

The World of Parliaments

Quarterly Review of the Inter-Parliamentary Union

October 2001
N° 3

The event: Parliamentary meeting on racism

"MPS COMMITTED TO FIGHTING RACISM"

At a meeting organised by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) and the South African Parliament on the occasion of the World Conference Against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance (WCAR) in Durban, some 300 parliamentarians from over 50 countries unanimously adopted a Declaration in which they expressed their commitment to combat racism. The Declaration, while recognizing the particular role and responsibility that parliaments have in the fight against racism, also acknowledges that their members have a personal responsibility to use their influence on public opinion to promote the values of diversity and tolerance.



On the left, Mrs Frene Noshir Ginwala, Speaker of the South African National Assembly and Chairperson of the parliamentary meeting; on the left, Mrs Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma, Minister of Foreign Affairs of South Africa and Chairperson of the world conference against racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance.

"We cannot afford to fail"

The Speaker of the National Assembly of the South African Parliament, Dr. Frene Ginwala presented the Declaration to the Plenary of the WCAR on 4 September. "As elected representatives, individually and collectively, parliamentarians are both the product and custodians of the democratic values, processes, and systems in our countries and must set the national tone for tolerance and to support new ambitious initiatives in this field in the international arena", she said. Commenting on the final document, she added, "the world will be watching with great interest to see if we indeed take concrete action and follow up on our Declaration. We therefore cannot afford to fail".

"Parliaments are key actors"

The Secretary General of the Inter-Parliamentary Union, Mr. Anders B. Johnsson, pointed out that "parliaments have a key role to play in supervising government action, enacting appropriate legislation where needed and deciding on the allocation of the national budget. Moreover, parliaments are key actors in elaborating plans of action". He also said that "the IPU is certainly keen to take up the invitation which is included in the Declaration of the Parliamentary Meeting and the Programme of Action of the World Conference itself to encourage Parliaments to follow up on the commitments made."

"Up to MPs to push this..."

The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Mrs. Mary Robinson, stressed that "As a world organisation of parliaments, the Inter-Parliamentary Union is an important - indeed unique - forum for parliamentary dialogue and work for peace and co-operation among people, for the promotion of democracy and for the defence and promotion of human rights and the protection of the rule of law... Parliamentarians can be a strong voice for those who are discriminated against. Whether raising issues in parliament or playing an active role in parliamentary committees, or simply by speaking out, parliamentarians are well placed to focus public attention on issues of racism, xenophobia, discrimination and intolerance, and may do so to considerable effect... Another point I would stress is that follow-up is all important for Durban. Governments will be called on to put in place national plans or programmes of action and I hope that these will be as specific as possible. Whatever is decided here by governments must be implemented in practice if Durban is to be considered a success. It is up to parliamentarians to push this in the legislative field and to assess performance".



Mrs Mary Robinson,
UN High Commissioner for
Human Rights.

MPs pledge

MPS and the Kyoto Protocol

MPs present in Ouagadougou decided to include on the agenda of the 107th IPU Conference, which will take place in Marrakech from 17 to 23 March 2002, at the invitation of the Parliament of Morocco, an item entitled : *Ten years after Rio: global degradation of the environment and parliamentary support for the Kyoto Protocol*.

With the successful conclusion of the resumed 6th Conference of the Parties (COP6) to the Framework Convention on Climate Change in Bonn last July, the momentum is quickly building for parliaments to ratify the Kyoto Protocol. This may very well turn out to be one of the main achievements of next year's World Summit on Sustainable Development, which will mark the tenth anniversary of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), also known as the Rio Conference.

At the COP6, governments were able to come to an agreement about the technical rules of application of the Kyoto Protocol, which sets a target to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from 1990 levels by 5.2 percent. Generally, the agreement covers three key areas: carbon sinks (now allowed, but only up to a certain limit for each country), emissions trading (there is now a workable system to adopt the rules governing it), and the Clean Development Mechanism (rules were set to allow developed countries to invest in climate-friendly projects in developing countries and receive credit for the emissions avoided by these projects). All of this comes with appropriate financial provisions and a compliance regime to provide enough incentives for countries to play by the new rules.

For the Protocol to enter into force, it will have to be ratified by at least 55 parties to the Convention, including indus-

trialized countries representing at least 55 per cent of the total 1990 carbon dioxide emissions from this group. So far, only 36 countries have ratified it, and of these, only one is from the industrialized group. Aware of this, the IPU Council, meeting at the 105th Havana Conference, urged parliaments to hold debates on climate change and to organize an information campaign to help mobilize public support for the Kyoto Protocol. Now that the main roadblocks to ratification have been removed in Bonn, it is to be hoped that a round of parliamentary debates will get under way, thus demonstrating once again how the IPU and the UN can support each other in the pursuit of an important policy objective.

