of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) to Jordan, Israel and the territories controlled by the Palestinian Authority, the President of the IPU Council, Dr. Najma Heptulla, recalled the invitation made by the IPU to the Speaker of the Knesset, Mr. Avraham Burg, and the Speaker of the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC), Mr. Ahmed Qurie «Abu Ala» to meet at their earliest convenience, under the auspices of the IPU.



Photo: B. Chadenet

From left to right: Mr A. Philippou (Cyprus), Mr R. Ahaouandjinou (Benin), Mr A. Qurie «Abou Ala», Mr Y. Tavernier (France, President of the Committee) and Mrs O.A. Starrfelt (Norway).

«The IPU stands ready to pursue its actions in order to continue to facilitate this resumption of the dialogue between political representatives with a view to an improvement of the living conditions of the Palestinian people and of the security of Israel», stressed Dr. Heptulla, who welcomed the fact that the Speakers of the Knesset and the PLC have accepted to meet under the auspices of the IPU. «Other direct contacts between MPs from both sides should also take place. The Committee demands that measures be taken to enable the PLC to meet and carry out its mandate», insisted the President of the IPU Council.

During its mission, the IPU Committee met with prominent Israeli and Palestinian representatives. The Speaker of the Palestinian Legislative Council, Mr. Ahmed Qurie «Abu Ala» said that «the IPU which represents the people is the institution that can preserve and protect international legitimacy and the UN resolutions. The IPU proves that it can support peace and the people who are still suffering from the Israeli occupation...We ask the IPU to help to put an end to this occupation. I am ready to meet Mr. Avraham Burg, the Speaker of the Knesset. He is a good friend. I send him my best wishes and I hope he will have good luck in his election. I have no problem to meet him at any time».

The Speaker of the Israeli Knesset, Mr. Avraham Burg, also declared that he was ready to meet «Abu Ala», out of the region. He said that the meeting should take place «with a specific agenda».

The IPU Committee also met with the Israeli Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr. Shimon Peres, who stressed that the IPU action «is today the most important way» and that «a clear position from the political world can change the situation».

The President of the Palestinian authority, Mr. Yasser Arafat stated : «We have to work hard for international pressure and international interference, so that we can be able to find a quick solution and to protect the peace of the brave which I have signed with my partner Rabin and to implement the UN resolutions, as well as the Mitchell report and the Jordanian and Egyptian initiative. No doubt the IPU and the parliaments can play an important role. They can be a strong balance».

The delegation of the IPU Committee on Middle East Questions, headed by the French MP, Mr. Yves Tavernier, was composed of Mr. M. Raymond Ahaouandjinou (Benin), Mr. Andreas Philippou (Cyprus, Rapporteur) and Mrs. Oddbjorg Ausdal Starrfelt (Norway). During its mission, from 1 to 6 June, the IPU Committee called on the Israelis and the Palestinians to immediately implement all the recommendations of the Mitchell Report and notably those related to the cessation of all violence against civilian populations. As called for in the Mitchell Report, the Committee insisted on a freeze on all settlements in the occupied territories. It also demands that measures be taken to enable the PLC to meet and carry out its mandate. ■

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