

# THE WORLD OF PARLIAMENTS



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*Two women peer out of their house in Lalsot, around 80 kms from Jaipur (Rajasthan, India).*

Photo AFP/M. Vatsyayana

## Legislators face the challenge of the economic crisis

The IPU is challenging parliaments to contribute to mitigating the impact of the financial and economic crisis. In April and May 2009, it adopted this topic as an emergency item at the 120<sup>th</sup> Assembly in Addis Ababa (Ethiopia). The IPU also debated it at a parliamentary conference in Geneva. The crisis is affecting the whole world, but as IPU President Dr. Theo Ben Gurirab said, "it will at a minimum consolidate entrenched inequalities and most likely exacerbate them, pushing women even further into poverty". This edition of the World of Parliaments is dedicated to the first crisis of globalization. ►

Prof. Joseph Stiglitz, Nobel Prize laureate in Economics:

“We need to create an economic framework outside the framework of special interests”

The Commission of Experts of the President of the United Nations General Assembly on Reforms of the International Monetary and Financial System held a meeting at IPU Headquarters in March 2009 to discuss the economic crisis. On that occasion, its Chairman, Joseph Stiglitz, 2001 Nobel Prize laureate in Economics, gave *The World of Parliaments* his views.

**Q:** You said that globalization should be better controlled, and that there should be a balance between the market and State intervention. How is that possible given that many people are reluctant to have the State interfere in the economic sector, with the exception of the banks?

**J.S.:** That debate is over. Everybody recognizes now that the State is absolutely essential. States have saved economies. Once you recognize that you need the State to save jobs, the economy and banks, you also have to recognize that you need the State to regulate. You cannot provide the insurance against failure without taking action against the recurrence of failure. The banks are going to take actions which can put at risk trillions of US taxpayers' dollars, so we have to make sure that they don't do it again. That was our mistake. We allowed banks to take actions or risk our money because we thought they would act responsibly. We know now that they did not. Never can we let that happen again.

**Q:** Do you think that this commitment will really be implemented, in say one year, when the crisis will be more or less over?

**J.S.:** The crisis will not be over in one year! But there will be a debate. There are too many people who have been

hurt badly to let this simply go on as if nothing happened. Most Americans want a change.

**Q:** What about the regulation mechanism? How do you explain the fact that nobody sounded the alarm?

**J.S.:** The people who were running the banks were too politically powerful. Many people sounded the alarm. But people who were making money were making too much money and too many campaign contributions. Unfortunately, they managed to make sure that they were not constrained in putting at risk trillions of dollars of American taxpayers' money.

**Q:** Is this the positive result of the crisis, hoping that it will not happen again?

**J.S.:** I think so. But remember that our political system is still an imperfect democracy and many of these people

still have a lot of money. And they will use this money to try to influence politics to allow them to get even more money. It is not going to be an easy battle.

**Q:** Would you say that developing countries resisted better the financial crisis?

**J.S.:** Many of the developing countries had much better regulators, much better central banks, partly because they have had financial crises before and have seen the cost. They worked with their previous experience, but they were under tremendous pressure from American financial institutions and some of the better ones, like India, resisted this pressure. But others have suffered.

**Q:** Do you agree with those who advocate a reform of the IMF and the World Bank?

Photo IPU/H. Salgado





**J.S.:** They are there. We have to work with them, but I think that we have also to work to create new institutions. There has to be more competition among these institutions.

**Q:** In the movie "The world according to Stiglitz", you mention the need for cross-border accountability. What exactly do you mean by this?

**J.S.:** We need to have cross-border accountability, because if you commit a crime in one State, under one jurisdiction, you can go across the border and escape accountability. We have recognized the basic principle: provisions for extradition, but in too many cases you cannot get extradition for environmental crimes, for example. It is a serious crime, which can be tantamount to murder because people can die of environmental crimes. There is also a lack of accountability for "economic" crimes. Countries have legal frameworks so if you do damage to somebody else, they can sue you for compensation. But internationally, if a company in country X does damage in country Y, it is very difficult to recover by law. We may need to be working towards international courts for environmental crimes, for corporate crimes or for accountability. The reason is that firms in country A believe that a court in country B will treat them unfairly. People worry about getting fair treatment in another jurisdiction, but that is not an excuse for lack of accountability. We have to create international legal systems in which we have confidence. We have been doing that in areas of jurisprudence, hence the International Criminal Court, but we have not yet done that in the commercial field. A parallel to this is that in the United States we have 50 states and each state has his own Commercial Code. If you commit a crime in one state, you can get away and go to another state, but we have federal courts, and there is confidence in the federal court system.

**Q:** Should the same logic apply to the globalized economy?

**J.S.:** We have so much international and commercial activity that we will naturally have to have an international commercial court.

## Save the economy and preserve human dignity

Almost every day citizens question politicians about the negative impact of the financial crisis on their daily life. "Governments have found money to save the banks but in many cases they are unable to help citizens who lose their jobs", is an oft-heard complaint in the media. The situation is explosive. Millions of jobs are at risk, with consequences that nobody can predict. What can the representatives of the people do to prevent the financial crisis from leading to marginalization and discrimination?

The underlying global economic crisis is an explosive human rights crisis: a combination of social, economic and political problems has created a time bomb of human rights abuses, said Ms. Irene Khan, Secretary General of Amnesty International, on presenting a report which indicates that human rights are being relegated to the back burner in pursuit of global economic recovery.

The consequences of the 1929 crisis were devastating. Will they be the same this time? Economic recovery will be neither sustainable nor equitable if governments fail to tackle abuses that drive and deepen poverty, or armed conflicts that generate new violations, warns Ms. Khan.

Nobel Prize laureate in economics, Joseph Stiglitz, believes that parliamentarians, as representatives of the people, have the power to demand accountability. They can require the banks to be more transparent and more responsible; they can demand that governments impose systems of checks and balances on the financial system. They can also demand respect for the rights and the dignity of the most vulnerable citizens, who are at risk of being marginalized through poverty. The time has come for legislators to use this power.

LB

**Q:** How could parliamentarians and the IPU make a difference?

**J.S.:** The IPU and parliamentarians are typically much closer to the people and to democratic processes. First, they could try to change the political framework to make campaign contributions less important and more transparent. The second thing is to ensure that there is greater transparency. One of the problems in the United States is the lack of transparency. What is happening is outrageous. There was a huge amount of money but we do not know where the money went. Parliamentarians, as representatives of the people, have the power to demand accountability. The third thing is to recognize that markets do not work by themselves. There is a need for governments to act – although governments often also fail – and we have to think of systems of checks and balances, of making markets work better and also making governments work better.

**Q:** The whole world expects President Obama to save the world economy from this crisis. What can he really do?

**J.S.:** The problems are too big for any single person or any single country to solve. What is very clear is that he is managing the situation much better than President Bush. The problems are very serious and the political environment is very serious. He did not get a single Republican vote from the House of Representatives, for instance, and the fact that the country is so polarized on a matter such as this emergency is amazing for an economist.

**Q:** What can you and the Commission you are presiding over do to help solve the crisis?

**J.S.:** We are trying to outline what needs to be done, to create an economic framework outside the framework of political pressures of special interests. LB ▀

## Multilateralism and the role of the International Monetary Fund in the global financial crisis<sup>2</sup>

*by Mr. Dominique Strauss-Kahn  
Managing Director,  
International  
Monetary Fund*

Photo IMF



Especially in the current environment, there is a need for strong global cooperation in macroeconomic and financial-sector policies. One of the key lessons of the Great Depression was that a lack of cooperation and a retreat to isolationism can make things worse. The unprecedented collapse in global activity in the 1930s also had dire social and political consequences, and contributed to the outbreak of a disastrous war that left tens of millions dead and a whole continent in ruins. When world leaders met in Bretton Woods in 1944, they vowed never to repeat the errors of the past. They embraced multilateralism and a cooperative approach to economic and financial policies.

The IMF was born in Bretton Woods, forged in the furnace of this multilateral idealism, and endowed with a mandate to oversee the global financial system and to act as a lender of last resort to members with balance of payments needs. It stands right at the heart of macroeconomic and financial-sector policy coordination.

