

THE WORLD OF PARLIAMENTS



New IPU President Dr. Theo-Ben Gurirab

“The IPU must protect its unique identity”

At the 119th IPU Assembly held in October in Geneva, Dr. Theo-Ben Gurirab was elected President of the IPU. Current Speaker of the National Assembly of Namibia, he is also a former Prime Minister, Foreign Minister and Information Minister of his country. In addition, he served as President of



Photo IPU/FGlatz

the fifty-fourth session of the United Nations General Assembly. In his first interview to *The World of Parliaments*, he describes his priorities, views and hope. See page 2.

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The Universal Declaration of Human Rights: Sixty years of achievements and challenges

On 10 December 1948, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted by the United Nations. As the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights mentions on its website, the Declaration was one of the first major achievements of the United Nations, and it remains a powerful instrument which continues to exert an enormous influence on people’s lives all over the world. This issue of the IPU Quarterly Review will focus especially on human rights and the role that parliaments can and should play to defend, protect and promote human rights everywhere. The IPU actively defends human rights, particularly those of legislators, the representatives of the people. As Canadian Senator Sharon Carstairs, President of the IPU Committee on the Human Rights of Parliamentarians, said: “We are trying to make this world a better place to live in”. A seminar held at *The House of Parliaments* explored the achievements and challenges sixty years after the adoption of the Declaration. Other articles explain that the rights of women and of persons suffering from HIV/AIDS are far from being respected. Finally, the first International Day of Democracy stressed that there is no democracy without respect for human rights. ▀



Photo United Nations

Dr. Theo-Ben Gurirab, new IPU President:

“The IPU must protect its unique identity”

Dr. Theo-Ben Gurirab, Speaker of the National Assembly of Namibia, was elected President of the IPU on 15 October. Dr. Gurirab, who will serve a three-year term of office, was Namibia's Prime Minister from 2002 to 2005 and Minister for Foreign Affairs from 1990 to 2002. He was a member of the Constituent Assembly Constitution Drafting Committee and a founding member of parliament. In 1999, he served as President of the 54th Session of the United Nations General Assembly. He was instrumental in driving forward the UN reform process and presided over the drafting of the historic United Nations Millennium Declaration in 2000. Interview.



Photo IPU/G. Fortunato

Q: Mr. President, what will be your priorities?

Dr. Theo-Ben Gurirab: The priorities for the IPU for the period 2009-2011 are spelt out in its strategic plan. As I participated in its formulation, there is nothing I want to change. But from a political perspective, I can tell you what I think the IPU should be focusing on. One priority should be for the IPU to take full advantage of the growing partnership with the United Nations. In my acceptance speech, I stressed the point that the IPU is neither a specialized agency nor a Standing Committee of the United Nations; it is a partner. The IPU must protect its unique identity as an organization of national parliaments.

Q: Given your vast experience at the national and international levels, what for you is the specificity of the IPU?

T.-B.G.: The IPU is different from any other international organization. At home, parliaments are the houses of the people. The priority of parliaments is to promote the well-being, security and progress of citizens and communities. We are far more than just members of parliaments. Parliaments depend on different political systems, but those of us who come from a system where cabinet members also sit in parliament. I would like to draw a line between cabinet ministers and deputy ministers on the one hand, and

backbenchers whose only responsibility is to work in parliament to promote better living conditions for the people and hold the government to account for laws that are passed and policies formulated by the government. The justification for existing as the IPU through national parliaments is that we must always do things that show our responsibility, our commitment to promote the welfare of the people.

Q: The IPU is also a forum for delegates, sometimes for countries in conflict, to have bilateral meetings. Would you encourage more meetings of that kind?

T.-B.G.: This is very much consistent with the ideal of the work of parliament. There are parliaments dominated only by one political party, but parliament is at its best when there is political pluralism, where there are different ideas on how best to promote economic development, health care, education, rural development, and protection of women and children. Multilateralism and dialogue on different ideas is the best way for parliament to be alive and active. I will promote bilateral relations and also promote multilateralism, where we, as Members of the IPU, engage in discussing the global economy, climate change, global warming, environmental protection, human rights and the rights of children. I have a rich background having been associ-

ated with the United Nations for so long and having placed much emphasis on public diplomacy, which means that dialogue is the best means to solve problems.

Q: You mentioned the global economy. What can legislators do to try to solve the financial crisis?

T.-B.G.: Each national parliament has a responsibility to sit down with its government. Governments are responsible for economic planning and the budget. Each country should, through its parliament, seek to identify the consequences of the current global economic crisis and the breakdown of financial markets and how they affect our countries. There must be a dialogue. We must hold the government to account. Heads of State, Heads of Government, finance, economy and planning ministers have to come before the parliament and explain the situation to the parliamentarians and therefore to the people. Each country has its peculiarity: there are those with energy or mineral resources and those that depend on tourism, which is the backbone of their national economy. Governments have to come to parliaments and explain how the current economic situation affects the society and with that knowledge, we legislators need to go back to our communities to educate the people about things that they should do to protect their living conditions and the

things they should avoid doing. People do not know what is going on in the world and we should be the ones getting that information and bringing it to their attention. It is therefore the responsibility of the IPU, acting together with its Members, to speak as a voice of concern and urge governments, through the United Nations, to do something about the world situation and to prevent a catastrophe of global proportions.

Q: Speaking on the 60th Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, do you think that human rights are in jeopardy or is the situation improving?

T.-B.G.: In global terms, let me say that we have been doing more as countries and as governments, thanks to the activities carried out by the United Nations, the IPU and other organizations, civil society and individual actors. The human rights situation continues to improve, but there are some countries in which human rights have perhaps gone from bad to worse. The IPU is a leader in holding those countries to account through its Committee on the Human Rights of Parliamentarians, which reports on parliamentarians who have been imprisoned or killed. We keep a watchful eye on the behaviour of governments in IPU Member countries. The issue of human rights is a fundamental concern of governments, and certainly of parliaments and the IPU does its best to keep this issue constantly alive in the view of the public.

Q: How do you view IPU activities to promote gender partnership?

T.-B.G.: The IPU has provided leadership in terms of not only promoting the rights of women but providing a yard stick by which its Members are judged. There is a requirement that each delegation attending IPU meetings must be gender-balanced and that women be included. Not all countries do that, but there is a sanction for those that do not comply. We should continue to promote it by implementing the conventions and protocols that have

Hope is still alive

The tears of Jesse Jackson and the joy of Martin Luther King's daughter on the night of 4 November reminded us of the long fight of millions of people to see their rights finally recognized. The election of a young president, with a multicultural background, who incarnated the desire for hope in millions of people for a better world, happened a month before the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The historical coincidence simply could not have been better timed.

