

THE WORLD OF PARLIAMENTS



INTERNATIONAL DAY OF DEMOCRACY

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THE TEST OF COURAGE COMES WHEN WE ARE IN THE MINORITY.

THE TEST OF **TOLERANCE** COMES WHEN WE ARE IN THE MAJORITY.



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Political tolerance - a cornerstone of democracy

As it did for the first time in 2008, the IPU will also be celebrating the International Day of Democracy this year, under the theme of "Democracy and political tolerance". Among other initiatives, the IPU will be holding a Parliamentary Conference on Democracy in Africa from 14 to 16 September 2009 in Gaborone (Botswana). The event seeks to identify the particular role and responsibilities of parliaments in relation to these issues. It aims to promote parliaments' engagement with the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance, encourage action to ensure ratification by their governments and internalize the Charter's provisions in domestic legislation and practice. The spotlight will be on greater political tolerance within political parties and between ruling and opposition parties. This issue of *The World of Parliaments* contains contributions from the Prime Minister of Kenya, the Deputy Prime Minister of Zimbabwe, the Speaker of the Senate of Burundi, and an interview with a prominent member of the European Parliament. It also gives the floor to several Speakers of Parliament who attended the Fifth Meeting of Women Speakers of Parliament in Vienna and the 1st Preparatory Meeting of the Third Conference of Speakers of Parliament, due to be held in Geneva next year. ▀

Mr. Daniel Cohn-Bendit,
European Member of Parliament

“Democracy needs dissent to thrive”

Daniel Cohn-Bendit is a German politician whose life and career have played out in France and Germany. He has been a European Member of Parliament since 1994 and co-president of the European Greens/European Free Alliance group since 2004; he was one of the main protagonists during the events of May 1968 in France. In the 2009 European elections he headed the Europe Écologie list in the Île de France constituency (20.86% of votes) – the list won 16.28 per cent of votes nationally. In a telephone interview with *The World of Parliaments*, Cohn-Bendit talks about his commitment to parliament and analyses democracy in general.

Photo AFP/G. Gobet



Q. Where do you think democracy stands today?

Daniel Cohn-Bendit: Generally speaking, our parliamentary democracies work. At the same time, there is obviously a gap between society and democratic institutions. Societies in general are very sceptical of the capacity of democratic institutions to solve problems.

Q. What is the role of elected representatives in strengthening democracy and ensuring respect for political tolerance?

DCB: The problem for elected representatives is to show they are capable of understanding what's happening in society. It is the task of parliamentarians – and this can sometimes seem contradictory – not only to find solutions for today's crises – the financial and economic crisis, the ecological crisis, the globalization crisis – but also to try, by their presence and the action they take, to forge closer ties between democratic institutions and society.

Q. Should lawmakers serve as a bridge between voters and government, for example to convince governments of the urgency of saving the ecosystem?

DCB: Elected representatives have to push the majority and hence the government in a certain direction. Parliamentarians serve, not just as bridges or channels, but also to express contradictions. Democracy needs dissent to thrive. There is never just one answer in politics. Democracy can only be successful if societies are convinced that debate, the expression of conflicting points of view, leads to solutions. The problem is that elected representatives tend to say, “All we have to do to weather the storm is ...”, and that's never true. Saying “all we have to do” is a threat to democracy.

Q. You say things can be changed via parliament and the ballot box, but what do you say to those who have lost confidence in their political representatives?

DCB: One of the problems of democracy is that our societies are relatively unilateral. Most people are in favour of reform on condition that nothing changes for them. The result is an impasse, with elected representatives sometimes faced with society's refusal to budge. If you take the case of the changes or reform needed to save the ecosystem, we have to do more than just adopt laws, people also have to change the way they behave, and that's one of the most difficult things to do.

Q. You helped spearhead the 1968 student movement, and you are very active in the European Parliament.

What is your message to young people to convince them to strengthen democracy and get involved in order to move things forward?

DCB: I'm not as sceptical as you are about young people. True, young people have an individualistic outlook, which in fact corresponds to the state of mind of society, but at the same time many young people are getting involved in non-governmental organizations and are fighting for a better world. My message to them is, yes, we can change the course of events by getting involved.

Q. What was the turning point that convinced you that you could change things by becoming a member of parliament?

DCB: It was in the 1970s, after I had been part of the very important events of 1968 and had been an activist in the ecological and anti-nuclear movements. We realized that while those movements mobilized society, the decisions were made by a parliamentary majority. A democracy can change things only if there is a parliamentary majority able to implement change. Working at the institutional level helps bring about change. Social movements and new majorities go hand in hand. You can change the world by acting on society and by taking action at the institutional level.

Q. What can Europe do to help other continents, notably Africa?

DCB: It is vital for Europe to take part in all the negotiations relating to how globalization works and to the World Trade Organization (WTO). Europe is going to renegotiate the common agricultural policy, which has an impact, positive or harmful, on Africa. We have to stop export assistance for our agriculture. Europe must be at the core of reflection on the need to develop the poorest countries, which implies new WTO regulations and a new common policy in Europe.

Q. You're also very interested in Latin America ...

DCB: The situation's the same, whether it's Africa or Latin America. In international negotiations, Europe must

Creating a culture of tolerance in society and in political life

The International Day of Democracy is a collective opportunity to promote values related to democracy such as freedom of expression, respect for the rights of men and women, and political tolerance.

"Political tolerance goes hand in hand with elections. We should be open to different ideas and different policies, and citizens should be afforded equal facilities to listen to all political parties. Voters are entitled to know which positions parties and their representatives are going to take on important issues such as violence against women, climate change and the environment, or the rights of children, and also what they are going to do to narrow the gap between urban and rural areas" said IPU President, Dr. Theo-Ben Gurirab, at the Fifth Meeting of Women Speakers of Parliament in Vienna. He added that the International Day of Democracy is also an opportunity to talk about women's rights, and their presence in decision-making positions in parliament, in government and in the private sector.

Political tolerance, protection of human rights, democracy and the rule of law must be respected everywhere. Parliaments and political parties can and must play a role to put into practice these values. That is the view of the IPU President and the Speakers of Parliament who share their opinions in this issue of *The World of Parliaments*.

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impose the possibility for emerging countries to develop on their own; at the same time frank dialogue is needed with Latin America, in particular Brazil, a very strong emerging country, on issues relating to the environment, climate change and fuel, which pose genuine problems of environmental degradation.

Q. You have always supported partnerships between men and women in politics. Have you seen progress or setbacks in this area?

DCB: We're making progress, but too slowly. In some countries, you have political forces, like the Green parties or the ecologists, who have achieved true parity, while other more traditional or conservative political forces still have a long way to go. The same holds true in the economy, where the

number of women reaching the top is relatively small.

Q. Where do you take the energy to continue pushing for change?

DCB: I'm very optimistic. Take Jimmy Cliff's reggae song, *You can get it if you really want*. It says that you can if you want. That's the message Barack Obama developed.