Over sixty years later, although the contours of the world financial system would be unrecognizable to the Bretton Woods delegates, the IMF remains as central as ever. But it took the worst financial crisis since the Great Depression for this to be made manifest. Over the past eighteen months, an economic crisis that originated in the

U.S. housing market has spread like wildfire to every corner of the world. As the dust settles, we are learning a few core lessons—the links between the real economy and the financial sector are deep-rooted and complex, and that world economy is interconnected in more ways than we had imagined. It is also clear that a multilateral solution is essential, and that the IMF has a central role to play. It is an international institution ideally placed to address financing and liquidity problems at a global level, and to conduct candid, independent, and even-handed surveillance.

### Effectiveness as a firefighter

The IMF is helping a wide array of countries meet their financing needs, and expects to add more to that list before the year is out. To help the IMF perform its firefighter function effectively in this crisis, world lead-

ers pledged to triple the IMF's lending capacity to an unprecedented US\$ 750 billion, and—in addition—to double its capacity for concessional lending to low-income countries. In response, the institution is adapting to circumstances, and has introduced a package of innovative reforms. As a key first step, all loan access limits have been doubled, including for low-income countries.

It is surely better to prevent fires than put them out. The IMF has introduced a flexible credit line that grants rapid upfront financing in large amounts—with no ex post conditions—for countries with a proven track record of good performance. More generally, the institution will provide larger amounts and more upfront financing across a wide range of facilities.

While conditionality remains important, it must become more focused and streamlined—this should encour-

<sup>2</sup> The article is based on a speech delivered at the School of Advanced International Studies, Washington D.C., on 23 April 2009.

age countries to approach the IMF early on. The IMF remains committed to protecting the poorest and most vulnerable in both concessional and non-concessional lending programmes. Many recent programmes call for sizable increases in social spending.

## Effectiveness as a policy adviser

The IMF also has an important role as policy adviser in the global economy, through its bilateral and multilateral surveillance. As the crisis evolved, the IMF was among the first to pinpoint the policy responses that have now become part of conventional wisdom. This is especially true in two key areas—the case for fiscal stimulus, and the need to restructure the banking system.

The IMF has been recommending, as early as January 2008, a discretionary loosening for countries that can afford it. Countries have delivered a 2 per cent of GDP fiscal stimulus in 2009, exactly in line with IMF recommendations. The unprecedented degree of international cooperation was particularly impressive. Countries are still delivering stimulus for 2010, less than in 2009, but still sizeable. The jury is still out on whether this will be enough.

The IMF also noted very early on that a speedy recovery depended on cleansing banks' balance sheets of toxic assets. Without this, efforts to boost demand will prove fruitless. And here, the message is mixed—while moving in the right direction, the response has tended to be slow and piecemeal, though recent signs have been more positive.

## Legitimacy as a provider of early warnings

One criticism levelled against the IMF was that it failed to predict the crisis. Some of this criticism is justified. The warnings were given, but were not loud or clear enough, and were often ignored by policymakers. But

the institution proved its worth once the crisis broke out. Its forecasts were ahead of the curve, both for economic activity and for credit losses.

Looking ahead, the IMF is dramatically improving its early warning exercise. These new early warnings must be strong, candid, credible, and even-handed. They must not shy away from "naming and shaming" where appropriate. The strategy will be to focus on systemic risks from all quarters, better integrating the macroeconomic and financial sector work, and better monitoring policy spillovers and cross-country linkages.

## Legitimacy as a global institution

For the facilities and surveillance reforms to be effective, the IMF must have legitimacy as a global institution. Its voice must be respected in every corner of the world. This is why the institution must reform its governance structure to give more influence to emerging markets and low-income countries. The next phase of quota reform should be completed by early 2011.

In sum, robust multilateralism is essential to the resolution of the current crisis, and indeed, to the prevention of future crises. In an increasingly globalized world, the web of connections between countries and activities will continue to grow. As this crisis unfolded, the benefits of cooperation were evident with the global fiscal stimulus and with coordinated liquidity provision by central banks. The costs of non-cooperation were seen with temptations to protect domestic banking systems at the expense of neighbours, ring-fence assets, and favour domestic lending.

Countries seem increasingly inclined to adopt a coordinated response to policy challenges, a positive development. The IMF will do its part. At the end of the day, however, it is not about the IMF, but rather the global economy and the welfare of the nearly seven billion people who share this planet. ▀

## VERBATIM

*by Dr. Supachai Panitchpakdi  
Secretary-General of the  
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at IPU Parliamentary  
Conference on the  
Global Economic Crisis  
Geneva, 7-8 May 2009*

...UNCTAD in the past couple of years has been sending out warning signals, although there are very few people in the world who could have predicted exactly when this crisis would have erupted. UNCTAD has been one of the very few institutions that have been sending out regular warnings, particularly in the three or four areas that I would like to mention here. First, UNCTAD has drawn the attention of the global community to the fact that when the Asian crisis broke out in the 1990s, one of the major problems was that of imbalances. In those days it was imbalances in current accounts and balance of payments. This time, the imbalances are to be found in budget deficits, current account deficits, the deficit of financing, because one part of the world keeps consuming while another part of the world keeps saving. UNCTAD has always indicated that the huge imbalances that have been augmenting from year to year have to end. Yet it was constantly told that it was wrong. The second point is the glaring dichotomy between the lack of financial regulation – particularly at the international level – and the tight discipline in all areas of commodities trading and markets...The third warning sign was that one of the key causes of the Asian financial crisis was the over hasty deregulation process that has led to full financial liberalization without really preparing the markets to be more mature and have the depth, the players and institutions to balance them... See also In the Spotlight – IPU web page <http://www.ipu.org/splz-e/finance09.htm>



## Tackling the global jobs crisis: A Decent Work response

*by Mr. Juan Somavia  
Director-General  
of the International  
Labour Organization*

Photo IPU/G. Fortunato

The global financial and economic crisis is turning into a jobs crisis and a social crisis. The speed, depth and breadth of the crisis have taken all by surprise. The crisis is creating hardship for millions of workers and families in low-, middle- and high-income countries through loss of employment, lower quality employment in the informal economy, drop in earnings and low probability of finding employment, particularly for young people. Pension schemes relying on individual market capitalization have been hit hard.

This crisis was preceded by growing imbalances in the way globalization unfolded, notably a protracted aggravation of income inequalities within countries. Moreover, the crisis occurred in a context of a dominant policy vision that overvalued the capacity of markets to self-regulate, undervalued the role of the State and devalued the dignity of work, respect for the environment and the delivery of public goods, social protection and the welfare function in society.

A social recession of major proportions is upon us. Millions of persons across the globe have lost their jobs over the last few months and many more jobs are in jeopardy. ILO estimates suggest that an additional 50 million persons will enter unemployment by the end of 2009 when compared with 2007. We continue to monitor the situation closely. It could be higher. The number of working poor will swell by some 200 million over the same period. In-

formal employment will rise in many countries. Earnings are likely to fall on average. Workers' rights are put under pressure as suggested by rising discrimination against migrant workers, for example.