As the High Commissioner for Human Rights said, the adoption of the Universal Declaration stems in large part from the strong desire for peace in the aftermath of the Second World War. It represented a common statement of goals and aspirations – a vision of the world as the international community wanted it to become. The election of Barak Obama represents the same strong desire for peace and respect for human rights in the aftermath of a decade of wars, violence, terrorism and human rights violations.

Adopted on 10 December 1948, the Declaration recognizes that the dignity of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world and is linked to the recognition of fundamental rights towards which every human being aspires: the right to life, liberty and security of person; the right to an adequate standard of living; the right to seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution; the right to own property; the right to freedom of opinion and expression; the right to education, freedom of thought, conscience and religion; and the right to freedom from torture and degrading treatment, among other things.

On 4 November 2008, everywhere in the world, people expressed their hope that these rights would be enjoyed by all human beings – men, women and children, from all cultures, religions and races. One man in one country cannot change the world, but he can help foster more respect for human rights everywhere. It is a matter of political will, the will of parliaments and legislators all over the world to bring change. And yes, hope is still very much alive.

L.B.

been internationally endorsed as the basis for action to promote gender equality. The IPU should ensure this and encourage national parliaments and governments to appoint women to decision-making positions and give them a higher political profile in their countries. The participation of women is not an act of charity. It is an obligation for governments to live by the conventions they have signed up to.

Q: The IPU will celebrate 120 years serving democracy and dialogue. What is your assessment of democracy today?

T.-B.G.: In Namibia, we were among the first countries to have celebrated the International Day of Democracy. We marked it on 18 September rather than on the actual Day itself – 15 September – because the Parliament did not resume its session until the 16th. We organized a workshop. I made an announcement in the National Assembly. We invited the President, one prominent religious personality, a civil society spokesperson, a university professor, a spokesperson for a women's organization and I delivered a speech. It is important to discuss issues of democracy at the national and international levels. ▀

“We are trying to make this world a better place to live in”

by Senator Sharon Carstairs

Established in 1976, the IPU Committee on the Human Rights of Parliamentarians helps legislators to represent their constituents freely, safely and effectively. It has since examined a number of cases in over 100 countries. Canadian Senator Sharon Carstairs assumed the presidency of the IPU Committee on the Human Rights of Parliamentarians in June 2007. A teacher by profession, Senator Carstairs was the first woman to be appointed Deputy Leader of Government in the Canadian Senate in 1997.



Senator Sharon Carstairs presenting the report of the Committee on the Human Rights of Parliamentarians to the Governing Council at the 119th IPU Assembly in Geneva.

Javed Hashmi was freed in Pakistan after serving four years in prison on politically-motivated charges. Hussam Khader, a member of the Palestinian Legislative Council, was released after six years in prison following an unfair trial, and six members of the Colombian National Congress were freed from the hands of the FARC, one of them, Oscar Lizcano, having spent more than eight years in captivity.... These are some of the cases of parliamentarians unable to exercise the parliamentary duties for which they were duly elected that were brought to a successful conclusion in the past year.

While the Committee rejoices at the resolution of these cases, it is ever mindful of the other 300 plus parliamentarians in 32 countries whose cases are before it and remained unresolved. At present, the Committee is dealing with parliamentarians who have been murdered in Sri Lanka and Lebanon; it is examining cases of parliamentarians who have disappeared in Belarus, Eritrea and Rwanda. It is unknown whether they are alive or dead. It has before it cases of parliamentarians whose mandates have been summarily revoked in Ecuador and the Democratic Republic of the Congo by courts without any due process or by members of the parliament themselves as in Afghanistan.

Other parliamentarians still have been arrested in Palestine and taken

to Israel where there is no information about what charges have been laid, their trials and whether fair trial guarantees are assured. There are parliamentarians who have been beaten and tortured in Zimbabwe with no investigations having taken place to arrest the perpetrators and where the burden of proof rests not with the State but with the victim.

These are but a few of the cases that the permanent five-member Committee, together with its five substitute members, works on throughout the year. The members represent the five geopolitical groups which make up the IPU. The Twelve Plus Group has two representatives, with Asia-Pacific, Africa, and Latin America making up the balance. At present, the members are from Algeria, Belgium, Canada, Mexico and the Philippines. Four of them have been cabinet ministers in their countries and all have been active members of their political parties. They were chosen first by their geopolitical group and then ratified by all delegates at a Governing Council session. They are all dedicated to doing what they can to facilitate the life of parliamentarians in their own country and others throughout the world.

Currently, one of its members, Senator Pimentel from the Philippines, provides us with the experience of a parliamentarian who himself spent time in jail on four different occasions because he was opposed to the activi-

ties of the government of the day. This first-hand experience is frequently insightful when dealing with others held under similar circumstances in countries where the rule of law is not practised in an appropriate way.

The Committee meets four times a year and each meeting results on average in about 30 hours of deliberation on the different cases. It hears from the parliamentarians themselves or their representatives and also from representatives of the parliaments of which they were or are a member. It attempts to find solutions and draft reports. Some cases remain in its confidential files. These are cases in which, the Committee believes, genuine progress towards finding a resolution is being made. Others fall under its public procedure and are presented twice a year to members of the Governing Council for their approval. It would be an exaggeration to say that the Committee enjoys its work. It would be impossible to enjoy learning the stories of fellow parliamentarians under great distress in far too many nations of this world. But it remains dedicated to its work because it knows that, in a different time or place, its own members could be experiencing similar difficulties.

I have been an active politician for 24 years. For me this is the most challenging and most important work I have ever done. I must admit that before I became a member of this

Committee, the work of other parliamentarians working under far less favourable conditions than my own was not of very great concern to me. This Committee has taught me the importance of remembering that we are all part of the global community and that I have a responsibility towards my fellow human beings and more particularly, my fellow parliamentarians who are trying to do for their people what I try to do for mine – make this world a better place to live in. ▀

Quotable quotes:

Both my husband and our family are eternally grateful to all at the IPU for championing cases like ours. There were bleak moments but we drew strength from the IPU's tireless efforts. Thank you again.

Dr. Wan Azizah, wife of Mr. Anwar Ibrahim, former Deputy Prime Minister of Malaysia

I want to express my heartfelt gratitude to the IPU and salute the struggle for freedom it waged by our side during all these years of suffering.

Mr. Alpha Condé, former presidential candidate of Guinea

Mr. Secretary General, we want to thank you and through you the Inter-Parliamentary Union and the Committee on the Human Rights of Parliamentarians for all the support we received in this fight we have been undertaking for over a year. We very much appreciate the resolution adopted by the IPU in Cape Town, South Africa.