Q. Can President Obama really change the world?

DCB: Let's say that Barack Obama has a key part to play. Of course, he's not on his own, he can push American society to change, but you see the opposition his health reform programme has encountered in the United States, for example. He is no doubt one of the people who can bring about the greatest change at this time. LB ▀

The grand coalition experiment in Kenya as a transitional measure for democracy

by Mr. Raila A. Odinga, EGH MP, Prime Minister of the Republic of Kenya

AFP/J.-P. Clatot

To enhance democracy and mitigate intolerance and exclusion, we committed ourselves to reconstructing a country based on a common vision...

This is a brief account of the grand coalition phenomenon in Kenya, which is an innovative experiment in democratic practice in Africa. This paper attempts to address the following question: Is the grand coalition experiment capable of enhancing democracy and mitigating intolerance and exclusion?

On 28 February 2008, we signed the Agreement on the Principles of Partnership of the Coalition Government (the National Accord). I signed on behalf of the Orange Democratic Movement while President Mwai Kibaki signed on behalf of the Party of National Unity. These were the two leading parties and presidential candidates in the 2007 elections.

It is now generally accepted that the trigger of the post-election violence was the manipulation of the presidential election results by the Electoral Commission of Kenya.

By that agreement, our country managed to pull itself back from the precipice. For two months prior to the signing of the National Accord, Kenyans were at war with the security forces, militia and supporters of political parties, resulting in over 1,300 deaths. Hundreds of thousands of people became internally displaced. Billions of shillings worth of property lay in ruins. The economy ground to a standstill. The danger of an all-out civil war was imminent. Our nascent democracy was imperilled.

The dispute over the 2007 presidential elections had brought to the fore deep-seated and long-standing divisions within Kenya that both President Kibaki and I realized had to be addressed if Kenya was to remain one united country.

Through the National Accord, we pledged to share power, as equal partners. We also pledged to build mutual trust and confidence in each other and in the constitution, laws and institutions that we undertook to reform for the benefit of all Kenyans.

We realized that Kenya had imploded, not just because of the failures of the Electoral Commission of Kenya to conduct credible, free and fair elections, which were obvious. Kenyans nearly went to war with each other primarily due to failures of our weak institutions, unresponsive laws and an undemocratic constitution.

Unlike the winner-takes-it all system, a grand coalition government tries to involve all major political parties that

represent various interests, communities and regions in governance and decision-making. Through constant consultations and a willingness to compromise, members of a grand coalition government participate in governance through consensus.

To enhance democracy and mitigate intolerance and exclusion, we committed ourselves to reconstructing a country based on a common vision; a vision for one united Kenya where our people have equal social, political, economic, religious, and gender rights. It is one where great attention is paid to and respect is ensured for basic needs, fundamental human rights and dignity. Our people have equality before and under the law; the rule of law and constitutionalism are not just respected and adhered to; but practised daily in all our activities; our people have an equal opportunity to fulfil their dreams and their purpose utilizing their full potential.

Resources are utilized and distributed equitably for the benefit of our people,



while at the same time protecting our resources and environment so that we bequeath a better Kenya to future generations; institutions and people serve the public interest before and above individual interests. Ours is a country where the desire for short-term gains and benefits is not permitted to undermine our long-term responsibilities as a people and as a nation.

We undertook to achieve this vision by: transforming and reforming our institutions; delivering a new people-focused constitution; revising and transforming our laws to make them responsive to the needs of our people; delivering quality services to the people; implementing a national land policy and reforms; and always listening to the people and serving them with unwavering commitment and dedication.

To date, the grand coalition government has instituted various committees, commissions and task forces as a means of driving the reforms outlined under the Nation Accord. The Interim Independent Electoral Commission, the Interim Independent Boundaries Commission, the Committee of Experts, the Truth, Justice and Reconciliation Commission, the Task Force on Police Reform, and the Constitutional Dispute Resolution Court are either already in place or are about to be unveiled.

A comprehensive national land policy has also been approved by the Cabinet. The Land Policy attempts to address some of the worst problems facing millions of Kenyans. These are just highlights of what we are involved in as a grand coalition government.

As someone who has been actively involved in the process of democratization in Kenya for the majority of my adult life, I believe that a grand coalition experiment is transitional. It can be used not just to stabilize a country and entrench democracy but also to ensure constitutionalism and respect for human rights and the rule of law, thereby effectively mitigating intolerance and exclusion.

The realization of these reforms is my unwavering commitment to the Kenyan people. ▀

IPU'S RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PROMOTING POLITICAL TOLERANCE

To Speakers (Presiding Officers) of Parliament

- Maintain impartiality in exercising functions to ensure equality of treatment of all parliamentarians, whether from the ruling or opposition parties
- Guarantee respect for parliamentary rules, for example, that all parliamentarians have an equal opportunity to speak
- Ensure that all parliamentarians can receive information upon request from a specific service within parliament
- Encourage the use of a bureau or other management structures within parliament in which all parties are represented

To political party leaders

- Develop internally democratic procedures that allow for full debate on contentious issues, rather than relying on dictates from the party executive
- Follow appropriate procedures when pursuing the suspension or expulsion of a member, including guaranteeing due process and the right of members to defend themselves
- Develop and adhere to codes of conduct that promote political tolerance, especially during the electoral period
- Open avenues for inter-party dialogue and initiatives to set an example for constituents

To individual parliamentarians

- Pursue political action through dialogue and concerted action, not violent means
- Be role models for constituents by acting in a statesmanlike manner in negotiations and debate, respecting the opinions expressed by others
- Promote tolerance in relations with citizens and be receptive to opinions expressed by constituents
- Run electoral campaigns that are transparent and adhere to electoral codes of conduct

To civil society

- Support civic education campaigns, in particular, youth outreach
- Work with local communities and authorities to monitor and prevent hate speech, provide forums for dialogue between groups, and raise awareness about intolerance and discrimination
- Promote political participation in all its forms, such as voting, contacting elected representatives, participating in the work of political parties, signing petitions, and attending lawful demonstrations

Political tolerance and parliament

Political life involves confrontation. Institutions of democracy, such as parliaments, provide the channels to make confrontation between opinions possible. Parliament is meant to regulate tensions and maintain an equilibrium between competing claims of diversity, and to accommodate the participation of all people in the society it represents. Political tolerance is therefore essential to the functioning of parliaments and should be actively pursued in practice.

Rebuilding a sense of citizenship, political tolerance and national reconciliation in Burundi: The role of parliament

by Mr. Gervais Rufyikiri
President of the Senate
of Burundi

Photo Senate of Burundi

Parliament has played – and continues to play – a crucial role in rebuilding a sense of citizenship based on the principles of inclusive dialogue and compromise.

In the words of one African politician, "If there is one country in Africa that could demonstrate great unity thanks to a shared culture and a common history, that country is Burundi". And yet, since its accession to independence, Burundi, like most African countries, has been caught up in endless social and political strife. Since the 1960s, it has been the scene of a series of conflicts that resulted in the deaths of hundreds of thousands of people, forced hundreds of thousands more into exile or internal displacement, and wrought devastating material destruction. Parliament was also affected, with many members being murdered or forced into exile.