### Slow recovery in employment

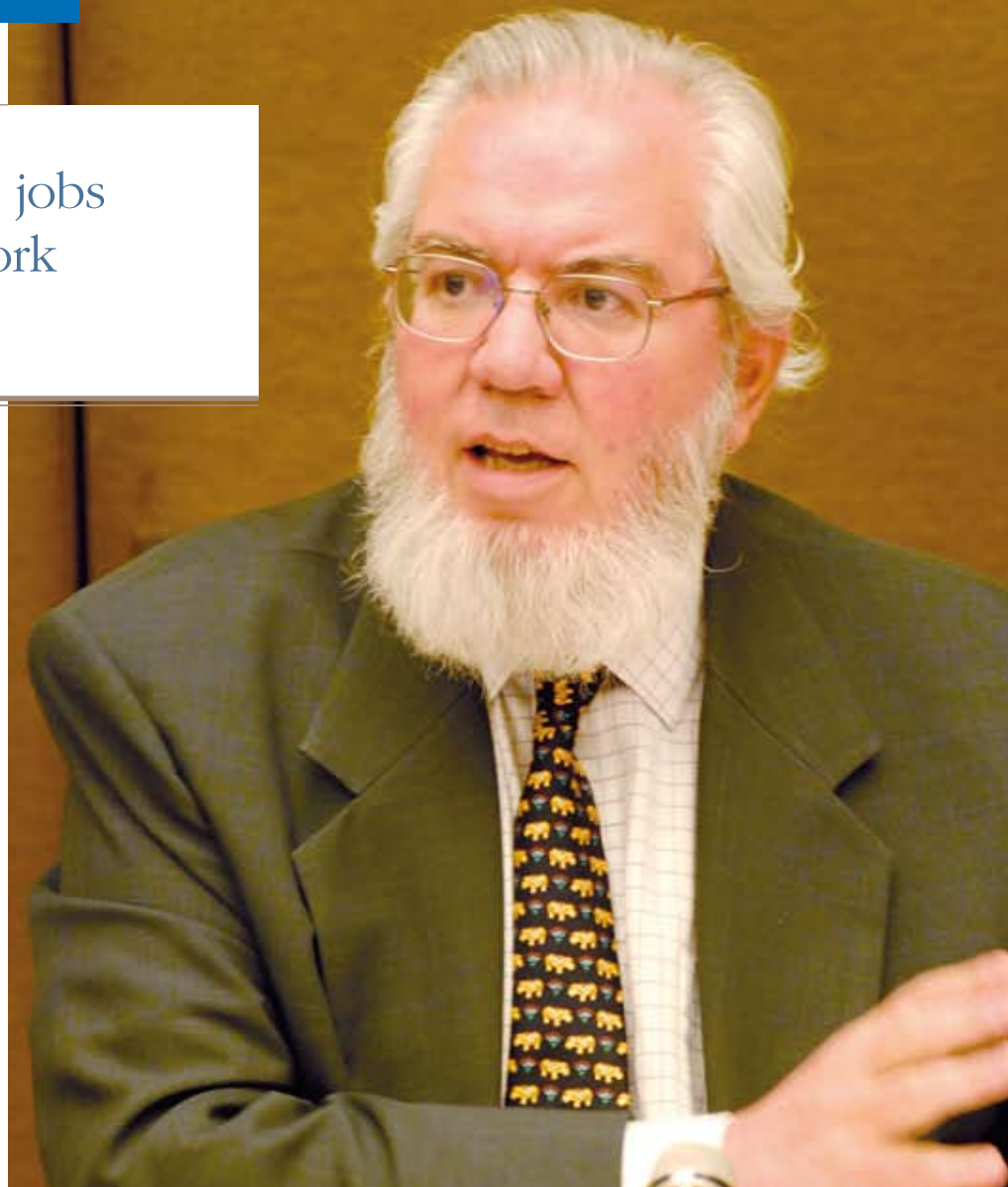
Several forecasts suggest that unemployment will continue to rise at least until end 2010 as the recovery slowly gains momentum and enterprises gradually reduce their idle capacity. Additionally, given the especially uncertain future outlook, investments projects are being and will be deferred. It is very likely we will experience a significant lag of four to five years, well-documented in previous crises, between recovery in economic indicators and recovery in employment to pre-crisis levels.

Most forecasts predict a long and slow economic recovery starting sometime mid 2010. This, however, is conditional on the effectiveness of measures taken to stimulate economic activity through sizeable fiscal stimuli and stabilize the financial sector laden with bad debts.

Meanwhile, the labour force continues to grow. An estimated 45 million persons worldwide, mostly young persons looking for their first job, enter the labour market every year. Prospects for job-seekers, especially first-time job-seekers, are grim.

### A jobs crisis for several years with risks of instability

Putting these elements together paints a bleak picture. The world is looking at a jobs crisis of some six



to eight years duration. This holds worrying implications for social and political stability and security in general. Already we have seen signs of instability, tensions and even riots in several countries. And we know the dearth of employment is one of the major sources of instability; simply because decent work remains to date the most fundamental democratic demand of people, together with basic economic security.

We should not forget the crisis before this crisis: unbalanced globalization, lack of broad opportunity for all, little social protection in too many countries, massive poverty, weakening middle classes through stagnating earnings, global warming through excessive carbon emissions, devaluation of dignity at work, of public goods and of global solidarity.

The policies of the past have failed to avoid this crisis and the earlier ones. We cannot pretend to counter this crisis with failed policies. In considering the policies needed to recover from the terrible blows inflicted by this crisis, we need to bear in mind the lessons of the recent past.

The ILO has for some time been a critique of a model of globalization that the World Commission on the Social Dimension of Globalization described in 2004 as "morally unacceptable and politically unsustainable".

Policies are needed to re-establish balances between the power of the State, the dynamism of markets and private enterprises, the voice of societies and expression of people, the satisfaction of basic needs of families and communities.

## A global jobs pact

In the immediate future, the central proposal of the ILO is a global jobs pact, to be discussed at the International Labour Conference in June 2009. The proposals integrate the extraordinary measures adopted by many governments, those agreed to by the G20 leaders in April and the process under way with the Chief Executives Board of the United Nations backing the global jobs pact.

A global jobs pact is the Decent Work response to the crisis. It is envisaged as a policy contribution by the ILO to mitigate the impact of the crisis on working families and enterprises, including the informal and rural sectors, and to help shape a productive and sustainable recovery.

## Balanced growth with broad support

The strategic objective of the global jobs pact is to place employment and labour market issues, together with social protection and respect for workers' rights, at the heart of stimulus packages and other relevant national policies to confront the crisis. The use of social dialogue to define and implement policies is seen as a key consensus-building tool. Not enough priority has been given to this approach – which is what people expect from political leadership.

Policies must target employment and social protection outcomes. We need a productive way out of the crisis in order to significantly reduce the lag time between recovery of growth and the recovery of employment. This would also prepare the ground for a new model of sustainable development and a fair globalization. At the ILO we call for a new globalization providing opportunities to all, rooted in balanced growth with efficient market economies, socially just and environmentally sustainable outcomes.

This is a political project grounded in decent work for all working women and men. A project requiring the support of all: governments, parliamentarians, local and regional authorities, citizens, employers' and workers' organizations, civil society and multilateral institutions.

At the heart of all this lie local politics and the interaction with global politics. Parliamentarians are conveyor belts; they must play a central role to ensure that the policies applied today and the new governance systems that will inevitably emerge tomorrow respond to the deep-rooted need we all have for dignity at work. ▀

## In the press

### The "voiceless" have strong words on the global financial crisis

UNCTAD's first public symposium on the global economic crisis opened with a chorus of demands for significant international reaction so that poor countries and people are not ignored as the global financial crisis plays out. There also were repeated calls for significant reforms to prevent similar crises in the future...Anders B. Johnsson, Secretary General of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), said that "Parliaments have some soul-searching to do" on why they did not have regulations in place to prevent the financial abuses that led to the crisis, as they were public monitors of their governments' management of national economies.

"Tighter financial controls are needed", he said, adding that "We must reinforce the regulatory control of greed."

A better balance also is needed between the functioning of markets and the overall well-being of countries and their peoples.

The FINANCIAL (Georgia) – 12 June 2009

### Inter-Parliamentary Union calls for nuclear non-proliferation

Addis Ababa. The Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), which brings together 154 Member Parliaments, appealed on Friday to countries in possession of nuclear weapons to make deeper and "irreversible" cuts to their arsenals and to redouble their efforts to combat nuclear proliferation. The IPU "calls on all nuclear-armed States to make deeper, faster and irreversible cuts", according to a resolution adopted on Friday at the close of the 120th IPU Assembly in Addis Ababa, a copy of which AFP obtained. The instrument goes on to say that the IPU "urges all States to redouble their efforts to prevent and combat the proliferation of nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction". The international organization invites States to negotiate a "treaty on the prohibition of short-range and intermediate-range land missiles that carry nuclear warheads". Lastly, the parliamentarians expressed particular concern at the situation in the Middle East, calling for it to be "declared a nuclear-weapon-free zone, without exception". Israel has never publicly acknowledged that it has a nuclear arsenal and has always refused to sign the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), which aims to build international cooperation in the area of nuclear energy for civilian use. The 120th IPU Assembly, which commenced its work in Addis Ababa on 5 April, closed on Friday after gathering over 500 parliamentarians from around the world.

Agence France Presse (AFP) – 10 April 2009

## The human rights implications of the financial crisis for Africa

*by Justice Ms Sanji Mmasenono Monageng, High Court Judge, Swaziland, and Judge at the International Criminal Court*

Photo Carolyn Dibble



The worldwide economic and financial crisis, the worst since the depression of the 1930's, that started in the United States and then spread to Europe, Asia, and the rest of the world, is having serious implications for the realization and effective enjoyment of human rights in Africa. It is interesting to note that the response of Western governments to ward off regional and global recessions and restore stability and confidence in the markets was to come up with rescue packages to assist their ailing financial systems. The bailouts have been unprecedented. In both the United States and Europe, what we have seen is a colossal and unparalleled plan of government intervention, nationalization of major financial institutions, injection of enormous financial support into troubled institutions and a re-regulating of their financial sectors. The irony cannot be more telling as such responses contradict the severe neoliberal policies forced on developing countries by the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and many developed countries for so many decades.