Mr. Alfredo Serrano, on behalf of 56 former members of the Parliament of Ecuador

I want to thank all of you for not forgetting me during the difficult times that thankfully now lie behind me. The efforts of the IPU during the past years were a symbol to me of the respect for my human and political rights, and the rights of thousands of Palestinian political prisoners. Especially the presence of an IPU observer at my trial, and the few words I was able to have with him, gave me personally both great comfort and sent a strong signal to the Israeli authorities. I cannot tell you enough how important this was for me during my time in prison.

Mr. Hussam Kader, member of the Palestinian Legislative Council

“No tolerance for double standards”

Message from the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Ms. Navanethem Pillay

December 10th marks the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. On this historic occasion, we should reaffirm the fundamental principles that its inspired group of framers articulated, which have been at the core of the mission of the United Nations.

In the Universal Declaration they recalled the “disregard and contempt for human rights” that led to actions which “outraged the conscience of mankind” and they heralded the “advent of a world in which human beings shall enjoy freedom of speech and belief and freedom from fear and want,” proclaiming this as “the highest aspiration of the common people.” Sixty years later, we reflect on the progress we have made, and it has been significant. And we must continue to strive for these freedoms.

The comprehensive vision of the Universal Declaration is a beacon of hope for the future – it contemplates a world with full realization of civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights without distinction, a world in which every man, woman and child lives in dignity, free from hunger in a world without violence and discrimination, with the benefits of housing, health care, education and opportunity. This vision represents a global culture of human rights, and it should be a unifying force, within and among all cultures.

I start from the premise that the success of human rights work depends on its commitment to truth, with no tolerance for double stand-



Photo OHCHR

ards or selective application. The history of the Universal Declaration and its progeny, the Covenants and other human rights treaties that have been adopted to provide a more detailed legal framework for implementation of the rights in the Universal Declaration, clearly equate the importance of civil and political rights on the one hand and economic, social and cultural rights on the other.

The two sets of rights are indivisible and interdependent, and equally important. We must work for the full implementation of all these rights on the ground in a way that affects and improves the lives of the men, women and children who are all entitled, regardless of their race, sex, religion, nationality, property or birth, to realization of each and every right set forth in the Universal Declaration.

I want to leave you with the wisdom of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, set forth in its first words that “recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world.” Let us pay tribute to the extraordinary achievement represented by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights by breathing more life into it and ensuring full respect for the rights of each and every one of us. ▀

The Speaker of the Togolese National Assembly:

“Participatory democracy must be strengthened”

Parliamentarians have a determining role to play in promoting and protecting human rights. As legislators, it is their responsibility to incorporate into domestic law the provisions of international human rights instruments and the observations made by the various treaty bodies in charge of monitoring treaty implementation. To allow members of parliament to fully play this role, the IPU has launched a project for parliamentarians from French-speaking African countries. It is intended to promote parliamentary participation and involvement in the work of the human rights treaty bodies. At the project's mid-way review point, the Speaker of the National Assembly of Togo, Mr. El Hadj Abass Bonfoh, shares his views with us.



Photo National Assembly of Togo

Q: What do you think of the National Assembly's participation in the project to draw up country reports and submit them to the human rights treaty bodies and follow up their recommendations?

El Hadj Abass Bonfoh: Let me take this opportunity to express my gratitude to the IPU for supporting our institution by way of building the capacity of our parliamentarians and promoting and protecting human rights. Following the parliamentary elections of 14 October 2007 that gave way to the new legislature, the IPU was the first organization to commit to institutional capacity-building in terms of techniques for drawing up country reports for submission to human rights treaty bodies. These reports must be produced with objectivity and impartiality in order to avoid social unrest during crises. The meeting organized in February 2008 for members of the parliamentary Committee on Human Rights in Lomé attests to the renewed partnership between the IPU and our parliament.

Q: What was the outcome?

A. B.: Recommendations were adopted and a Steering Committee was set up. Short-term, medium-term and long-term strategies were also drawn up. Togo has set in motion a new set of dynamics based on the notion of

inclusiveness. This has been an overarching element of strengthening participatory democracy as well as dialogue and reconciliation. It would be a positive thing for us if the IPU decided to stand by our side. Under this policy of strengthening the rule of law as advocated by President Faure Essozimna Gnassingbé, the National Assembly should not be left out. Its involvement in the project aimed at drawing up country reports for human rights treaty bodies is a way of participating in the promotion of these universal values. The right to health, education and freedom of opinion are values we all share. The Head of State has agreed to the opening of an office of the United Nations High Commission for Human Rights in our country (UNHCHR).

Q: What benefit can the National Assembly gain from this project?

A. B.: The project is in its second phase, which consists of following up the national strategy on the involvement of Togolese parliamentarians in the work of the human rights treaty bodies. As part of the project, a second national seminar was organized jointly by the IPU and UNHCHR for our parliamentarians in October 2008. By assessing the course taken by the Steering Committee, members of parliament were able to seize the opportunity to also evaluate the various activities conducted. They identified shortfalls,

which will allow the project to build on a stronger foundation, which is indispensable for the National Assembly's involvement in consolidating the rule of law. The parliamentarians have a better understanding of the ratification instruments, which I am pleased about. Our institution continues to play its oversight role. To this end, we have recently approved ratification of the Additional Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children to the United Nations Convention against Transborder Organized Crime.

Q: What are the National Assembly's expectations in terms of implementation of these strategies?

A. B.: There are several activities to carry out but due to scarce financial resources, we have not been able to organize large-scale awareness campaigns, not to mention the seminars that had been foreseen. We are still hoping to benefit from the IPU's support in all its forms in order to achieve those outcomes. Being a complex issue, the human rights struggle is a long-term undertaking. Togo is not giving up. Moreover, it was the first African country to set up a national Human Rights Commission in 1987. The democratic processes in our country need support from all sides if the aim is to build nations that have secured peace and reconciliation. ▀

Legislators must be the guardians of human rights

These words were not wasted on the members of parliamentary human rights committees who gathered in Geneva in early November. At the heart of the debate was the question of how to make human rights a tangible reality in the daily life of people everywhere. The seminar took a critical look at the state of play on the eve of the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

The parliamentarians believed that there was much to be proud of. In the past sixty years respect for human rights has become a legitimate cause, gaining a permanent place on the agendas of national governments and the international community. The creation of an impressive array of human rights treaties and the emergence of civil society were also considered significant. However, despite these remarkable achievements, participants felt that they had all too frequently failed to bring improvements on the ground. Many people



From left to right: Ms. Ingeborg Schwarz (IPU), Ms. Elissavez Papademetriou (IPU), Mr. Bacre Waly Ndiaye (OHCHR) and Mr. Ibrahim Salama (OHCHR).

were still forced to live in conditions that showed scant consideration for human dignity, leaving their economic and social rights by the wayside. Equally worrying was the fact that respect for fundamental freedoms, long considered secure, had been thrown into question in a world in which the fight against crime and terrorism had taken centre stage.