The darkest periods occurred at the time of the 1972 massacres and the civil war that broke out after the country's democratic institutions were violently overthrown a scant three months after they had been established in 1993. There is absolutely no doubt that political intolerance and its corollary, the struggle for influence between political classes, were decisive factors in the fighting. In their analysis, the parties negotiating in Arusha (Tanzania) defined the nature of the conflict in Burundi as follows: "a fundamentally political conflict with extremely important ethnic dimensions".

During those negotiations, Burundians made enormous progress in the arts of dialogue, discussion and tol-

erance. The belligerents pledged to overcome their hostility and to build the country together, renouncing violence, confrontation and exclusion. The country gradually returned to peace after several years of negotiations that culminated in the signing in 2000 of the Arusha Peace and Reconciliation Agreement and in 2003 of various ceasefires, notably between the Transitional Government and the main armed movement, the CNDD-FDD. Time has seen the emergence of a climate of civil liberties, in particular freedom of opinion and freedom of expression, that many other countries would be right to envy.

Parliament has played – and continues to play – a crucial role in rebuilding a sense of citizenship based on the principles of inclusive dialogue and compromise, and in constructing mechanisms for inclusion and political tolerance. In addition to being actively involved in the peace negotiations, parliament has enacted major statutes as a means of

making political tolerance a legal reality, notably granting temporary immunity from prosecution to members of armed political movements that had signed the ceasefire agreements.

The desire of Burundians to halt the fighting once and for all also takes the form of a series of constitutional provisions. The new Constitution approved by referendum and promulgated on 18 March 2005 provides for "a pluralistic democracy and the rule of law". It reaffirms "unswerving determination to put an end to the root causes of the ongoing state of ethnic and political violence, genocide and exclusion, bloodletting, political insecurity and instability that have mired the people in distress and suffering". At the same time, the power and role of parliament have been strengthened by the Constitution's recognition of a provisional decision made five years earlier for a bicameral parliament whose two chambers are the National Assembly and the Senate.

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The test of courage comes when we are in the minority.
The test of **tolerance** comes when we are in the majority.

At the Parliamentary Conference in Gaborone (Botswana) on Democracy in Africa, the IPU will be launching a *Study on Party Control over the Parliamentary Mandate*, to have a deeper understanding of the situation. The power of political parties to revoke the parliamentary mandate and the implications of "political party dictatorship" are real problems which require discussion and action.

The world organization of parliaments will also present a Worldwide Public Opinion Survey with questions formulated around the overall theme for 2009: democracy and political tolerance.

Lack of political tolerance a problem everywhere

Lack of political tolerance is a problem everywhere. It manifests itself when political leaders refuse to give space to opposition parties and politics, when political parties do not tolerate dissent from their membership and, more generally, through a rejection of different views. This year, the IPU has chosen the theme of "Democracy and political tolerance" in order to highlight the importance of creating a culture of tolerance in society, and political life in particular.

Some of the key ingredients of a culture of tolerance are education, freedom of expression and media.

Education and political participation can cultivate tolerance among citizens. States can help to eliminate discrimination and hatred by promoting dialogue with minority and vulnerable groups. Citizens who have more opportunities to practise and observe tolerance are more appreciative of and committed to tolerance and respect for others' rights. States can contribute to the overall democratic learning and stability by involving citizens in the democratic process and upholding the civil liberties of all groups.

A society in which freedom of expression is not guaranteed hinders political tolerance. Open dialogue and a diversity of political opinions are made possible by and reinforce a culture of tolerance.

The media plays an important role in developing a culture of tolerance. States have a duty to allow a pluralistic media to flourish and present diverse and critical views. Encouraging a wide array of ideas and beliefs among individuals and institutions builds an

equitable and non-discriminatory environment that enhances political life.

Parliamentary immunity and freedom of expression

Freedom of expression is the working tool of members of parliament, without which they cannot represent their constituents. Legislators need some measure of protection to carry out their work, most importantly, protection of their freedom of speech. Thus, parliamentarians generally enjoy immunity from prosecution or other proceedings for votes they cast, statements they make in parliament and acts carried out as part of their parliamentary function. Parliamentary immunity safeguards the integrity and effectiveness of the parliamentary institution. However, this immunity is not an individual privilege granted for personal benefit and is not meant to place parliamentarians above the law. Rather, it protects them from politically-motivated proceedings or accusations. Parliamentary immunity is vital for enabling parliamentarians to speak freely according to their conscience, without fear of harassment, punishment or other retaliatory measures.

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Thanks to the composition of each chamber, parliament is a reference point for democracy, a space for expressing opposing points of view that is open to the public and to the media. Certain decisions require a strong qualified majority of two thirds, three quarters, or even four fifths, and are therefore taken by consensus, as no party has a two-thirds majority.

Although both chambers are legislative assemblies, the Constitution confers on the Senate a specific mis-

sion as the guarantor of reconciliation. The Senate thus has the general task of overseeing the application of constitutional provisions requiring representativity or balance in the (ethnic, political, gender or regional) composition of all State structures and institutions, especially the public administration and defence and security forces. It is in application of its role as the regulator of balances and guarantor of political tolerance that the Senate has been empowered to

approve appointments to the highest State positions.

In conclusion, Burundians have made great strides towards peace and security, chiefly because they have learned from the harm done by so many years of intolerance and confrontation. The role played by parliament, the guarantor of the people's most fundamental interests, is paramount in the reconciliation effort, which implies upholding the rights of each and every individual, without exclusion. ▀

Post-election power-sharing arrangements: A panacea to political exclusion and intolerance

by Ms. Thokozani Khupe,
MP, Deputy Prime
Minister of the Republic
of Zimbabwe

AFP/D.Kwande



The Government of the Republic of Zimbabwe is currently battling to rehabilitate the damaged economy and restore the democratic values and principles enshrined in the Global Political Agreement signed on 15 September 2008. In Zimbabwe we are currently going through a transitional arrangement whose key focus is to build democratic institutions that should lead to a new socio-political era where the norms and values of political inclusion and political tolerance will be enjoyed by all our people.

I am passionate about the principles of political inclusion and political tolerance especially insofar as they affect women across the continent. It would be a betrayal of the trust placed in me by millions of women in my country if I were to stand here and not raise their concerns and worries, their fears and hopes. Our contemporary history has shown that where political exclusion occurs, women are the most affected. Scientific research has also revealed that where political intolerance occurs women suffer most. In this regard, any panacea to political exclusion and intolerance should factor in the challenges of those who bear the brunt. It is unfortunate that the inclusive governments we have witnessed so far are only inclusive insofar as political parties are concerned and not in terms of gender equity.

The Zimbabwean Inclusive Government came into existence out of serious humanitarian and political crises.

Inclusive governments in Africa are becoming fashionable as signified by the twin cases of Zimbabwe and Kenya in our contemporary history. Inclusive governments are now seen as a conflict resolution mechanism used for settling electoral disputes. While a temporal cessation of hostility can be achieved through this "government by compromise approach", it is doubtful whether the whole arrangement is a solution to the challenges of political intolerance that is besetting a number of our countries in the subregion. It is even doubtful whether the conditions that create them are in fact at all unavoidable.