But what are the implications for Africa – a region which even before the recession was the poorest in the world? The crisis has already begun to impact many African States as their stock markets and currencies drop, private capital flows are being re-

duced and large investment projects are being cancelled because Africa's eventual profitability is now in doubt. Oxfam estimates that the economic turmoil of 2008 dragged a further 119 million people below the poverty line, prompting Jacques Diouf, the United Nations Food and Agricultural Organization's Director-General, to remind the world that, "the global financial crisis should not make us forget the food crisis."

In terms of the financial crisis' human rights implications for Africa, a few sobering statistics on the most vulnerable members of our society – children, puts the debate into proper perspective: one in five children die every three seconds from AIDS, other preventable illnesses and extreme poverty. In fact, about 20 per cent of Africa's children die before the age of five. To date, more than 15 million children have already been orphaned as a result of the epidemic. Two million of those children are under 14. In addition, hundreds of thousands of lives are being claimed for lack of clean water. Forty three per cent of children in sub-Saharan Africa do not

*"One in five children dies every three seconds from AIDS, other preventable illnesses and extreme poverty. In fact about 20 per cent of Africa's children die before the age of five."*

have safe, accessible drinking water and 64 per cent do not have adequate sanitation. Furthermore, malnutrition and diseases such as malaria, pneumonia and typhoid fever, are killing record numbers of people.

UNICEF estimates that in sub-Saharan Africa, measles takes the life of a child nearly every minute of the day, though an effective measles vaccine costs as little as \$1 per child. Only 57 per cent of African children are enrolled in primary education, and one in three of those do not complete school. As if those statistics were not bad enough, about 120,000 African children are participating in armed conflicts, with some as young as 7 years old. In fact, children account for half of all civilian casualties in wars in Africa. Grim as those statistics are, they fail to capture the face of hunger of the teeming millions of Africa's children staring into a vortex of hopelessness, or the unnecessary suffering of many millions more caught in the vicious cycle of disease, war and lack of opportunities. The statistics tell the reader nothing about child poverty being the worst form of violence and



human rights abuse – a disgrace to humanity itself. But, that is only part of the story for millions of Africans.

At the forefront of addressing the plethora of problems affecting Africa are NGOs and civil society organizations, many of them with links to Western NGOs. But the news coming from those parts of the world is not good. A recent survey by Price Waterhouse Coopers shows that the recession in the UK, for example, could leave Britain's charity sector with an income shortfall of £ 2.3 billion in 2009, affecting many good causes in Africa. In June 2008, a pledge of US\$ 12.3 billion was made by governments and agencies in Rome to address the world's worst food crisis. Since then only US\$ 1 billion has been disbursed and a further US\$ 1.3

billion, earmarked by the European Commission (EC) to aid African farmers, may not be released, with some European governments now contesting their ability to afford such provisions.

Not surprisingly, the worldwide human rights organization, Amnesty International (AI), warned that the global economic crisis is exacerbating human rights abuses. In its annual report, AI said the downturn had distracted attention from abuses and created new problems. Rising prices have meant that the already impoverished millions in Africa can no longer meet basic needs, and protests for improved food security and provision are often met with repression.

One cannot agree more with the High Commissioner for Human Rights,

Justice Navi Pillay, who told the Human Rights Council on 20 February 2009 that governments and the private sector should consider human rights in their responses to the current global economic and financial crises. While it is important to respond to the unfolding crisis with a comprehensive evaluation of the performance of the financial systems, a human rights approach will contribute to making solutions more long-lasting in the long run. It should not be forgotten that addressing poverty, disease, conflict and other human rights concerns are not gestures of charity. It is rather an act of justice. It is the protection of a fundamental human right, the right to dignity and a decent life as enshrined in the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights. ▀

### *Ms. Rama Yade, the then Secretary of State for Human Rights, France:*

#### **“Defending human rights with a view to being effective rather than putting on a show”**

On the occasion of the IPU Assembly in Addis Ababa, IPU Secretary General Anders B. Johnsson and the

French parliamentary delegation in Addis Ababa met with the then Secretary of State of France for Human Rights, Ms. Rama Yade, to exchange views on the role of parliamentarians in defending human rights. Ms. Yade shared with the IPU Secretary General her deep concern over the situation of women in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Following that meeting, Ms. Rama Yade spoke with the World of Parliaments team. When asked to comment on the role of parliamentarians, she said that “parliamentarians are the representatives often elected by citizens and civil society. They are perhaps the best placed to speak on behalf of the people. As they come from very different regions, they are also likely to make a variety of opinions heard. The smooth relations they have with their peers throughout the world allow them to raise difficult issues such as human rights in a much simpler way than the executive”.

In response to a question on how to juggle human rights and diplomacy, she replied: “Therein lies the very art of diplomacy! It is a task that must be carried out with intelligence, tact and with a view to being effective rather than putting on a show. Occasionally, that requires discretion and a great deal of determination. The causes have to be followed closely; one should take care not to be insulting or aggressive, because that does not necessarily work. The idea is to maintain dialogue but where necessary, exert some diplomatic pressure”. ▀



Photo Parliament of Ethiopia

Left to right: Ms. Ingeborg Schwarz (IPU), Mr. Anders B. Johnsson (IPU Secretary General), Mr. Robert del Picchia (French Senator, member of the IPU Executive Committee), Mr. Bernard Chalet (Secretary of the French delegation to the IPU) and Ms. Rama Yade (French Secretary of State for Human Rights).

## The financial crisis: Women's empowerment and governmental responsibility

*by Ms. Vigdís Finnbogadóttir  
former President of Iceland*

Photo: Vigdís Finnbogadóttir Institute

The international financial crisis broke on the shores of Iceland like a massive tidal wave on 6 October 2008. The blow to the nation's psyche, producing a state of collective shock, still lingers, even if Icelanders have yet to feel the brunt of the catastrophe. The shock is, however, not only due to financial distress or societal insecurity. Icelanders are used to hardships in a land in which both farming and fishing are precarious enterprises. Having only become an "affluent" country in the wake of World War II, Icelanders have battled poverty, deprivation and famine through most of their history. What really makes the Icelandic blood boil is the fact that (quite literally) a handful of banking and retail "entrepreneurs" not only went on a debt-financed global spending spree but also took it upon themselves to tarnish the good name of Iceland and its people as well as its relations with other countries.

The political class also failed during these trying times. Signs of an impending collapse and, as it turned out, accurate warnings from experts and institutions, were ignored or suppressed. This complacency raised serious questions about the integrity of the political system – especially the parties, which were financed in part by the companies that brought Iceland to the point of near-bankruptcy – and democratic accountability. Indeed, what not least accounted for public disillusionment was that ideas and representations of Iceland – as reproduced in images and myths abroad – were used and abused to promote a globalized financial adventurism.

In the aftermath of the crash, commentators were quick to point to the different roles played by men and women in it. The financial bubble was created almost exclusively by men, specifically young males, hooked on excessive risk-taking. Hence, it should not come as a surprise that it has been suggested that the financial collapse would not have taken place – or would, at least, not have been as severe – if women had been at the helm. Women are usually more "economical" in their conduct, being used to thrift and caring for others. Indeed, recent surveys (e.g. Creditinfo Iceland) have consistently shown that businesses are less likely to run into debt and more likely to make money, if they are run by women.

The struggle for gender equality has been a driving force in the development of Icelandic society and political life. As a result, Iceland has one of the highest rates of employment of women, close to 80 per cent, while, at the same time, the country's birth rate ranks among the highest in Europe: 2.1 children per woman. The government has responded to this development by providing childcare for pre-school children, legal rights for parents to return to their jobs after childbirth and a generous parental leave system. The Icelandic parental leave scheme, which was established in 2000, is in many ways unique and has received international attention and great interest from various governments in Europe.