The Vice-President of the IPU Executive Committee, Ms. Elissavet Papademetriou, stated in her inaugural speech that: "there is a need to reaffirm the vision that the Universal Declaration championed sixty years

ago. As parliamentarians, this places us squarely before our responsibilities, as guardians of human rights, to do all we can to live up to the ideals of the drafters of the Declaration."

The seminar, a joint initiative of the IPU and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, offered a series of recommendations for parliamentary action for achieving this goal, urging in particular parliaments and their members to become more actively involved in the work of United Nations to promote and protect human rights. ▀

HIV and Human Rights

The rights of people infected with HIV are often breached. AIDS is a product of human rights violations and is fuelled by such violations. They include sexual violence and coercion faced by women and girls, stigmatization of men who have sex with men, and abuses against sex workers and injecting drug users.

The opening paragraph of the IPU's 2005 Manila resolution on HIV/AIDS and Human Rights, which provided the textual basis for so much of the organization's subsequent work in the field, explicitly calls upon parliaments and governments to ensure that their laws, policies and practices respect human rights in the context of HIV/AIDS.

Although there is no international treaty or covenant that specifically addresses AIDS, international human rights treaties contain a good many provisions that concern people living with HIV. The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) cov-

ers the right to marry and found a family, and the right to privacy. This includes the right to physical privacy, implying the obligation to seek informed consent to HIV testing. The rights of children are covered under a separate convention, the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). Under this treaty, children have the right to special protection and assistance if deprived of their family environment. They have the rights to education, to health, and to inherit property.

More fundamentally, the ICCPR recognizes that every human being has the inherent right to life. Significantly, the Human Rights Committee, interpreting the right to life, has recommended to one African country that it "adopt comprehensive measures encouraging greater numbers of people suffering from HIV and AIDS to obtain adequate antiretroviral treatment and facilitate such treatment" (2004). The provision of affordable antiretroviral treatment, which has improved and extended the lives of many people infected with HIV, is a subject that en-



Child peering out from a play pen at an orphanage for HIV-positive children in Moscow (Russian Federation)

compasses human rights, intellectual property law, and trade regulations. It is a field in which the legislator can do much to set the right framework for enlightened policy. In order to support the enactment of appropriate intellectual property legislation, the Advisory Group is also holding a series of regional seminars on HIV/AIDS, treatment and intellectual property rights, beginning in Africa in early 2009.

Women's rights are on the decline

Sixty years after the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, what is the status of women's rights? A former member of the French National Assembly, a former member of the European Parliament and the first woman mayor of a town of over 30,000 inhabitants, Françoise Gaspard recalls the context in which the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) was adopted.

Françoise Gaspard



Photo Camille Servan-Schreiber

Françoise Gaspard's term as Vice-President of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women recently ended. She recalls the controversy that pitted the French against the Canadians in the matter of translating the term "human rights of women" into French. Because historically human rights were translated in French as "the rights of men", the term could not be changed. UN interpreters translate the new term literally as "women's rights of men". This speaks volumes about the ideological debate and the manner in which women's rights were taken into consideration at the time.

To cite another example: in 1945, when the United Nations Charter was adopted and the question of human rights and the establishment of a Commission on Human Rights - which would be presided over by Eleanor Roosevelt - was raised, women's organizations dating back to the Society of Nations called for a commission to deal with women's rights. That promoted a very heated debate since at the outset Eleanor Roosevelt was against the idea, considering that human rights encompassed women's rights. At the first United Nations meeting held in London in 1946 - the New York building hadn't been constructed yet - Mrs. Roosevelt finally accepted that a commission on the status of women should be established.

Ms. Gaspard points out that this inter-governmental commission, which deals exclusively with women's rights, currently comprises 45 States and was behind the first world conference on women held in Mexico City in 1975. It was through that Commission that the UN General Assembly adopted a number of conventions, notably on the political rights of women, since at its inception in 1945, half of the Member States of the United Nations had not granted women full citizenship rights.

The second convention adopted dealt with nationality and provided that women

who had married a foreigner could retain their nationality and pass it on to their children. The third convention dealt with questions related to marriage and most notably, to consent. In Mexico City, the governments requested the Commission to merge all these conventions into a single one that would cover the full range of women's rights and thereby eliminate all the forms of discrimination from which they suffered in law and in practice. That was how the CEDAW came into being and was adopted in 1979.

Françoise Gaspard admits that "although some progress - slow progress - has been made in terms of the law and although some States have ratified the Convention with reservations about certain articles, particularly Article 16 on family relations; in actual fact things evolve at a much slower pace and are even likely to regress. Although some States come before the Committee to explain their reservations about articles that provide for granting women the same rights as men, the reality of the situation is often different".

With regard to the role of parliamentarians, Ms. Gaspard insists that elected representatives "should familiarize themselves with the Convention since it is parliaments that ratify the Convention, country reports and the Committee's findings", adding nevertheless that "in the history of CEDAW, I am not aware of the existence of any communication sent to any State indicating that it has complied with the obligations of the Convention and that women are the de jure and de facto equals of men. Indeed, there have been setbacks just about everywhere".

The situation in European countries has been a cause for concern. "After being the pioneers of setting up a mechanism to monitor women's rights within government and the administration, this service has been eliminated in virtually all the countries we have examined". To give

a concrete example, each ministry is told that one of its mandates is to promote gender equality, but these very ministries are ill-equipped to do that. And if there is no longer any mechanism to foster gender-sensitive policies, there will inevitably be some decline, not so much in terms of the law, but in terms of practice".

Jordanian MPs identify actions to implement the CEDAW

At the end of the two-day meeting organized by the IPU and the Jordanian House of Representatives in Amman (Jordan), in November, the participants identified key actions members of parliament can take to further the implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in Jordan.

These include: encouraging ratification of the Optional Protocol to the CEDAW; urging the State to withdraw various reservations to the Convention; undertaking legislative reviews in light of the Convention such as the revision of the Personal Status Act; ensuring a stronger role for parliament in the CEDAW reporting process; enhancing cooperation with the national machinery for the advancement of women and with civil society and international organizations, religious and community leaders and the media.

At the seminar entitled "The Role of Parliament in Implementing International Human Rights Conventions, in particular the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women", legislators from the Jordanian House of Representatives and Senate, representatives from international, national governmental and non-governmental organizations, as well as national and international experts and members of other parliaments, examined the core United Nations Human Rights Treaties to which Jordan has acceded and has recently made part of its legal system.