The phenomenal growth of inclusive governments over the past two years in Africa is a worrying development. There is nothing wrong with inclusive governments per se but there is everything wrong if these governments are formed in order to keep incumbents in some form of power even after elections have determined otherwise.

In the context of our continent, inclusive governments are transitional arrangements that are formed mostly as political compromises by former warring parties who realize that they cannot continue escalating the conflict as a result of a mutually hurting stalemate. It is, however, unfortunate that inclusive governments are a result of a failure of power transfer. Incumbent governments refuse to accept electoral defeat, thereby creating political crises which result in power deals. Some of our leaders in Africa have deliberately been keen to subvert the electoral will of the people by creating chaos in their countries, knowing full well that regional bodies will recommend inclusive governments that leave their positions intact.

This unfortunate development in our continent should be frowned on and should be given no room to flourish. It is not a solution to political exclusion nor is it a solution to political intolerance.

I am not against political accommodation, coalitions, governments of national unity or a positive sum approach, but I am opposed to the subversion of the will of the people. I am opposed to the violation of the national constitutions in order to maintain power by all means necessary.

The best solution to both political exclusion and intolerance is the building of genuine democracies based on total respect of the will of the people which is expressed through the results of free and fair elections. A credible national leadership which respects the cannons of the constitution is able to prepare for an election, manage an election, run elections, participate in an election, and respect the results of an election and hand over power if defeated. The Zimbabwean Inclusive Government, to which I belong, is nothing more than a transitional arrangement that should enable Zimbabweans to choose a government of their choice in the shortest possible time. Only respect for the will of the people can be a solution to political exclusion and intolerance.

The Zimbabwean Inclusive Government, of which I can speak authoritatively, came into existence out of serious humanitarian and political crises. Its birth certificate is a Global Political Agreement, which was a result of protracted negotiations that took more than a year to conclude. Although all the parties to the agreement agreed to all the provisions of the deal upon affixing their signatures to it, it also has its challenges.

The fact is that most inclusive governments are always faced with serious and numerous implementation challenges. They range from a simple lack of respect for the principles and values of the Global Political Agreement to the need to protect political turfs by continually excluding other players in the agreement, to the right to have unbiased media coverage, among many other issues.

The current Inclusive Government is not the first one in Zimbabwe; upon gaining independence, our country had a type of inclusive government that included representatives from the major

parties. That government did not last that long as there were soon accusations and counter accusations of plots to kill each other. There will always be challenges with inclusive governments: political parties and their leaders are creatures of power and until one party is clearly in power there will always be a tussle for power.

Although these challenges will not be easily resolved, they will surely be solved. I believe most of us in the Inclusive Government are committed to making sure that all the clauses of the Agreement are adhered to. If faced with challenges we will not hesitate to turn to our neighbours and African friends for assistance.

The Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) remains a guarantor of the Zimbabwean Inclusive Government and as a result it should monitor its implementation. Although the parties to the Agreement agreed to form a joint monitoring and implementation committee to effectively allow Zimbabwean parties to implement the agreement, that does not mean that SADC should walk away; its job is not yet done. SADC should remain committed to democratic principles as we have witnessed first-hand the tragic consequences of ignoring them.

The time for SADC to speak on behalf of democratic principles is now. While the principle of non-interference in the affairs of other countries remains important, the principle and the practice of SADC should be that no leader should be accepted into the regional body unless he/she has been democratically elected. Our approach to regional affairs should be guided by the same principles that we use in our countries. Consultations, persuasion and the importance of democratic elections in electing a country's leadership must apply if we are to avoid the inconvenience of inclusive governments.

The nascent Inclusive Government of Zimbabwe is currently implementing its democratic reforms, economic stabilization plan, national healing and constitutional reforms. Once these are achieved, Zimbabwe will surely transform itself into a democracy that will

be the envy of many in the region. I am confident that our Government will overcome all the hurdles that it is currently facing. With a people-drawn constitution and a leadership that is democratically elected, political tolerance and political inclusion will be guaranteed.

The inclusive government is not an undesirable arrangement for some political situations but it is certainly a questionable solution to political exclusion and political intolerance. I wish to appeal to both the regional and international community to help us in our endeavour to transform Zimbabwe into a democratic and prosperous nation. ▀

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Party control over the parliamentary mandate

The freedom of conscience and expression of parliamentarians is frequently limited in practice by political parties, which seek to exercise control over their members. Although in theory legislators generally have a free representational mandate, various rules and practices have been put in place to ensure that members support the "party line". By controlling the terms of their mandate or party membership, parties can prevent parliamentarians from fulfilling their mandate and undermine the democratic process as a whole.

Rights and duties of the opposition

The freedom of expression of parliamentarians, almost exclusively those from the Opposition, frequently comes under attack. This is a particular concern because the Opposition in parliament is an indispensable component of democracy. Opposition and minority parties play a key role in holding the government to account, and in providing alternative policy options for public consideration. The Opposition therefore has rights and duties that enable it to make an effective contribution to the democratic process.

Political tolerance in the words of Speakers of Parliament

The Universal Declaration on Democracy was adopted by the IPU Council on 16 September 1997 in Cairo (Egypt). During the 1st Preparatory Meeting of the Third World Conference of Speakers of Parliament held in Geneva in July 2009, some Speakers of Parliaments gave their views to *The World of Parliaments* on the importance of political tolerance. Among them was Dr. Ahmed Fathy Sorour, who was President of the IPU when the Declaration was adopted in Cairo.

Dr. Ahmed Fathy Sorour, Speaker of People's Assembly of Egypt



Photo IPU/G. Fortunato

The value of tolerance must prevail in order to minimize the desire to use force or revenge

I am happy to celebrate the International Day of Democracy because I was the one who proposed the Universal Declaration on Democracy during my presidency of the IPU. This celebration adds to the prestige of the IPU, likening it to the United Nations, which celebrates the Declaration of Human Rights. It will deepen the values of democracy because although people and governments may forget, when we ring the bell every year and say that there is a Declaration on Democracy, people will hear and study the values of our Declaration. We also have to ask UNESCO to introduce the principles of this Declaration in their education programme. If students are taught the principles of human rights they should also be taught the principles

of democracy. The principles of human rights are codified in treaties on civil, political, human and social rights. The IPU has to work towards developing a model treaty on respecting the principles of democracy with a view to fostering political tolerance. Parliament is composed of the majority and the opposition. If political tolerance is desired in society, the parliament - through dialogue between the opposition and the majority - can help to achieve tolerance. Parliament has also to play the role of mediator vis-à-vis the diversity of society. The value of tolerance must prevail in order to minimize the desire to use force or revenge. If there is no tolerance, we will all pay the price of violence and terrorism in the world.