Combating desertification

The fourth of its kind after the parliamentary round tables in Dakar (1998), Recife (1999) and Bonn (2000), the round table held in Geneva (4-5 October 2001) with the support of the Inter-Parliamentary Union, brought together MPs from 25 countries on the fringe of the Conference of Parties to the Convention. At the meeting, delegates described the situation with regard to desertification in their respective countries. Following presentations on desertification control in the countries concerned and on support for it in countries which are not directly concerned but which are anxious to combat this planet-wide phenomenon, the discussions focused on the text of the MPs' declaration which was presented a few days later to the Conference of Parties. Essentially, this text calls for the creation, within the Global Environment Facility (GEF), of an additional funding window for the implementation of the Convention. ■

PARLIAMENTS INVITED TO DEBATE DEVELOPMENT FINANCING

Preparations for next year's International Conference on Financing for Development in Monterrey, Mexico (18-22 March) have reached a crucial juncture with the release in September of the first draft outcome document for the event. The paper may still be a long way from representing the political agreement of governments as to how to finance development more effectively and more equitably in the era of globalization. That agreement may not materialize until the day of the conference itself. However, it is a very good synthesis of the discussions held by member states so far, and will undoubtedly constitute a solid platform for high-level political negotiations in the months leading up to the UN conference.

The draft outcome paper brings together many old and new ideas that touch on virtually every aspect of development financing. Some, expressed in the form of pledges for action or further consideration, respond to the wishes expressed by parliaments through a number of IPU resolutions or declarations. The paper dwells on trade as a key source of revenue for developing countries, advocates the abolition of unfair subsidies and other export barriers, especially in agriculture and textiles, and calls for a closer relationship between the WTO and the UN as well as for a more inclusive decision-making process at the WTO.

Consistent with IPU positions, the draft paper also calls for the deepening of the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) initiative for debt reduction, the untying of Official Development Assistance (ODA), a more focused role for the IMF, fairer governance of the World Bank, the incorporation of gender in all aspects of development financing (including in the budget process), more accessible credit for small enterprises, and further consideration of a global tax regime on control short-term capital flows – to mention just a few items. In addition, the paper presents many new proposals yet to be debated by the IPU and its member parliaments. These include: the possible creation, under the aegis of the UN, of a new world economic body to secure consistency of action among existing international organizations; a possible new International Tax Organization; increased powers for the ILO to make its international labour standards enforceable; and various fund-raising approaches to finance Global Public Goods such as increased partnerships between private and public sectors.

The IPU has been following the preparatory process for the International Conference virtually from the very beginning, and a major parliamentary contribution was made with the Jakarta resolution of October 2000 (*Financing for Development and a New Paradigm of Economic and Social Development Designed to Eradicate Poverty*). As decided by the IPU Council at the Ouagadougou Conference, the IPU will directly contribute to the UN event with a parliamentary declaration.

The release of the proposed outcome document provides yet another opportunity for parliaments to contribute to the development financing issue. Following recent discussions between the IPU and the UN, all parliaments are invited to debate the document and provide their input to the preparatory process for the International Conference. Indeed, a broad debate would provide further evidence of how the IPU can complement the work of the UN and, more important, help democratize the global decision-making process. ■

THE ROLE OF THE IPU IN THE FIGHT AGAINST TERRORISM

The proceedings of the 106th Inter-Parliamentary Conference in Ouagadougou had only just begun when the events which plunged the United States into mourning reminded the 600 MPs from 116 countries that the fate of the men and women of the planet was, for better or for worse, indissolubly linked. Shaken by this tragedy, the delegates immediately condemned "the terrorist attacks perpetrated against the United States of America" and called on "all States to develop or strengthen their cooperation with a view to preventing and stamping out terrorist activities throughout the world", inviting them "to work together to expose and punish the perpetrators of these terrorist attacks".

Through the President of the Council, Mrs. Najma Heptulla, and the President of the National Assembly of Burkina Faso, Mr. Mélégué Traoré, who presided over the proceedings of the 106th Inter-Parliamentary Conference, the IPU expressed its "solidarity, condolences and compassion to all the families and countries of origin of the innocent victims of these terrorist acts".