“The style of politics in the Pacific region is not favourable to women”

In September 2008 the IPU co-organized a meeting to examine measures to promote women's access to the parliaments of the Pacific Island States, a region of the world with the lowest representation of women – less than 3 per cent on average. The Sub-regional Workshop on Special Measures for Women targeted parliamentarians and officials in the Melanesian region. The meeting discussed the challenges that women face being elected to Pacific parliaments, and identified how special measures could best be implemented within existing electoral arrangements.¹ The workshop took place in Papua New Guinea on 24 and 25 September. Dame Carol Kidu, Minister for Community Development and the only woman member of parliament in the country, explains the challenges for women in politics in the Pacific and highlights the value of the meeting.



Photo Parliament of Papua New Guinea

Dame Carol Kidu, Minister for Community Development and MP of Papua New Guinea

Q: As one of the very few women members of parliament in the Pacific Islands, how would you describe the main challenges that women face with regard to being elected?

C.K.: I think it is all too clear that there are significant cultural barriers, which are compounded by financial and logistical barriers. There is a style of politics that has developed in the Pacific region that is simply not favourable to women because the barriers have become enormous. So it is absolutely imperative that we look at special measures, although there seems to be a lot of misunderstanding about them as temporary policy measures. Some of the men say that if reserved seats are implemented for women, that the rest of the seats belong to them. This is a real

“catch 22” situation. But I am confident that women will perform very well and produce results that translate into them being elected in open seats. Change must start somewhere, as we have seen in Rwanda, which has more than 50 per cent of women in parliament, and where change has been incredible. One of the lessons learned, of course, is that political commitment at the top is fundamental, so I hope that we will see political commitment translate into real change in Papua New Guinea too.

Q: What has been the importance of this meeting?

C.K.: The Pacific region has the lowest female representation in parliament in the world. It is very important to address the

issues of special measures and to assess how we can enhance women's participation in politics. It is significant that it has been done at a subregional level, because the Pacific region is very diverse and the Melanesian area has specific cultural backgrounds that need consideration. The other important aspect is bringing together women, and men, for networking and sharing of different country experiences. The information provided is very important and we need to learn from other countries that have made progress so that we can develop our own strategies.

¹ The workshop was organized in collaboration with the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat (PIFS), UNIFEM, UNDP Pacific Centre, the Department of Community Development, Papua New Guinea, the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC), the International Development Law Organization (IDLO) and with support from AusAID and PNG Sustainable Development Program Limited.

Legislators say no to violence against women

IPU President Theo-Ben Gurirab added his voice to those of other parliamentarians at the 119th IPU Assembly in Geneva as they pledged to make ending violence against women a national and international priority by signing up to UNIFEM's Say NO to Violence against Women campaign, which is supported by a number of well-known figures, including actress Nicole Kidman.

“Violence against women remains a major issue on the international human rights and parliamentary agenda. We all have to be committed and mobilized against this unacceptable reality, which needs to be addressed as a matter of

urgency by the political leaders of the world. Together – men and women – we can make sure that putting an end to this tragedy becomes a priority”, said President Gurirab, who is also the

Speaker of the National Assembly of Namibia.

More than 200 members of parliament from over 70 countries signed the campaign.



Photo IPU/J. Ballington

Members of the IPU Coordinating Committee of Women Parliamentarians at the 119th IPU Assembly in Cape Town.

Democracy is about power-sharing

Last year, the United Nations General Assembly proclaimed 15 September International Day of Democracy. This decision holds special significance for the IPU as the international organization of parliaments.

To mark this event, the IPU examined current challenges to democracy at a panel discussion at the House of Parliaments, in the presence of Mr. Danilo Türk, President of the Republic of Slovenia; Ms. Marta Lagos, Executive Director of the *LatinoBarómetro* polling organization (Chile); and Prof. Benjamin Barber, a US-based political analyst and writer. IPU Secretary General, Mr. Anders B. Johnsson, and the Director-General of the United Nations Office at Geneva, Mr. Sergei Ordzhonikidze, were also present. Mr. Jimmy Carter, former President of the United States of America, 2002 Nobel Peace Prize laureate and President of The Carter Center, sent a video message.

"The IPU welcomes the International Day of Democracy. It offers an important opportunity for the international community and countries to reflect on democracy and to think about what each and every one of us can do in order to defend democracy and improve it", said the IPU Secretary General, welcoming the participants gathered at The House of Parliaments for the panel discussion moderated by Swiss journalist Muriel Siki (TSR).

Mr. Sergei Ordzhonikidze underlined that "in establishing this Day, the UN General Assembly reaffirmed that democracy is a universal value based on the freely expressed will of people to determine their own political, economic, social and cultural systems".

"Democracy is what it produces"

In his address, the President of Slovenia, Danilo Türk, said that "it is fair to say that this entire process of new and restored democra-



From left to right: Ms. Muriel Siki, Prof. Benjamin Barber and President Danilo Türk at the podium.

cies articulated a list of issues which are central to the establishment and functioning of democracies globally today". These essential elements are: the understanding that democracy has to deliver. "Democracy is a value in itself, but its actual test is in what it produces. Because people do not live out of love for nice principles, there have to be practical results and democracies have to meet the challenge of practical needs throughout their existence". The rule of law, transparency and the need to fight corruption are important. "The credibility of democracy depends on how effective it is in this matter. Democracy cannot exist in a lawless society, at least not for a long time. Once the basic rule of law is established, there are tests of whether democracy will thrive". One of the tests is how effective it is in fighting corruption. Another element relates to

security. "Democracy of course is not without its challenges. Challenges to security of society are also challenging democracy", added the Slovenian President.

Markets are being questioned

Ms. Marta Lagos, Executive Director of *LatinoBarómetro*, spoke about the threats that democracy has to face. "The biggest threat that democratization processes have is the fact of not being able to democratize societies and markets so that all can benefit from progress". Will democracy fail to generate a fair process for societies? That is the question that we need to answer.

"Unfortunately, in some parts of the world growth and development have widened the gap between those who feel part of the system and those who do not. Markets are be-



Ms. Marta Lagos.

ing questioned as a tool to distribute the economic goods and the progress of wealth. Parliaments play a central role in this process. They can be part of the problem, or they can be part of the solution. Parliament is nothing more, and nothing less than the reflection of how a given society has been able to represent its plurality and diversity", stressed Ms. Lagos. "In this first celebration of the Day, let us hope for the sake of democracy that parliaments will grasp and interpret the demand for plurality and diversity, producing higher degrees of freedom and trust in their societies", she concluded.