Mr. Max Sisulu, Speaker of the National Assembly of South Africa

Tolerance is all about listening to what others say and trying to meet people halfway

Tolerance should involve for the majority the ability to listen to the minority and for the minority it should entail having the courage to express its views. Even within the same party, it should mean listening to different views on the same issue. Tolerance is all about listening to what others say and trying to meet people halfway. Political parties can do more, can do better, and can do it differently. In Africa, there are new democracies, some of them emerging from conflict. Rwanda is a classic example, where parties which were in conflict are now sitting together to adopt laws in the interest of the entire population. This is an important experience for the people of Rwanda and indeed

the people of Africa. In South Africa, the situation was similar. There was a party which fought against apartheid with the support of the international community. When apartheid ended, we were able to sit together with the former regime, in the same parliament and in the government of national unity composed of the African National Congress (ANC) and the National Party. Nelson Mandela was the first democratically elected President of South Africa and Frederick De Klerk, the former leader of the National Party, was one of the Deputy Presidents. We hope that this will serve as an example for other countries in Africa coming out of a conflict.



Photo IPU/G. Fortunato

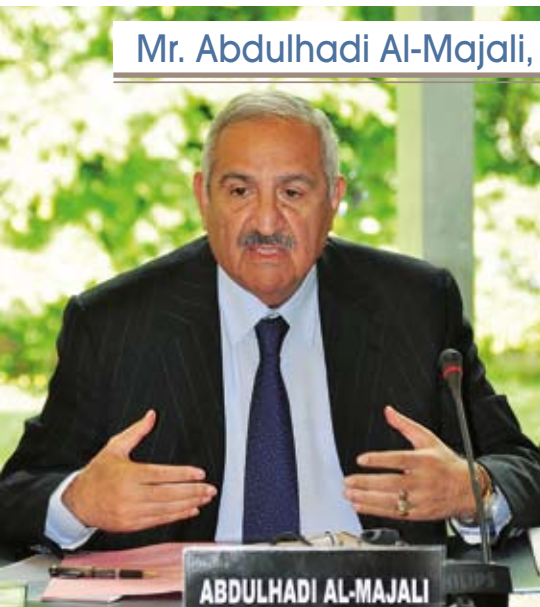


Mr. Michel Temer, Speaker of the Chamber of Deputies of Brazil

Political tolerance and responsibility

The International Day of Democracy should be commemorated globally. Intolerant regimes can cause problems for all components of society. The idea of responsible tolerance is closely linked to the concepts of democracy, freedom of

expression, freedom of movement and freedom of association. This takes us back to the idea of responsibility. Speakers of Parliament would do well to disseminate these ideas in their respective countries.



Mr. Abdulhadi Al-Majali, Speaker of the Jordanian House of Representatives

Democracy, human rights and tolerance differ from country to country

Democracy, human rights and tolerance differ from country to country. A majority of Speakers of Parliament believe that democracy should not be imposed and that there is no single model of democracy. Each country should decide

on its own. The most important thing is to see the results. Will things on the ground change because of our work and our discussions? If they do not, nobody will hear about the IPU.

Types of prejudice suffered by parliamentarians, 2009*

Political intolerance often leads to abuses of the human rights of parliamentarians in a number of ways, such as through the arbitrary use of defamation laws. Actions that infringe on parliamentarians' rights and immunities are of particular concern for democracy. The IPU's Committee on the Human Rights of Parliamentarians investigates such violations.

By protecting parliamentarians against abuses, the Committee safeguards the rights of the parliamentarians' constituents and therefore defends the institution of parliament and democracy in general. In June 2009, the Committee was examining 58 cases concerning 253 parliamentarians in 30 countries.

See full section on IPU website: <http://www.ipu.org/dem-e/idd/overview.htm>

Undue exclusion from political life

121

Lack of due process

99

Arbitrary arrest, detention

93

Undue restriction of freedom of speech

70

Murder, enforced disappearance

31

Attacks, death threats, fear for security

29

Torture, ill-treatment

6

Failure to respect parliamentary immunity

4

Kidnapping, abduction

2

* Based on the cases considered by the IPU Human Rights Committee



Photo Parliament of Austria

IPU President, Dr. Theo-Ben Gurirab

Breaking the silence surrounding violence against women

In July, the IPU and the National Council of Austria held the Fifth Annual Meeting of Women Speakers of Parliament in Vienna, which addressed two key questions: violence against women and girls and women and the global economic crisis, two often inter-linked problems. The women Speakers and Deputy Speakers of 15 national parliaments and one regional parliament highlighted how the financial crisis increased women's vulnerability to violence. Economic independence and gender equality, they said, were the best means of prevention. In Vi-

enna, the participants visited a shelter where women and children can find protection when they escape from their violent husbands or partners.

The IPU President, Dr. Theo-Ben Gurirab, said that the IPU had launched a campaign to support parliaments in their efforts to end violence against women, which targets three main areas: building a strong and effective legal framework, securing effective implementation of legislation and reinforcing awareness, sensitization and visibility of violence against women.

Ms. Barbara Prammer, Speaker of the Austrian National Council

We must ensure that anti-discrimination programmes are expanded

Ms. Barbara Prammer, Speaker of the Austrian Parliament, and host of the meeting, pointed out that parliaments must not leave it to government alone to enhance gender mainstreaming processes. "We as parliamentarians play a crucial role in this process and we must ensure that anti-discrimination programmes are expanded. Those

countries that have not yet ratified the *Convention* on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) should do so now. The same applies to the ILO Conventions on gender equality and regional conventions and legislation such as European Union's directives".



Photo Parliament of Austria

Ms. Joyce Adeline Bamford-Addo, Speaker of Parliament of the Republic of Ghana



Photo Parliament of Austria

Political participation: a sine qua non for democracy and governance

For Justice Joyce Adeline Bamford-Addo, Speaker of Parliament of the Republic of Ghana, women's rights are human rights. The significance of violence against women is that it is the cause and effect of the denial of a range of other human rights. "Gender-based violence which denies or impairs the enjoyment of rights by women constitutes discrimination. Poverty and unemployment for example increase opportunities for exploitation of women, including trafficking

and sex tourism. The incidence of war leads to the rape of women and girls".

Traditional norms and culture have embedded practices that dehumanize women and girls. "Political participation, a sine qua non for democracy and governance, is compromised when women experience violence, resulting in the challenges that face many of our countries with regard to representation in political structures", she said.

Ms. Ntlhoi Motsamai, The Speaker of the National Assembly of Lesotho

Women should not be viewed only as victims

The Speaker of the National Assembly of Lesotho, Ms. Ntlhoi Motsamai, believes that women should not be viewed only as victims, but also as agents of change. "Governments must come up with policies that take everyone on board and most importantly, priorities that promote gender equality and women's empowerment. History has shown that, through women's empowerment, the United States and

Latin America survived the Great Depression of the 1930s. There is a need to expand economic opportunities for women and increase their access to credit. Women need to be involved in policy-making, including the budgeting processes". Parliaments have also to amend and/or promulgate laws intended to remove social, cultural and legal barriers to gender equality.