The liberation of women through their participation in the labour market is a key explanation for the rapid

*The great effort on the  
part of women in the  
making of the Icelandic  
economy has not been  
duly rewarded.*

economic development in Iceland in the second half of the 20th century. In 1975, Icelandic women made international headlines when they went on a one-day strike to underline their contribution to society. Ninety per cent of Icelandic women refused to work, cook or look after children during that day. More than 25,000 women descended on Reykjavik city center to celebrate in speeches, song and performances. Five years later, I was elected the first woman President of Iceland.

Despite these manifestations of women's empowerment, the great effort on the part of women in the making of the Icelandic economy has not been duly rewarded. During the years of high economic growth and unprecedented (albeit deceptive) financial prosperity, the gender pay gap actually increased and women were less likely to occupy positions of power. From these facts, there are important lessons to be learned. First, they confirm what has been long known: that progress in matters of equality, in Iceland as well as in other countries, will not come about by itself. Governments





national conference on Security Council resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security held at the University of Iceland<sup>5</sup>. The Training Programme will be conducted by the University of Iceland under the auspices of its Research Institute on Gender Equality and Diversity and financed by the Icelandic Research Council and the Ministry for Foreign Affairs in Iceland (as part of its commitments to gender equality and international development cooperation). The overall objective of GET is to promote peace-building, reconstruction, and economic and social welfare in developing and post-conflict countries by promoting gender equality, women's empowerment and participation in decision-making at all levels.

Politics in Iceland, and elsewhere, must undergo drastic changes: the order of the day is transparency and honesty. In spite of the dire situation, there is always hope that, in the end, some redemptive good will come out of the collapse in Iceland, such as constitutional reforms, the renewal of the democratic institutional order, and the re-affirmation of gender equality. A sign of recovery may well be found in the guise of the new Prime Minister, Jóhanna Sigurdardóttir, who was voted into office last April. She is known for being a solid, hardworking and honourable person. A nation of seafarers knows instinctively that women are capable of running societies. I learned during my presidency that this is something that men are as much aware of as women. Women in Icelandic history, wives of seamen, were in their own right "ministers" of sorts – house makers, architects, teachers – and responsible for the family's finances and the children's education. And in the current situation, men and women must work together to find ways to reconstruct public trust in our society and our financial and political system. ▀

<sup>3</sup>United Nations Human Rights website: "High Commissioner: Adopt gender-sensitive policies when addressing the economic crisis", March 2009. <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/WomenDay2009.aspx> [Visited: 17 May 2009]

<sup>4</sup>GET programme website: <http://www.hi.is/get/> [Visited: 17 May 2009]

<sup>5</sup>The conference's homepage: [www.1325.is](http://www.1325.is) [Visited: 17 May 2009]

and non-governmental organizations need to be pressured to take action in support of gender equality. Second, the current crisis should not be used as an excuse for inaction in this field. On the contrary, as it is put on the United Nations Human Rights website, "[i]f anything, the financial crisis should be seen as an urgent reason to speed up the advancement of women's rights, and not as a reason to postpone fundamental legislative and policy improvements and implementation until financially calmer times".<sup>3</sup>

This goes for the developed countries as much as the developing ones. The crisis clearly shows that Western societies, not excluding the Nordic

countries that have up to now been praised for their stand on equality and human rights issues, need to address its consequences through critical introspection. The Western discourse on "failing States" and "state-building" – in the "Third World" needs to be reconciled with the need to take into account economic and societal failings and "reconstruction" in Western countries, such as Iceland. What is required is a transnational dialogue, not a monologue, on "reconstruction" following a systemic collapse. A Gender Training Programme GET at the University of Iceland<sup>4</sup> promises to be an important venue for the learning process. It has been formally launched on 19 June 2009 on the eve of an inter-



Photo IPU/G.Fortunato

### *IPU President Dr. Theo-Ben Gurirab:*

## **The global financial crisis affects women and men differently**

At the close of the Parliamentary Conference on the Global Economic Crisis, which brought together nearly 400 legislators from 80 parliaments in Geneva in May 2009, IPU President Dr. Theo-Ben Gurirab declared that "legislators need to recognize that the global financial crisis affects women and men differently, with women being the hardest hit".

The crisis will at a minimum consolidate entrenched inequalities, but most

likely exacerbate them, pushing women even further into poverty. Women are a driving force of our economies – formally and informally – and the solutions to this crisis must therefore build on their potential, recognize their contributions and promote gender equality, underscored the IPU President.

"In parliament we must make sure that the policies and programmes that are developed to address the current crisis take into account gender equality and political participation by women and apply tools such as gender-sensitive budgeting", stressed President Gurirab, who is also the Speaker of the National Assembly of Namibia. ▀



Photo IPU/G.Fortunato

### *Ms. Barbara Prammer, Speaker of the Austrian Parliament:*

employment. When women's incomes are low or they lose their jobs, they face real problems. Sometimes it is a question of life or death for them. The marginalization of women is acute in both the developed and the developing countries, said Ms. Prammer.

The Speaker of the Austrian Parliament pointed out that the discussions on the economic crisis "are very male dominated and this is a mistake. We are very few women parliamentarians present here and we should lobby for women's issues, because the backlash can come very quickly".

When asked how women could convince their male colleagues to give more space to women in finding solutions to the financial crisis, she responded: "My colleagues understand that in an economic crisis, the situation of men and women is connected. Men also lose their jobs, but poverty is a problem that affects more women in general. This is why men and women have to work in partnership", stressed Ms. Prammer.

The economic crisis will also be on the agenda of the Fifth Meeting of Women Speakers of Parliament, which Ms. Prammer will be hosting in July in Vienna. "Each time we come together, at the national or multilateral level, we speak about the crisis. The Vienna meeting will focus on the theme of violence against women, but we have to be aware of the fact that violence and poverty are interconnected. We should exchange the experiences we have in the different regions of the world and discuss strategies and enhanced cooperation among us".

Ms. Prammer is convinced that women in the developing countries will feel the real pinch of the crisis. "There is a big question mark concerning the Millennium Development Goals in times of crisis, and women will suffer a lot. Poverty worldwide has a female face. Developed countries will not cut their aid to developing countries, but development is slowing down in my country, as it is everywhere. This is not a good thing, but it is the reality of the situation". ▀

## **Poverty worldwide has a female face**

The Speaker of the Austrian Parliament, Ms. Barbara Prammer, one of the panellists at the Conference, shares the analysis of the IPU President. She told *The World of Parliaments* that "when poverty is on the rise, women are the first to be affected", recalling that women account for a significant portion of the millions of poor people in the world.

Most of the social security systems are connected to or centred on em-



*Ms. Sabina Orellana Cruz, Bolivian legislator***"The economic crisis will trigger a food crisis"**

Ms. Sabina Orellana Cruz, a member of the Bolivian Chamber of Deputies, shares the view that the financial crisis has an impact on the economy of the poorest countries. "In Bolivia, the economic crisis greatly affects the poor, especially indigenous women. This is the case of all indigenous populations in all countries.

"In Bolivia, the crisis is also affecting outlying urban areas and the situ-

ation will get worse in another year or two because the economic crisis will trigger a food crisis. Ms. Cruz added that "countries have to find joint solutions because they will not be able to overcome the crisis if they act on their own. We will all have to work together because if men and women complement each other in the family, they should also complement each other in politics, where it is important for women to express their views, so that alongside men, they can contribute to making a better life for all". ▀



Photo IPU/G. Fortunato

*Ms. Tiouloung Saumura, Cambodian MP:***The financial crisis: The Cambodian case**

Ms. Tiouloung Saumura, a member of the Parliament of Cambodia, agrees that the economic crisis affects women in particular, which are the poorest and most vulnerable sectors of society in both rich and poor countries. "Women are generally marginalized in economic systems of production and in political executive systems. The poor countries are the most affected in general and women will be driven even deeper into poverty because of the crisis".

She said that the Conference in Geneva would provide men and women parliamentarians with an opportunity to reflect together on structural issues. "Governments will attend to the most urgent things first in an attempt to save the big corporations and the banking and financial systems, but that represents only a minority of the population rather than the majority of people," she said. It should be recalled that among the people who benefit from these banking systems, there are very few women, even more so in the poor countries. We parliamentarians are lucky in that we can step back and reflect on the situation. No doubt measures will have to be taken immediately to overcome the crisis, but there is also an opportunity to be seized to make

fundamental structural and long-term changes so that we can strike a balance between rich and poor countries, men and women, and among the beneficiaries of economic growth".