"Democracy is about power-sharing"

Mr. Benjamin Barber, a US-based political analyst and writer, who is also President of the NGO *CivWorld*, believes that democracy is the only way our planet will survive. "Democracy is about power and power-sharing. Those who live under it must participate in it. Too often we talk about democracy in terms of liberty, equality, justice, civility and representation. But ultimately, it is about power and about power-sharing and people

who want democracy want a share of power. They want a voice in their own affairs, which is why voicelessness is perhaps the most dangerous indicator of the absence of democracy and why the work around the world of people to give women a voice, the poor a voice, the lower casts a voice, that is one of the primary objectives".

According to Mr. Barber, parliaments are the conservatories and the emblem of democracy. They play a vital role but they can only do it successfully if they maintain a close connection with those they represent and if they keep those they represent engaged and if they call on them to be citizens and to share the responsibility. Professor Barber, who was one of President Clinton's advisers, underlined that "if citizenship is no more than paying taxes and voting once a year and it is sending your children to die occasionally in wars that you don't really control, then most people will become cynical about democracy. No matter how good their rules are no matter how much they elect the parliament and the leadership that represents them". ▀

Web, exhibition & videotape

The IPU set up an exhibition of satirical drawings portraying challenges to democracy on 15th September, which was also on display during the 119th IPU Assembly. A special section on the International Day of Democracy was created on the IPU website, which contained background information, a list of events organized by the IPU, a series of questions and answers entitled "10 things you should know about democracy", and a video extract of the panel discussion: <http://www.ipu.org/dem-e/idd/events.htm#activities>

In the press

Institutional reform on the agenda of Nairobi Seminar

A three-day National seminar on the role of parliament in the reconciliation and institutional reform process in Kenya, organized by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) and the Parliament of Kenya, opened in Nairobi. Following the opening session, President Mwai Kibaki gave assurances that his government was as determined as ever to ensure that Kenyans got a new constitution. The Seminar is part of a two-year project launched by the IPU aimed at enhancing the contribution of parliament to the promotion of political inclusiveness, institutional reform and reconciliation. Mr. Kibaki appealed to his fellow citizens' sense of forgiveness for the violence that ensued in the aftermath of the presidential elections held early that year which caused over 1,000 casualties and 350,000 displaced persons. Over 200 Kenyan members of parliament and representatives of the IPU attended the opening session.

17 November 2008 – Jeune Afrique and APANEWS

Former US President Jimmy Carter

"I applaud the IPU for raising public awareness"

"I applaud the Inter-Parliamentary Union for coming together to raise public awareness about the first International Day of Democracy and about our collective responsibility to protect the citizens' rights to vote, to be elected and to participate freely in the public affairs of their country", said former US President Jimmy Carter, 2002 Nobel Peace Prize laureate and President of the Carter Center, in a special video message addressed to the IPU.

Mr. Carter explained that, together with his Carter Center colleagues, he has been working to promote democracy and human rights for nearly 20 years. "Since 1989, we have observed 70 elections in 28 different countries. All of The Carter Center's election observation missions are conducted in line with the Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation. This document - to which the IPU is also a signatory - marked a critical milestone in the development of election observation. It has now been endorsed by 32 election observation organizations across the globe. The Declaration is important because it provides consistent, professional standards for international election observation. In essence, we are seeking to re-establish the essential human rights and fundamental principles enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and subsequent treaties as criteria against which genuine democratic elections are assessed", he added.

International Day of Democracy

Events held by parliaments

To mark the first International Day of Democracy, the IPU invited national parliaments to organize their own democracy-related activities to highlight the role of parliament as the cornerstone of democracy.

According to the information received, the following parliaments held an event on or around 15th September to mark this Day: Afghanistan, Algeria, Austria, Belarus, Belgium, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Croatia, Finland, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Indonesia, Latvia, Lithuania, Maldives, Monaco, Mongolia, Namibia, New Zealand, Pakistan, Philippines, Qatar, Romania, San Marino, Serbia, Slovakia, South Africa, Switzerland, Thailand, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedo-

nia, Togo, Turkey, United Kingdom, United States of America, Uruguay, Zambia.

They included the adoption of a resolution marking the Day, television and radio programmes, an "Open Day" and special parliamentary sessions. The IPU President Pier Ferdinando Casini participated in one such session at the Hellenic Parliament. Other activities included the involvement of the public, in particular young people, in parliamentary proceedings and the organization of democracy-related exhibitions. Many of the parliaments had made use of the information that the



Art exhibition depicting themes and messages on democracy produced by secondary school children in the Maldives

Photo Parliament of the Maldives

IPU had placed at their disposal, which included a poster and leaflet, as well as a redesigned version of the 1997 Universal Declaration on Democracy. Some had translated the material into their national languages. The complete list of activities can be seen on the IPU webpage: <http://www.ipu.org/dem-e/idd/events.htm#activities>

“Defending the human rights of legislators is a responsibility for all MPs”

A panel discussion focusing on the human rights of parliamentarians and the various violations they are sometimes subjected to was held at the US Congress on 18 September 2008 as a joint endeavour of the IPU, the Congressional Human Rights Caucus and the House Democracy Assistance Commission. As the title suggests, the panel explored

the link between democracy and human rights, and particularly the right of elected representatives to express their views freely and without fear. It also examined how parliamentary solidarity and diplomacy can be mobilized in support of democracy.

Coming on the heels of the first International Day of Democracy, celebrated

on 15 September, the panel provided an opportunity for the US Congress to pay tribute to the new International Day. Members of parliament from Afghanistan, Liberia, Timor-Leste and Haiti were among the participants. A video message sent by former US President Jimmy Carter – in which, among other things, he saluted the IPU and its Universal Declaration of Democracy – provided one of the highlights.

Some of the salient points of the event included calls for pro-active diplomacy, needed at the first sign that democracy is under attack in a country. Governments that abuse their authority must be made aware immediately of the fact that their actions will not go unsanctioned.

The participants underlined that parliaments must act as human rights watchdogs and whistleblowers on the international scene. They must help raise the bar of what is acceptable conduct in the way governments treat their political opponents.



Panel discussion held at the US Congress

Photo IPU/A. Motter

They added that democracy is a slow process that must be adapted to each country's political history and practical circumstances. There is no universal formula. The key to success in all cases is parliamentary oversight. This is also important to build people's trust in the democratic process. It is not only undemocratic regimes that violate the rights of parliamentarians. Terrorism can be an even greater threat to democracy in certain countries. Members of parliament have been killed by terrorists seeking to destabilize the democratic process to their advantage.