Photo Parliament of Austria

Baroness Anne Gibson of Market Rasen, Deputy Speaker of the House of Lords (UK)



Photo Parliament of Austria

Economic crisis and violence against women are often interlinked

Almost all the participants underlined the fact that economic crises and violence against women are often interlinked. Baroness Anne Gibson of Market Rasen explained that "if women lose their jobs, the consequent stress is inevitable. Most women take on jobs in the first place because their income is needed to keep the family afloat. Without this extra help, financial strain rises alarmingly. If the woman's partner loses his job, the stress he goes through affects his partner and the family generally. And if a woman is a single parent, she can be quickly plummeted into despair. The loss of her job will put her and her children

back in the lowest economic category in our society. The frustration of job loss, creating instability in family life, can be a recipe for violence in the home, and we heard about the appalling effects of domestic violence".

Legislators could ask their governments to be vigilant and ensure that the recession does not lead to an increase in discrimination against women and to ensure that women's skills are not left untapped or underutilized as the economies recover, added the Deputy Speaker of the UK House of Lords.

Ms. Katalin Szili, Speaker of the National Assembly of Hungary

Provide equal opportunities for women

Although men and women are affected differently by the economic crisis, the Speaker of the National Assembly of Hungary, Ms. Katalin Szili, insisted that measures to provide equal opportunities for women should be continued. "We should provide all the help we can, especially to women with the highest level of schooling, so that these women can access jobs that are in line with their education and skills. We should make sure that the aspect of equal opportunities for women is

never neglected when working out crisis management measures".

"At every intervention, we should examine what impact its introduction will have on women and men. We should calculate with the effect of discriminatory elements, especially when social welfare services are being cut", she said, adding that the improvement of the situation of women is good for men as well, and it is good for the whole society.



Photo Parliament of Austria

Ms. Anna Burke, Deputy Speaker of the House of Representatives of Australia



Photo Parliament of Austria

Economic hardship can exacerbate domestic abuse

Ms. Anna Burke, Deputy Speaker of the House of Representatives of Australia, highlighted the fact that economic hardship also poses a threat to women's physical and emotional freedom from domestic violence. "Incidences of domestic violence are not confined to developing countries. Indeed it appears that reports of domestic violence linked to the global economic crisis are more prevalent in developed countries. This indicates that economic hardship can exacerbate existing domestic abuse. This may be in part because out-of-work abusers have more opportunity to

batter. It may also be because victims are already economically enslaved, as abusers deny them access to money. Hard economic times simply compound an existing situation".

She explained that a sufficient and sustainable social security system is important for many women on low incomes to maintain economic security. In Australia, for example, the pension reform is intended to address the inadequacy of the single pension, which will be of benefit to women who are disproportionately reliant on incomes from the social security system.

Ms. Jozefina Topalli, Speaker of the Parliament of Albania

Women make change happen

Ms. Jozefina Topalli, the first woman Speaker of the Parliament of Albania, believes that "women are the ones who make change happen". She highlighted the contribution of Albanian women to the development of her country. "Women constitute about 51 per cent of Albania's population, 56.7 per cent of them work as experts in public administration, and 31.8 per cent as heads of departments. Women comprise 40 per cent of the employees in ministries and other State institutions and they make up about 47 per cent of the employees in small enterprises, about 71 per cent of employed

persons in clothing manufacturing and about 12 per cent in construction industry. In urban areas, activities which boast the highest percentage of women employees are: education with 64 per cent and public health with 77 per cent. With the inclusion of a new share of 30 per cent women to be part of the new Parliament, the new electoral code adopted in 2009 marked a step forward. The key to the success of Albania, which used to be the poorest country in Europe, is the level of women's education, which is equal and often even higher than that of men, according to Speaker Topalli.



Photo Parliament of Austria



Photo Parliament of Austria

Ms. Huda Fathi Ben Amer, President of the Arab Transitional Parliament

Exacerbation of violence among minorities and refugees

The President of the Arab Transitional Parliament, Ms. Huda Fathi Ben Amer, highlighted the exacerbation of violence among minorities and refugees or those living in popular districts,

poverty belts as well as areas of tension, and especially against young women. This problem "has extended to trafficking in women and slavery in its different forms".

Ms. Chiara Simoneschi-Cortesi, Speaker of the Swiss National Council

Physical, sexual or mental violence within couples is as widespread in Switzerland as it is in the rest of Europe

The Speaker of the Swiss National Council, Ms. Chiara Simoneschi-Cortesi, said that physical, sexual or mental violence within couples is as widespread in Switzerland as it is in the rest of Europe. One in every five women experiences some form of physical violence or sexual abuse from her partner during her lifetime. On average, 25 women a year die as a result of domestic violence in Switzerland. "The risk of becoming an abuser increases among persons who have themselves experienced violence either directly or indirectly during their childhood. It is also higher among persons who present antisocial or criminal behaviour outside the home and among alcoholics. Violence breeds easier in couples with unequal power relations and where quarrels are not

resolved through constructive dialogue".

She added that "since 2004, the Swiss Criminal Code punishes acts of domestic violence and provides for their prosecution. This provision strengthens the position of women, because victims of domestic violence in most cases end up withdrawing their complaint because they often are dependent financially, socially, psychologically and emotionally on their partner. It provides that the aggressor – the husband, partner or father – must leave the family home, and no longer the woman, who had to do so sometimes with her children. This



Ms. Chiara Simoneschi-Cortesi, Speaker of the Swiss National Council (right) and Ms. Pascale Bruderer, Deputy-Speaker of the Swiss National Council, (left)

Photo Parliament of Austria

new rule will have a positive effect if it goes hand in hand with measures to protect the victim and, where necessary, her children. These are related to counselling and legal assistance. Victims of abuse also require assistance in finding a job so that they do not fall back into the vicious circle of dependence and violence".

Ms. Rose Mukantabana, Speaker of the Rwandan Chamber of Deputies



Photo Parliament of Austria

Most victims remain silent and do not demand justice

Ms. Rose Mukantabana, Speaker of the Rwandan Chamber of Deputies – the parliamentary chamber with the highest percentage of elected women legislators in the world per 56.3 cent – said that "most victims remain silent and do not demand justice". She recalled that "the leading causes of violence against women and girls are male domination – be it political, economic or social – and a patriarchal system that is not conducive to the involvement and participation of women in managing the household in particular and the country in general".

Ms. Mukantabana explained that Rwanda had ratified all international human rights treaties and women's rights treaties, including CEDAW. She

added that "the law also provides for prosecuting and punishing persons guilty of genocide, rape and other forms of sexual abuse". Her country also passed a law governing marriage and inheritance that accords equal rights to men and women, girls and boys. The Speaker of the Rwandan Parliament said that her country had adopted a law on the rights of the child and on the protection of children. The Rwandan Constitution stipulates a 30 per-cent women's quota in all decision-making bodies. In addition to 56.3 per cent of women in parliament, over 40 per cent of posts in the police service and local authorities are reserved for women, which is an important factor in protecting them from violence and repression.