Ms. Saumura expressed the hope that men and women parliamentarians would play an active role in that kind of meeting "because the IPU offers an ideal forum for parliamentarians the world over to work together to find long-term solutions to common problems, with greater cooperation between rich and poor countries, the North and the South and men and women.

She explained that in Cambodia, "the banking system is not very well developed; there are no hedge funds or derivatives, and certainly not any stock exchange. In Cambodia, the crisis was not financial. However, it is feeling the full contagion effect of the crisis, which started off as a financial one and then became economic". The whole world today is suffering from the credit crunch and a lack of liquidity to finance economic activity. "My country's textile sector is a large garment producer. The other sector which contributes to Cambodia's GNP is tourism, which means that we are suffering from the drop in trade activity and the fall in purchasing power of our export markets. Demand for clothes has



Photo IPU/G. Fortunato

shrunk in Europe and North America, which are our main clients. The same applies for tourist arrivals, which have plunged sharply since the crisis began because people with less purchasing power are trying to cut down their expenses and foreign travel".

Cambodia is starting to be affected in economic terms by the consequences of the crisis. "I often say that for people living in rich countries, the economic crisis means buying fewer clothes or taking shorter holidays, but in poor countries it means one less meal for the underprivileged who, as it was, could only afford one meal a day. This crisis could therefore be disastrous in terms of health and the social services in general", she concluded. ▀

*Ms. Fathen Ben Amor,  
First Vice-President of the IPU Coordinating  
Committee of Women Parliamentarians*

## “Parliaments should adapt their laws in light of the economic crisis”

One month before the Geneva Parliamentary Conference on the Global Economic Crisis, this topic was the subject of an emergency item adopted at the 120<sup>th</sup> IPU Assembly in Addis Ababa. Legislators adopted a resolution calling on all parliaments and governments to make it a priority to eradicate poverty and social injustice as well as their root causes in Africa and other developing countries and to devise ways of mitigating the social, political and economic consequences of the global financial crisis, particularly regarding the developing countries.

Although some have claimed that the developing countries are better weathering the economic crisis than the developed ones, Ms. Fathen Ben Amor, a Tunisian member of parliament and First Vice-President of the IPU Coordinating Committee of Women Parliamentarians, considers that the developing countries are just as affected by the crisis, in particular women.

“The majority of job-seekers are women, who, in addition, have to be content with unstable jobs. They need more money to feed their family, and therefore need to work more, to the detriment of their health”, added Ms. Ben Amor.

Following the example of a number of women parliamentarians in other countries, she has called for laws to be passed aimed at protecting women and encouraging them to develop projects. “A survey on the participation of Arab women in the economy shows that women prefer jobs in the public sector. As the public sector offers fewer recruitment

possibilities, we have to encourage women to go to the private sector, to develop projects and to provide themselves with jobs”. Education should not be neglected though, and women should be encouraged to get a better education and show greater solidarity. “Young women, who will be the workers of tomorrow, will be the agents of change and development” predicted Ms. Ben Amor, warning that “given the current situation, women risk being left by the wayside”.

The Tunisian parliamentarian explained that, “in places where work means men and women being paid equal pay for equal work, we encourage women to work through microcredits and equal opportunity. If a male and a female candidate have the same competences, it is the woman who should be hired to encourage female employment. That goes hand in hand with secondary education and professional training, without forgetting women farmers. We are also trying to ensure that the decision-making posts are allocated to reflect the fact that 60 per cent of undergraduates are female”.

When asked if women could set an example of how to weather the crisis, Ms. Ben-Amor replied with a resolute “yes”. In her opinion, “women are more prudent, they borrow smaller amounts of money and they pay back quickly the loans they have been granted. Parliaments must adapt their laws taking into account the new order created by the financial crisis. They have to think globally and act locally. Parliaments must be the relay between the executive and the electorate”.

Photo: Parliament of Ethiopia



Ms. Ben Amor insists that although it might be true that in the short term the developing countries may be less affected by the crisis than the developed ones, “the financial and economic crisis spares no one. The fact that the rich countries are the most affected means that international aid to poor countries will drop. In the medium and long term, that will have repercussions for the developing countries. It’s a vicious circle”. ▀

### Employment from a gender perspective

As IPU President Dr. Theo-Ben Gurirab stated: the global financial crisis affects women and men differently.

According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), the economic crisis is expected to result in a rise in the number of unemployed women of up to 22 million in 2009, and the global jobs crisis is expected to worsen sharply with the deepening of the recession this year. The global economic crisis would place new hurdles in the path towards sustainable and socially equitable growth, making decent work for women increasingly difficult. In the meantime the ILO, quoted by Reuters, explained



*UNODC Executive Director,  
Mr. Antonio Maria Costa*

## “With the financial crisis human trafficking will become even worse”

At the 120th IPU Assembly held in Addis Ababa, the IPU and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) launched a handbook for parliamentarians entitled *Combating trafficking in persons*. At a press conference organized by the IPU, UNODC Executive Director, Mr. Antonio Maria Costa, explained that “human trafficking is a human rights violation which constitutes a crime against the individual and the State and it must be recognized and punished by legislative means”.

Human trafficking is a real danger in times of economic crisis. Desperate people are ready to sell everything, including their body, bodily organs and even people, he added. Mr. Costa also mentioned that around the world,

that the world's economic crisis has cost more men their jobs than women in Western countries. The male jobless rate in developed economies rose 1.1 percentage points to 6.6 per cent in 2008, the year when credit, financial, and economic woes began to sink global markets, the UN agency said in a report. Female unemployment rose 0.8 percentage points to 6.8 per cent. “There was a reduction in the gender gap in the unemployment rate in 2008 but only because the situation of men in the labour market worsened more than the situation of women,” according to the ILO. Men make up two-thirds or more of rich-country workers in mining, manufacturing, energy, construction and transportation, which have been hit hard by the continuing downturn.

millions of people, predominantly women and children, are trapped in this modern form of slavery. “This crime exploits millions of victims each year in an illegal billion-dollar industry that produces goods and services from sex slavery to forced labour”. Human trafficking is increasing, especially in a handful of countries and one can expect that with the financial crisis it will become even worse.

“We are concerned that the economic crisis could deepen the pool of potential victims and increase demand for cheap goods and services. Worldwide, almost 20 per cent of all trafficking victims are children. However, in some parts of Africa and the Mekong region, children are the majority and account for up to 100 per cent of victims in parts of West Africa”, he pointed out.

Many criminal justice systems belittle the seriousness of this crime. As of 2007-2008, two out of every five countries covered by the UNODC report on human trafficking had not recorded a single conviction. “Either these countries are blind to the problem, or they are ill-equipped to deal with it, or both. Some countries, including a few big ones, do not even inform us about the problem in their midst. Either they are too disorganized to collect the information, or they are unwilling to share it, perhaps out of embarrassment”, reported the UNODC Executive Director.

People often confuse prostitution and human trafficking. Mr. Costa remembered one political leader telling him: Our girls are beautiful, so of course they are snatched! “This form of banalization shows that people just don't get it, and I am talking about very senior politicians”.

The Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially



Photo: Parliament of Ethiopia

Women and Children defines human trafficking as a crime when it involves the recruitment, transportation, transfer, and harbouring or receipt of people through abuse of power, force and fraud. It occurs when people are forced into it for the benefit of a third-party profit.

Is there political will to stop this new form of slavery? The UNODC Executive Director says that there is growing political will because of pressure from the media. When asked why this crime too often goes unpunished, he said that “a lot of what goes on is culturally driven. We see cultural models behind it, whether it is gender discrimination or sexual exploitation. There is a tendency to treat women as objects. We have to change this mentality”. For him, “burkas and models in Western countries which expose women's bodies, displaying them as commodities, show that there is no respect for women”.

Mr. Costa has high expectations of the IPU and parliamentarians because as he put it: “the missing link in combating human trafficking is legislation in States. Parliaments and parliamentarians have the power to prevent human trafficking by raising awareness and curbing exploitative practices. We have international laws, but we need laws at the national level. About 132 countries have passed legislation. The next step is to implement it. This is why I call on governments to implement the decisions taken by their parliaments”.

*IPU Vice-President, Ms. Elsa Papademetriou, met Mr. Marios Garoyian, President of the House of Representatives of Cyprus, in Nicosia, on 6 May 2009.*

## Peace in the Middle East cannot be imposed from outside

The Vice-President of the Inter-Parliamentary Union, Ms. Elsa Papademetriou, who is also Vice-President of the Hellenic Parliament, addressed the United Nations International Meeting in support of Israeli-Palestinian Peace, held in Nicosia last May.