Human rights education should be a mainstay of all democracies. It is particularly important in new democracies where people may not fully understand the choices they are facing, as in the case of a new constitution. Democracies must guard against increasing economic and social inequalities; yet they must protect minority rights and accept the ethnic and linguistic differences in their midst.

The panel featured two prominent human rights leaders in the US Congress, Representatives Jim McGovern and David Price. They were joined by Senator David Coltart of Zimbabwe, Deputy Speaker Amanullah Paiman of Afghanistan, and Mr. Lenin Hurtado, a member of the Constituent Assembly of Ecuador. Ms. Kathryn Porter, President of the US Legislative Council for Human Rights, read out a message from Ms. Leyla Zana – a leading opposition leader from Turkey, and Ms. Ariela Blatter from Amnesty International offered a round-up of the substantive discussions.

The IPU Secretary General, Anders B. Johnsson, moderated the discussion and gave a presentation on the work of the IPU Committee on the Human Rights of Parliamentarians. In his closing remarks, he invited participants to be vigilant, but also to look on the bright side. Democracy had made huge strides in just twenty years, he said, especially in Africa. Several countries that until recently had been thought of as lost cases were currently undergoing a true democratic renaissance. ■

Iranian Speaker Ali Larijani visits The House of Parliaments

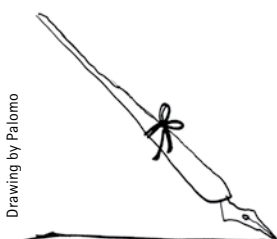
On the occasion of the 119th IPU Assembly, the Speaker of the Iranian Parliament, Mr. Ali Larijani, paid a visit to the House of Parliaments. Mr. Larijani and his delegation were received by IPU Secretary General Anders B. Johnsson. The discussion focused on the relation between the IPU and the Iranian Parliament, parliamentary diplomacy and fields where the IPU could offer its good offices, as well as the Middle East crisis, the situation in Iraq and nuclear non-proliferation.



Photo IPU/G. Fortunato

Frederik Bajer and the IPU: 1889 and today

IPU Secretary General, Mr. Anders B. Johnsson, delivered a statement at the Annual Seminar of the International Peace Bureau, held in November in Copenhagen, dedicated to Frederik Bajer, one of the eight IPU personalities to have received the Nobel Peace Prize. To understand Frederik Bajer and the importance of his life's work, it is important to understand the age in which he lived, a time that was very different from the one we live in today, said Mr. Johnsson. "Peace is not a passive state of mind. Peace requires action. And it requires action by everyone, men and women. My role has not, in the main, been that of a propagandist said Bajer in his Nobel Lecture, but rather that of an organizer whose work has been discharged behind the scenes precisely to help people take action. That was true of Frederik Bajer and that is equally true of the IPU back in 1889 and still today".



The World of Parliaments Team
wishes you
the very best for 2009

Azerbaijan

On 2 June 2008, the National Assembly adopted amendments to the Electoral Code reducing the period for official election campaigning. The deadline for announcing elections was reduced from 120 days to 75 days before polling day, and the duration of the election campaign was reduced from 60 to 28 days. Due to the shorter campaigning period, the number of signatures required to run for the presidential elections was reduced from 45,000 to 40,000. The amendments also abolished the deposit formerly required for candidates to register in the election without having to collect a sufficient number of signatures.

Italy

On 11 and 23 July 2008 respectively, the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate approved a bill giving top State officials immunity from prosecution. These include the President of the Republic, the President of the Senate and the Speaker of the Chamber of Deputies, and the Prime Minister. Any legal proceedings brought against them – including those relating to incidents that occurred before they took up their posts – will be suspended for the entire duration of their mandate. The governing majority, led by Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi, supported the bill, while opposition parties, including the Democratic Party and Italy of Values (IV-LDP) were opposed to it. The latter pledged to collect signatures for a referendum to repeal the law. President Giorgio Napolitano signed the bill into law on 24 July. The law took effect on 25 July upon its publication in the Official Gazette.

Latvia

Following a year-long confrontation between parliament on the one hand and trade unions and civic groups on the other, the Free Trade Union Confederation of Latvia (LBAS) undertook in March 2008 a signature collection campaign with a view to amending the constitution. The Constitution allows citizens to submit a draft constitutional amendment to the President, who

shall then present it to the parliament. If the latter rejects it or adopts it with changes, it shall then be submitted to national referendum. The proposed amendment would allow citizens to submit a draft resolution calling for the dissolution of parliament. The requisite number of signatures was obtained by the 10 April deadline, following which a bill with the constitutional amendments was tabled before parliament. The parliament rejected the draft amendments, thereby triggering a constitutional referendum which took place on 2 August. Although 97 per cent of voters supported the amendments, turnout did not reach the 50 per cent needed to validate the referendum. As a result, the President remains the only person entitled to propose the dissolution of the parliament via a referendum.

Nepal

On 10 April 2008, elections to a 601-member Constituent Assembly were held. These elections had originally been due before mid-June 2007, but were postponed twice due mainly to disagreements among the ruling alliance of political parties and Maoists over the electoral system and the future status of the King. The Communist Party of Nepal (Maoists) won a total of 220 seats. Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala's Nepali Congress Party (NC) and Mr. Jhal Nath Khanal's Nepali Communist Party (Unified Marxist-Le-

ninist, UML) took 110 and 103 seats respectively (see: http://www.ipu.org/parline-e/reports/2386_E.htm). The very first act performed by the Constituent Assembly when it convened in May 2008 was to abolish the monarchy and declare Nepal a federal democratic republic. Mr. Ram Baran Yadav, General Secretary of the NC, was elected as the first-ever President of the Republic in July, defeating the Maoist candidate Ram Raja Prasad Singh in a run-off. Mr. Subas Nembang (UML), who had served as Speaker of the House of Representatives and the interim Legislative Parliament, was elected unopposed as the Speaker of the Constituent Assembly. The Constituent Assembly is tasked with adopting the country's new Constitution within two years. It exercises the power of the Legislative Parliament, whose term ended after the first sitting of the Constituent Assembly.

Qatar

The 2005 Constitution increased the membership of the Advisory Council, a 35-member appointed legislative body, to 45. Two thirds of these members will be directly elected while the remaining members will be appointed by the Emir. On 19 May 2008, the Advisory Council adopted an electoral bill which stipulates that citizens – both men and women – of 18 years of age or over may vote in the elec-



The Parliament of Nepal.

Photo: Parliament of Nepal

tions. It also regulates campaign funding and prohibits vote-buying. The bill will need to be reviewed by the government and approved by the Emir before it enters into force. On 2 July 2008, the Emir extended the term of the current Advisory Council by two years to 30 June 2010.