Ms. Margot Kraneveldt-Van der Veen, Deputy Speaker of the House of Representatives of the Netherlands

Photo Parliament of Austria



Perpetrators of violence must also be treated

Ms. Margot Kraneveldt-Van der Veen, Deputy Speaker of the House of Representatives of the Netherlands, said that "violence against women and girls often passes on to subsequent generations: negative role modelling and copying behaviour seem to be key factors. Therefore, prevention and the empowerment of women and girls are important. In most cases violence against women and girls remains hidden. It is committed within the intimate relationship between partners, parents and children".

Loyalty and dependency prevent victims from stepping forward and seeking help. That is why a pattern of repeated violence frequently occurs. Therefore, assisting victims in reporting what happened to the police is very important. An unequal balance of power between those using violence and their victims almost always play a key role; such inequities

are mostly gender related. The use of violence against women and girls is often related to cultural and religious aspects, such as violation of honour and female circumcision. Therefore in our integration programmes a lot of attention is focused on equal rights and sexual integrity of women.

"Over the past few years the Dutch Government has invested a lot of energy and money in offering shelter and help to victims of violence and in tackling the offenders. Municipalities are responsible for the implementation of action plans. The aim is to get the victims into immediate and safe shelter and to provide them with professional help to relieve their physical and mental suffering. Perpetrators of violence are also treated. Apart from criminal proceedings brought against the perpetrator, agencies provide for supervision and behaviour training".

Ms. Akja Tajiyewna Nurberdiyewa, Speaker of the Mejlis of Turkmenistan

Unequal distribution of men and women in official hierarchies

The Speaker of the Mejlis of Turkmenistan, Ms. Akja Tajiyewna Nurberdiyewa, explained that income disparity in Turkmenistan is not so much linked to gender discrimination as it is to professional segregation. There is horizontal segregation based on profession, which is due to the unequal distribution of men and women in different occupations and in sectors of the economy. The majority of

women (more than a half) are employed in fields such as health care, social services, education, the textile industry, etc. She added that vertical segregation involves the unequal distribution of men and women in official hierarchies. This is manifest in a greater proportion of men in the top positions of State organs and at the local level.



Photo Parliament of Austria

Ms. Fahmida Mirza, Speaker of the National Assembly of Pakistan

Change of mentality hinges on more democratic and more tolerant societies

Dr. Fahmida Mirza, Speaker of the National Assembly of Pakistan, the first woman Speaker not only of Pakistan but also the entire Muslim world, stressed that abused, harassed, marginalized and threatened women lead a miserable life under the constant shadows of violence, discrimination and poverty. "What is even more alarming is society's collective response to it. Despite being considered as a major obstacle to development, violence against women has not been made a priority of our governments. This apathy is the outcome of the general indifference of our respective societies, because regardless of our cultural differences, violence against women in all societies has by and large been perceived as "a private affair".

"So as we ponder upon the vital issues of strengthening national action plans or introducing protective laws, we must also change the very mind-set that either sanctions or at best ignores women's abuse. Such a change of mentality cannot come about unless we enable our societies to be more democratic, more tolerant and more open to ideas. The rights of the vulnerable cannot be protected under dictatorships". Dr. Mirza explained that two years ago, the Parliament of Pakistan had passed an important bill – the Women's Protection Bill – liberalizing aspects of 1979 legislation that relegated women to literally second-class status. Similarly, another amendment to the Criminal Act now categorizes honour killings as "cold-blooded murder". The



Photo Parliament of Austria

Domestic Violence against Women and Children Bill 2009 seeks to eliminate the age-old pattern of treating women as private property.

Ms. Slavica Djukic-Dejanovic, Speaker of the National Assembly of Serbia

Progress and setbacks

Ms. Slavica Djukic-Dejanovic, Speaker of the National Assembly of Serbia, explained that there is no exact data on the extent and incidence of violence against women in Serbia and most of the information was collected with the assistance of non-governmental organizations. Their studies have indicated that this form of violence is widespread. Patriarchal relations between sexes, difficult economic crises, exile, wars and displacement of people, as well as the process of breaking with tradition, are factors which also contribute to this situation. "The most common forms of violence against women in Serbia are domestic violence by an intimate partner, sexual violence against women and trafficking of women".

Ms. Djukic-Dejanovic explained that in the past years "positive developments have been observed in the legislative domain, with the adoption of the Criminal Code, the Family Act, and the Constitution of the Republic of Serbia in 2006. Nevertheless, there are still serious problems to be tackled. One is a lack of capacities for the application of legislation and other instruments". She added that a cross-party Standing Committee of the National Assembly had been established; it was composed of representatives of all parliamentary groups. The Gender Equality Committee had prepared and adopted the Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Violence against Women, which would soon be adopted in plenary session".



Photo Parliament of Austria

Honduras

On 28 June 2009, a coup d'état took place in Honduras when the army seized President Manuel Zelaya and put him on a flight to Costa Rica. President Zelaya had expressed his intention to call, on that same day, a consultation asking whether the citizens wished to vote to establish a Constituent Assembly that would prepare a new Constitution. Should that be the case, the vote for a Constituent Assembly would take place on the occasion of the presidential elections, scheduled for 29 November 2009. Mr. Zelaya's four-year term was due to end in January 2010, and he was constitutionally barred from running in the 2009 elections.

The Supreme Court and the Electoral Tribunal had ruled that the consultation (referendum) aiming to change the Constitution was unconstitutional. The Chief of the armed forces had subsequently refused to obey the order of the President to distribute ballot boxes for the "public consultation". The President then dismissed him.

Later that day (28 June), the Congress voted to remove the President for "repeated violations of the Constitution and the law". The Supreme Court also announced it had authorized the removal of the President to protect law and order. Speaker of Congress Roberto Micheletti became acting President. The Electoral Tribunal announced that presidential elections would take place on 29 November 2009 as scheduled. Mr. Micheletti will continue in an acting capacity until 27 January 2010, when the newly elected President will take office.

The Organization of American States (OAS) condemned the military coup and demanded Mr. Zelaya's immediate reinstatement, a position which was echoed by the international community, including the IPU. On 4 July, the OAS suspended Honduras' membership. Costa Rican President and Nobel peace prize laureate Oscar Arias hosted three rounds of talks from 9 July between the representatives of ousted President Zelaya and acting President Micheletti but the parties

have so far failed to reach an agreement.

Latvia

After an unsuccessful constitutional referendum in August 2008 (see issue no. 32, December 2008), on 26 November 2008 President Valdis Zatlers called on the parliamentary Law Committee to prepare amendments to the Constitution, which would allow citizens to propose the dissolution of parliament. On 8 April 2009, parliament passed those amendments. According to the new provisions, one tenth of voters in the most recent elections can initiate a referendum on the dissolution of parliament. Parliament can be dissolved if a majority of voters approve the referendum and turnout surpasses two thirds of the number of voters at the previous parliamentary elections. Early elections will then be called no sooner than one month and no later than two months after such dissolution. The amendments will take effect after the next elections, due to be held by October 2010. The constitutional provision whereby voters may not recall any individual member of parliament remains unchanged.