The IPU is founded on the basic premise that conflicts must be solved through dialogue. Like anywhere else, peace in the Middle East cannot be imposed from outside. "The IPU is convinced that men and women like us can play a powerful role in achieving that peace. We have a mandate to represent people and people want peace and justice" said the IPU Vice-President.

Ms. Papademetriou outlined the visit to the region made in March by the IPU President, accompanied by the IPU Secretary General. In Gaza, they learnt of the human suffering of the Palestinian people, particularly the many thousands of innocent women and children who once again found themselves in the line of fire. They saw the destruction of what appeared to be largely civilian targets - hospitals and schools in ruins, a whole industrial area reduced to twisted metal and rubble, bombed out ministries and other institutions of governance, flattened dwellings and housing complexes.

Ms. Papademetriou added that President Gurirab would have liked to visit Israel during his mission to the region in order to gain a holistic view of the situation. This was not possible, however, since it coincided with the elections and the subsequent formation of a new government in Israel.

In his report to the 120<sup>th</sup> IPU Assembly in April, President Gurirab formulated

a number of recommendations for parliamentary action. "He stressed that we should build on those things we share, the things that unite us, which is why inclusive and fully representative parliaments are so important. It is in parliament that the policies and plans for every country need to be subjected to political debate and scrutiny by the full spectrum of society and the necessary agreements forged. We should therefore do everything we can to support Palestinian efforts at reconciliation and also assist by helping the Palestinian Parliament."

Reconciliation necessarily implies talking to all those who the Palestinian people view as their legitimate representatives and who were elected to the Palestinian Parliament. It is up to the Palestinians to reconcile their own differences, but the IPU and others can also give their backing to those efforts by maintaining a dialogue with all parties in pursuit of peace and cooperation.

The IPU will continue the important work carried out by its Committee on the Human Rights of Parliamentarians, including its efforts to resolve the many cases of Palestinian members of parliament who have been imprisoned by the Israeli authorities.

"We should start preparing ourselves for the day when the Palestinian people go to the polls and elect a new

Parliament. The IPU will accompany that process, and stands ready to provide technical expertise and observe the elections once they take place" she added.

The IPU and its Committee on Middle East Questions can do much to facilitate dialogue between Israeli and Palestinian members of parliament. There are a number of legislators in both parliaments who are committed to finding a negotiated solution to the conflict. By offering them a forum where they can meet to exchange views and learn from each other's experiences, organizations like the IPU can make a substantial contribution towards peace in the region.

There is a need for greater unity in the international community as well. It is obvious that several countries will need to be consulted, including the Islamic Republic of Iran. "Here again, we believe the IPU can help in building bridges at the parliamentary level. We have done it before and we can do it again".

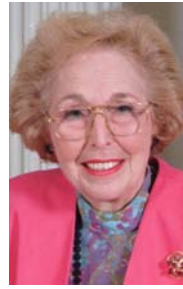
There are many in the Middle East who are tired of war and suffering. Plans such as the Arab Peace Initiative and the Middle East Roadmap endorsed by the Quartet have been on the table for some time. "What is in desperately short supply is the political will to act. That is where we, members of parliament, can help", said the IPU Vice-President. ▀



Photo: Parliament of Cyprus

## Senator Sheila Finestone: in memoriam

The IPU was deeply saddened to learn of the passing of former Canadian Senator Sheila Finestone. Members of our organization will long remember Senator Finestone for her commitment and dedication to the causes of gender equality and respect for human rights and humanitarian law. Sheila was a true firebrand. She spoke up fearlessly in defence of women everywhere. She did an enormous amount to support women's participation in politics and public life, as well as help the IPU develop its own programme for partnership between men and women in politics. She was also at the forefront of many humanitarian causes, playing a leading role in championing the international land mine convention. The IPU salutes Sheila Finestone with admiration, respect and affection.



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## In the press

### MP-elect Al-Mutawa promises to back colleagues on development

"I will consult my constituents if I am offered a seat in the Cabinet". [Kuwaiti] MP-elect Adnan Mutawa assured that he will consider the ideas of those who voted him into the National Assembly, reports Al-Watan Arabic daily. Speaking to the daily, Al-Mutawa said he was expecting the endorsement of suspended regulations and projects during the first meeting of the new parliament, indicating he will support development in coordination with his colleagues. Meanwhile, MP-elect Naji Abdullah Al-Abdullah is quoted as saying the new parliament requires honesty and cooperation on issues concerning the government and the National Assembly, reports Al-Rai daily. "Kuwait has entered a new era after four women won seats in the parliament". In a statement, Al-Abdullah vowed to pursue the needs of those who voted him into the National Assembly and to support visions that will transform the country. In the meantime, the President of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), Dr. Theo-Ben Gurirab, welcomed the election of women for the first time ever to the Parliament of Kuwait. On 16 May, four of the 50 seats up for election were won by women. "This is an historic turning point which attests to the progress made by Kuwait in recent years in terms of women's political participation. Partnership between men and women in the conduct of public affairs is at the core of democratic governance. The IPU applauds this achievement and looks forward to working with the parliament and its newly elected women members," said Gurirab. According to the Geneva-based IPU, in the Arab region, women account for an average of 9.1 per cent of all members of parliament, in contrast to the global average of 18.4 per cent.

**Arab Times and Kuwait News Agency -  
18 May 2009**

## In the press

### "All should do their part"

Excerpt: UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's speech to the Finnish Parliament  
For over a century your great country, and this parliament, has been a pioneer in democracy. Having both extended universal suffrage and the right to stand for election to all your citizens in 1906, before any other country, you continue to set an example for us all today-with women accounting for almost half your parliament and over half your cabinet. You show us that gender parity is not only possible; it is preferable! The results prove it. For this leadership we owe you a debt of gratitude. Here, where once East faced West in confrontation, Finland now shows us all how to live in peace and prosperity, without succumbing to complacency. You continue to show the way in cutting-edge social, political, and economic innovation. Here in this house of democracy, you take decisions that affect not only the lives of every Finnish citizen, but also of people all over the world... The parliamentary voice must be heard. We at the United Nations want to work with you, and I welcome the good and growing cooperation with the Inter-Parliamentary Union that has developed in recent years...  
**Helsinki Times (Finland) -  
28 May 2009**



## Azerbaijan

In a referendum held on 18 March 2009, 87 per cent of voters approved constitutional amendments that included the lifting of the two-term presidential limit. President Ilham Aliyev has been serving his second five-year term since October 2008.

## Bolivia

On 25 January 2009, Bolivians approved a new constitution in a referendum by 61 per cent of the votes. The new Constitution grants greater autonomy to the nine administrative departments and to indigenous communities, while reinforcing State control over key economic sectors. On 7 February, President Evo Morales, the country's first indigenous President, enacted the Constitution, pledging to "re-found the new united Bolivia". Under the new highest law of the land, early presidential and parliamentary elections are due on 6 December 2009. Since the presidential term served under the previous constitution is not counted, Mr. Morales remains eligible for re-election.

## Bulgaria

On 14 April 2009, the 240-member parliament adopted a mixed electoral system under which 31 members will be elected by the first-past-the-post

(FPTP) system and the remainder under the proportional representation (PR) system. Vacant FPTP seats will be filled through by-elections. However, if a member elected under the FPTP resigns to take up a ministerial post, his/her seat will be filled by the "next-in-line" candidate of the same party from the PR system.

## Comoros

On 11 February 2009, President Ahmed Abdallah Sambi called a constitutional referendum for 22 March, which was subsequently postponed to 17 May. In the referendum 93.8 per cent of voters approved the amendments, which extend the term of the Federal President from four to five years. The amendments also replace the president of each of the three component islands of the Comoros, with a governor each. The Federal President is also allowed to dissolve the Assembly of the Union, whose statutory membership has been reduced from 33 to 24. President Sambi, whose term was due to end in May 2010, will remain in power until 2011.

## Fiji

On 9 April 2009, the Court of Appeal ruled that the military government, established following the December 2006 coup, was illegal and should be

replaced by an interim government. The Court added that the interim government should be not be led by Mr. Laisenia Qarase (former prime minister deposed by the coup) or Mr. Frank (Voreqe) Bainimarama, the coup leader.