Sudan

In August 2007, the National Constitutional Review Commission (NCRC) submitted a draft electoral bill on elections to cabinet, which subsequently sent it to the National Assembly for deliberation in October 2007. However, the parties in parliament were unable to reach a compromise, in particular regarding the percentage of seats elected under the majority and the proportional representation systems, women's representation and the number of constituencies. On 7 July 2008, the National Assembly approved the bill stipulating that 60 per cent of the 450 seats in the parliament will be elected according to the majority system and 15 per cent according to the proportional representation system. The remaining 25 per cent will be reserved for women. The bill also allows Sudanese citizens living abroad to run for presidential elections and participate in national referenda. Presidential and parliamentary elections are expected to be held before July 2009, which will end the transitional period started in July 2005, when the now deceased former rebel leader John Garang was appointed as the First Vice-President and the interim constitution was adopted.

Tunisia

On 24 July 2008, the Chamber of Deputies adopted constitutional amendments which, among other things, lower the voting age from 20 to 18 years and allow the incumbent leaders of all recognized political parties to nominate themselves as candidates for the next presidential elections, scheduled for 2009, provided that they serve in the post of party leader for at least two consecutive years. Previously, presidential candidates

needed to be backed by 30 deputies or a mayor. Five opposition members voted against the amendments, claiming that they were tailor-made for the ruling party.

Zimbabwe

On 21 July 2008, President Robert Mugabe and opposition leaders Morgan Tsvangirai and Arthur Mutambara signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU), paving the way for talks to resolve the country's political impasse following the March and June 2008 parliamentary and presidential elections. President Mugabe's ZANU-PF party lost its majority in parliament for the first time since the country gained independence in 1980, although he himself was re-elected unopposed as President following Mr. Tsvangirai's withdrawal from the controversial presidential run-off elections on 27 June. The MoU stipulated that all parties should not take any decisions involving the convening of Parliament or the formation of a new government outside the established dialogue. However, on 19 August, President Mugabe announced that he would unilaterally convene the parliament the following week. On 25 August, parliament held its first session, nearly six months after the elections. Two MDC members elected to the House of Assembly were arrested on their way to parliament. In the contest for the post of Speaker of the House of Assembly, MDC Chairman Mr. Lovemore Moyo, won 110 votes, while the candidate endorsed by the Arthur Mutambara Movement for Democratic Change (MDC-AM) and backed by the ZANU-PF, Mr. Paul Themba-Nyathi, took 98 votes. On 15 September, the ZANU-PF, the MDC and the MDC-AM signed a Power-Sharing Agreement under the mediation of the then South African President Mbeki. Mr. Mugabe remained President, while Mr. Tsvangirai assumed the post of newly created Prime Minister. However, the leaders of the ZANU-PF and the MDC disagreed over key posts in the new government. As at 10 November, the new government had not been formed. ▀

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Timor-Leste Parliament embarks on strategic planning

Increasingly, parliaments, as pillars of democracy and good governance, are involved in developing long-term strategies that reflect their vision for self-development. In this context, parliaments should be continually reviewing their practices and procedures and taking corrective action to address short comings in the way they implement the mandate given to them by the people. This was the thrust of a workshop organized recently in Dili by the IPU and UNDP, in cooperation with the parliamentary authorities of Timor-Leste.

Participants were acquainted with the tools of forward planning, which as explained during the workshop, should involve a review of past and present practices and experiences, as the basis for developing a plan for a more efficient and productive institution.

Working with experts, legislators and parliamentary staff of Timor-Leste identified the building blocks for a strategic plan for the Parliament of Timor-Leste. Participants stressed that the success of such a plan required the sharing of ideas and a strong commitment of the stakeholders in the parlia-

ment: the leadership and members of parliament, the government as well as the staff of parliament and the public

Following the workshop the parliament is set to prepare and adopt its strategic plan. This exercise should also be informed by the recently published IPU self-assessment toolkit entitled *Evaluating Parliament*. It provides a framework and opportunity for any parliament to assess its performance against a set of criteria framed into a series of questions, such as:

- Does parliament reflect the votes of the people and the interests of minority groups and regions? Are parliament and its committees open to the media and the public? How effectively are decisions of parliament transmitted to the public? Can the public and groups make submissions to parliament? Do citizens have input into proposed legislation? How accountable are members to their constituents? Are there agreed and open systems to ensure that there are no conflicts of interest for members? How well is parliament able to influence and scrutinize the national budget? Can the parliament scrutinize appointments to public positions? ▀



Photo from left to right: Mr. Akbar Usmani, UNDP Country Director; Mr. Herbus Burger, Manager, Strategic and Business Planning of the South African Parliament; two staff members of the Parliament of Timor-Leste; Mr. Paul McGrath, former MP, Ireland; Mr. Fernando Lasama de Araújo, Speaker, Parliament of Timor-Leste; Mrs. Marion Bartlett, Director, Human Resources, House of Representatives, Australia; Ms. Maria Paixao, Deputy Speaker, Parliament of Timor-Leste; and Mr. Sarala Gopalan, former Secretary General, Lok Sabha, India.

The IPU has lost several of its outstanding supporters over the past months. The world organization of parliaments wishes to pay tribute to their commitment and dedication.

MR. PETER ADJETEY

Mr. Peter Ala Adjetey, Speaker of the Parliament of Ghana between 2001 and 2005, passed away on 15 July 2008. He was the Head of the West African Bar Association and former Chairman of the New Patriotic Party (NPP). He died after a short illness in Accra. The 78 year-old lawyer and politician was described by many as a man who gave selfless service to the country. Speaker Adjetey participated in many IPU meetings. In an interview to *The World of Parliaments* (issue no. 16 - 2004), he said that "when Speakers are committed to defending human rights, it has an impact. It is our responsibility and duty, in response to the request we have received from the IPU Secretary General, to approach foreign governments with regard to the human rights of parliamentarians".

MR. MUSTAPHA OUKACHA

Speaker of the Chamber of Councillors of Morocco, Mr. Mustapha Oukacha, passed away on 13 November at the age of 75 following his return to his native Morocco after undergoing surgery in Paris. Born in 1933 in Casablanca, Mr. Oukacha was a founding member of the *Rassemblement National des Indépendants (RNI)* movement. In October 2000, Mr. Oukacha was elected Speaker of the Chamber of Councillors for the first time, an office he retained following his re-election in 2003 and 2006. Mr. Oukacha has participated in several IPU meetings.

SIR JOHN PAGE

A member of the UK Parliament, Sir John Page passed away on 31 October 2008 at the age of 89. From 1962 to 1987 he was involved with the IPU. He was keen to use the IPU to foster the use of parliamentary processes in countries with weak democratic traditions.