Madagascar

On 14 March 2009, following a protracted political crisis, Mr. Andry Rajoelina, the mayor of the capital Antananarivo, declared himself President, effectively ousting the incumbent President Marc Ravalomanana (see issue no. 34, July 2009). On 9 August, the leaders of the four main political groups, including Mr. Rajoelina, Mr. Ravalomanana, and former presidents Didier Ratsiraka and Albert Zafy, signed the Maputo Political Accord, establishing transitional arrangements for a period not exceeding 15 months, during which presidential and parliamentary elections as well as a referendum on a new constitution will be held. The Accord provides for an interim constitution, the Transitional Charter, which came into effect on 9 August. All transitional in-

stitutions are to be established within 30 days. These would include a President and Vice President, a national unity government comprising a Prime Minister, three deputy prime ministers and 28 ministers and a bicameral legislative body: the Higher Transitional Council (the upper house, comprising 65 members) and the Transitional Congress (lower house, composed of 258 members). The members of the Congress will be appointed by presidential decree. The mode of designation of members of the Council will be decided following further negotiations.

Niger

On 25 May 2009, the Constitutional Court ruled that it would be illegal for President Mamadou Tandja to hold a constitutional referendum on the lifting of the two-term presidential limit. He has been serving his second five-year term, which is due to end in December 2009. The following day, the President issued a decree dissolving the National Assembly without giving any reason for his move. New parliamentary elections were constitutionally due between 45 and 90 days after the dissolution. On 2 June he signed a decree setting up a committee in charge of drafting a new constitution. On 3 July, he issued a decree calling a constitutional referendum for 4 August. Although the Electoral Commission had set early parliamentary elections for 20 August, they were postponed due to the referendum.

On 4 August 2009, 68.26 per cent of the 6 million registered voters turned out for the referendum. The new Constitution was approved by 92.5 per cent. It provides for a new bicameral parliament comprising a National Assembly and a Senate. Two thirds of the senators will be indirectly elected while the remainder will be appointed by the President of the Republic. All senators, who must be over 45 years old, will serve a five-year term. The new Constitution does not provide the timeline for installing the Senate. Under the new Constitution, the elec-

tions to the National Assembly, whose composition does not change, are due before October 2009. Until such time, the President of the Republic will exercise legislative power through presidential decrees. Thereafter, until the establishment of the Senate, the National Assembly will exercise legislative power.

The new Constitution lifted the limit on presidential terms. Although the presidential term remained at five years, the mandate of the incumbent President has been extended until the next presidential elections, which will now be held in December 2012. On 14 August 2009, the Constitutional Court validated the referendum results.

Uruguay

On 24 March 2009, the House of Representatives approved a law to increase the percentage of women in the candidate lists for elections at all levels. For parliamentary elections, party lists must comprise candidates of both sexes in at least the first 15 places. This rule applies to both titular and substitute members. In the electoral districts used for the House of Representatives, where only two seats are being contested, the titular candidates must include one man and one woman. The government promulgated the law on 13 April. This law will apply as of the parliamentary elections to be held in 2014.



Photo Parliament of Uruguay

The Parliament of Uruguay

In the press

Africa: Continent's Women Making Progress in Legislative Politics

When Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton visits Africa starting August 4, she will be meeting with one of the continent's foremost success stories for women in politics: Liberian President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf. Sirleaf became the first elected black female head of state in 2005 when Liberia's voters elected her president with a margin of nearly 19 percent, a triumph that came only after she endured house arrest and exile during the country's turbulent years. Women in Africa increasingly are making their presence felt on the political stage, but they still have a long way to go, according to the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU). IPU is a Geneva-based international organization established in 1889 to foster worldwide parliamentary dialogue and the firm establishment of representative democracy. IPU figures show that women hold an average of just 17.5 percent of legislative seats in sub-Saharan Africa. Women would need 30 percent of legislative seats to have a real influence in parliaments, IPU maintains. Even so, democratic elections, according to IPU, are a fact of life across most of Africa; the challenge now is ensuring that women have equal opportunities to vote and to run for office.

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Ms. Ines Alberdi, Executive Director of the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM)

Dispelling the misconception that women are inferior

According to Ms. Ines Alberdi, Executive Director of the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), the role of parliamentarians, and especially women parliamentarians, is very important "from the perspective of the level of crimes and the level of prevention, protection and punishment". Legislators could be very active in organizing plans of action to inform the population about violence against women, because this is a problem which concerns both men and women. It is a societal problem, which affects not only developing countries, but also developed countries.

This universal problem "has to do with the idea that women are inferior and it is difficult to dispel this misconception, which has been with us for centuries. We have to work at the level of education and also to adopt laws, to make it clear that this is a crime. We have to send the message that it is not legitimate, it is not allowed and it should be punished. The fight against impunity is very important. We also have to see relationships between men women differently".

UNIFEM has been working on an awareness campaign called Say NO to Violence, against Women asking everyone to sign up to it, with actress Nicole Kidman as its Goodwill Ambassador. "Her image and the very strong declaration she made got popular support. In one year we got 5 million signatures. We have to continue, even if it is only a minority of people who still think that women are inferior", said Ms. Alberdi. "For years violence against women has been a taboo subject and nobody talked about it; even the women who were abused would not admit that they were beaten".

In order to help the victims, the first step is to recognize that there is a problem and talk openly about it. In that respect, Spain has been dealing recently with this question while the northern countries were the first ones to conduct studies and to have



Photo Austrian Parliament

statistics on the scale of violence against women. "But in many countries, there are no statistics and we do not know exactly how many women or girls have been raped or beaten. Sometimes they are not free to go outside the home, to see their friends or to study. Some women who were separated from their husband prefer to be treated badly rather than be alone. Other victims think that it is their fault they are unhappy. "When you talk about it openly, you can help a lot of women", explained Ms. Alberdi.

It is more difficult to help the women who want to stay with their violent husbands or partners because they feel they cannot live without them. This has to do with the notion that a good wife obeys her husband. There are traditional ideas about the submission of women. Nowadays things are changing within couples. They talk about that, they negotiate and they discuss the questions related to children.

"Freedom and autonomy for women, and indeed all persons, were introduced with the development of democracy", concluded UNIFEM Executive Director.

Ms. Gelane Zwane, President of the Senate of Swaziland



In the press

Say NO to Violence against Women

Theo Ben Gurirab, President of the Inter-Parliamentary Union and Speaker of the National Assembly of Namibia, signs on to Say NO. Speakers and deputy speakers of 15 national parliaments as well as the Arab Transitional Parliament signed on to UNIFEM's Say NO to Violence against Women campaign on 14 July and agreed to make the issue a priority in their work. "We should not be timid: As speakers, parliamentarians and women, we have a responsibility to lead the way in the effort to empower women," said Barbara Prammer, Speaker of the Austrian National Council and host of the Fifth Annual Meeting of Women Speakers of Parliament during which the signing took place. "We need to show political will and ensure that our institutions are more involved in this battle." The conference in Vienna, Austria, on 13-14 July was organized by the National Council of Austria and the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), whose president also added his name to Say NO. Worldwide there are a total of 34 women speakers of parliament, representing 12 percent of all speakers; 17 speakers and deputy speakers were gathered at the meeting in Vienna.

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