In December 2006, Mr. Bainimarama had dissolved parliament and dismissed the Prime Minister and President Ratu Josefa Iloilo. However, in January 2007, he reinstated Mr. Iloilo as President, who then appointed him as caretaker Prime Minister. The April 2009 ruling declared that the dismissal of Mr. Qarase and his cabinet, as well as the dissolution of parliament, were unlawful and in breach of the Constitution. Mr. Bainimarama immediately relinquished the premiership and dissolved his cabinet.

On 10 April, President Iloilo appointed himself as Head of State and announced that an interim government would prepare the country for truly democratic elections by September 2014 at the latest. He abolished the 1997 Constitution, revoked all judicial appointments, and declared that he had assumed all governing power. The following day, he reappointed Mr. Bainimarama as caretaker Prime Minister.

## Guinea

On 23 December 2008, President Lansana Conte, who had come to power in a military coup in 1984, passed away. Within hours of his death, the National Council for Democracy and Development (CNDD), comprising 26 senior and middle-ranking military officers and six civilians, announced that Guinea's Constitution was suspended and the Government and the institutions of the Republic were dissolved. Captain Moussa Dadis Camara named himself as the new President, announcing that the CNDD would run the country until presidential elections were held in December 2010, when Mr. Conte's term will end. Amid international pressure, in late March



Photo: Parliament of Cyprus

The Parliament of Bulgaria

2009 the CNDD announced that there would be parliamentary elections on 11 October 2009 and presidential elections on 13 December 2009 (with a possible second round on 27 December). Parliamentary elections had been due by June 2007 but had been postponed several times.

## Kazakhstan

On 12 and 15 January 2009 respectively, the House of Representatives and the Senate approved a government-sponsored law amending the electoral law. The new law guarantees the representation of at least two political parties in the House of Representatives. Although the new law retains the 7 per-cent threshold to win parliamentary representation, it grants parliamentary seats to the party coming in second place if only one party surpasses the threshold. In the previous elections held in August 2007, the ruling National Democratic Party "Nur Otan" won all 98 directly elected seats.

## Madagascar

On 14 March 2009, following a protracted political crisis, Mr. Andry Rajoelina, mayor of the capital Antananarivo, declared himself President, effectively ousting the incumbent President Marc Ravalomanana. On 18 March, the Constitutional Court (HCC) endorsed Mr. Rajoelina as President of the Republic and swore him in on 21 March. In the meantime, on 19 March, Mr. Rajoelina suspended the National Assembly and the Senate and announced that legislative power would be exercised by the Higher Transitional Authority, the Council for Economic and Social Recovery and the government. Initially, he had announced plans to organize elections within 24 months. However, on 30 April, he promised the special envoy from the African Union that elections would be held before the end of 2009. Discussions over the formation of a transitional government are under way.

## Mauritania

On 2 June 2009, supporters and opponents of the coup leader, General Mohamed Ould Abdelaziz, agreed a peace accord in Dakar, Senegal. This deal followed a ten-month stalemate that had ensued when General Abdelaziz seized power in a coup from the country's first democratically elected president, Sidi Ould Cheikh Abdallahi, in August 2008. The agreement, brokered by Senegalese President Abdoulaye Wade, the facilitator of the African Union and the International Contact Group (ICG) on the Mauritanian crisis, provides for the formation of a transitional government of national unity, which would be tasked with organizing presidential elections on 18 July 2009, with a possible second round on 1 August.

Although General Abdelaziz did not suspend parliament upon seizing power, the institution had been plagued by internal divisions between supporters of the ousted president, mainly over the formation of a new government. Many of his supporters in parliament walked out of the party that had supported him during the March 2007 presidential elections, thus depriving him of a parliamentary majority. Subsequently, the normal functioning of parliament continued to be hampered by numerous boycotts, including by the Speaker of the National Assembly, an opponent of the August 2008 coup.

## Somalia

In August 2008, the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) and a Djibouti-based moderate Islamist group, the Islamist Alliance for the Re-liberation of Somalia (ARS), signed a peace agreement providing for the formation of a unity government. They further agreed on 26 November to double the statutory number of members of the Transitional Federal Parliament (TFP) to 550 in order to include 200 members from the ARS

and 75 from civil society, including opposition groups not represented in the ARS. The agreement also provides for the extension by two years of the TFP's term, which was due to expire in August 2009. The TFP approved these decisions on 26 and 28 January 2009.

In the meantime, in January 2009, Ethiopian troops, which had been fighting the Union of Islamic Courts (UIC), withdrew from Mogadishu in keeping with the peace agreement. On 26 January, the military wing of the UIC, Al-Shabab ("the youth"), seized Baidoa, the seat of the TFP. On 12 March, the TFP started to hold its session in Mogadishu. As at 29 April, 523 members had been sworn in. The vacant seats were expected to be filled in June 2009.

## Venezuela

On 15 February 2009, 54 per cent of voters approved via referendum constitutional amendments, including the lifting of term limits for the president, mayors and governors. President Hugo Chavez can now stand for re-election in 2012. In a December 2007 referendum, a proposal to lift only the presidential term limit had been rejected.

## Yemen

On 26 February 2009, the House of Representatives approved a constitutional amendment to postpone parliamentary elections by two years. The elections were due to be held on 27 April 2009. The amendment had been proposed by President Ali Abdullah Salih in a bid to resolve a political crisis, involving opposition-led street protests demanding electoral reform. Opposition parties had threatened to boycott the 2009 elections. On 27 April, the House of Representatives approved the extension of its current term by two years without modifying the statutory term of the House.

## Equatorial Guinea:

*Exchange of experiences and information for new MPs*

In March 2009, the second phase of the project aimed at assisting the House of People's Representatives of Equatorial Guinea was launched. The project, implemented by the IPU, is being funded by the European Commission and the Government of Equatorial Guinea. Under the project, the IPU organized a capacity-building seminar for parliamentarians in 2008. It dealt with the role and functions of parliamentarians in a modern parliament and enabled participants to bet-

ter grasp what being a parliamentarian entails and to examine the areas in which parliament is most active.

This second phase will entail the implementation of a number of activities aimed at building the capacity of the House of People's Representatives, both for members of parliament and parliamentary staff. These activities will focus notably on gender partnership, the representation function and enhancing the work of standing committees. ▀



Photo IPU/L.Marzal

*IPU training of staff at the House of People's Representatives of Equatorial Guinea.*

## Democratic Republic of the Congo:

*IPU launches activities in support of parliament*

In May 2009, the IPU and UNDP signed a four-year partnership agreement in support of the national legislative and provincial assemblies of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. This agreement provides for the joint implementation of activities that had been identified on an annual basis as priorities. In 2009, under this agreement, the IPU will implement

five activities for the parliament: an organizational audit, a needs assessment in terms of training and equipment for debate secretaries, staff training in legislative techniques and training of committee advisers and, lastly, training of communication officers at the national parliament. The first activity – the audit – took place in June 2009. ▀

## World Bank Institute-IPU partnership to deliver learning programme to post-conflict parliaments.

The IPU and the World Bank Institute have joined forces to develop and deliver, through distance learning technologies, a course for parliaments in conflict affected countries. The course, a first for IPU via video conferencing technology, included seven sessions on various aspects of the functioning of parliament, and took place in May 2009, with the participation of the parliaments of Liberia and Sierra Leone and the South Sudan Legislative Assembly.

Over the past couple of decades, the world has witnessed a transformation in the nature of conflict. Traditional inter-State conflicts have become rarer as non-traditional intrastate conflicts, civil wars, armed insurrections, violent secessionist movements or domestic warfare continue to rage across the globe.

The evolving nature of conflict has created an impetus to reassess which actors can contribute to resolving this latest incarnation of conflict and more importantly, how these actors can contribute to the peace-building process, particularly in conflict-affected countries. Parliaments are coming to the fore, more than ever before, as natural forums which are uniquely designed to address contentious issues and relationships in conflict-affected societies, thereby contributing to peace-building efforts. Parliaments are in a unique position to address the root causes of conflict and articulate policies intended to resolve these causes.

The objective of this parliamentary course is to consider the contribution parliaments make to poverty reduction and the well recognized correlation between conflict and poverty, namely that poverty increases society's vulnerability to conflict, while conflict itself generates poverty.

The course examined the nexus between conflict, poverty from the perspective of parliaments and the vital role that parliaments have to play in managing conflict not just by addressing contentious issues and relationships, but by helping to avert poverty, particularly in conflict-affected countries.