In view of the circumstances, the immediate reaction of the IPU Conference was to close ranks and display a strong sense of common purpose. The agenda was reorganised as a result of the events, but the conference business nevertheless continued. A drafting committee was set up to prepare a draft resolution on the supplementary item placed on the Conference agenda, concerning the *Contribution of parliamentarians to dealing with the continuing tragic situation in the occupied Arab territories, to the provision of international observers and monitors, and to the protection of the Arab Palestinian people, especially unarmed civilians*, submitted by the delegation of Kuwait on behalf of the Arab Group. The Drafting Committee prepared a draft resolution, which was subsequently approved by consensus.

Fortified by this unanimously recognized cohesion, the IPU echoed the feelings of millions of citizens, relayed a few weeks later by the British Prime Minister, Mr. Tony Blair, when he appealed to the world to seize this "instant of chaos" to become more just. There is an imperative need to identify and try those guilty of the terrorist attacks, but the time has also come for us to ask ourselves how and why the world has reached such extremes. Will it take the tragic death of so many innocent people for world leaders to dialogue on an equal footing and understand that on the stock exchange of human values the lives of all human beings are equally valuable?

"After the eleventh of September 2001, nothing will ever be the same again", is the refrain that echoes from Africa to Europe, Asia and Oceania, from the Americas to the Middle East. One thing is certain: the world cannot overcome terrorism without uniting and weighing up all the factors behind it, including injustice, wherever it may occur. True to its mission of promoting the ideals of peace and security, the IPU is called to play a still more active role on the international political scene. As the sole forum of inter-parliamentary diplomacy for all political tendencies and all religious beliefs, the oldest multilateral organization must continue to encourage dialogue among civilizations, the heritage – shared equally – of humanity. ■

L.B.

IPU AND UN UNITED FOR THE SAME CAUSE

The President of the Council of the IPU, Mrs. Najma Heptulla, immediately informed the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Mr. Kofi Annan (Nobel Peace Prize Laureate for 2001) of the adoption of the resolution of the emergency supplementary item condemning "the terrorist attacks perpetrated against the United States of America" and calling on "all States to develop or strengthen their co-operation with a view to preventing and stamping out terrorist activities throughout the world".

The UN Secretary-General recalled, as he had done in the columns of *The New York Times*, that "The international community is defined not only by what it is for, but by what and whom it is against. The United Nations must have the courage to recognize that, just as there are common aims, there are common enemies. To defeat them, all nations must join forces in an effort encompassing every aspect of the open, free global system so wickedly exploited by the perpetrators of last week's atrocities.

The United Nations is uniquely positioned to advance this effort. It provides the forum necessary for building a universal coalition, and can ensure global legitimacy for the long-term response to terrorism. United Nations conventions already provided a legal framework for many of the steps that must be taken to eradicate terrorism - including the extradition and prosecution of offenders and the suppression of money laundering. These conventions must be implemented in full.

Essential to the global response to terrorism is that it not fracture the unity of September 11. While the world must recognize that there are enemies common to all societies, it must equally understand that they are not, are never, defined by religion or national descent. No people, no region and no religion should be targeted because of the unspeakable acts of individuals. As Mayor Giuliani said: "That is exactly what we are fighting here". To allow divisions between and within societies to be exacerbated by these acts would be to do the terrorists work for them.

Terrorism threatens every society. As the world takes action against it, we have all been reminded of the need to address the conditions that permit the growth of such hatred and depravity. We must confront violence, bigotry and hatred even more resolutely. The work of the U.N. must continue as we address the ills of conflict, ignorance, poverty and disease.

Doing so will not remove every source of hatred or prevent every act of violence. There are those who will hate and who will kill even if every injustice is ended. But if the world can show that it will carry on, that it will persevere in creating a stronger, more just, more benevolent and more genuine international community across all lines of religion and race, then terrorism will have failed". ■

Can Parliaments play a role at international summits?

Economic globalisation worries the citizens of many of the world's countries. After the events which took place in Seattle, Porto Alegre, Davos and Genoa, we asked a few leading figures to answer the question: What role can parliaments, parliamentarians and the IPU play at international summits?



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Mrs. Sheila Finestone, President of the Canadian IPU Group. Canada will host the next G8 Summit.

Mrs. Sheila Finestone
Member of the Canadian Senate
(Liberal party)
President of the Canadian IPU Group

"MPs can facilitate the information flow"

Information on the contents of international summit meetings must be presented in a clearer way to encourage a meaningful dialogue between the participants. MPs can enhance the transparency of this process by helping to clarify the subjects that are discussed at these summits, thereby making it possible for more clearly defined objectives to emerge. Parliamentarians can also help to reinforce the idea that the issues at these summit meetings can be backed and approved by local constituents, be it only because MPs are more inclined to act in the interests of those they represent. Viewed from this perspective, the IPU can turn out to be an important point of reference to facilitate the development of democracy.

Mr. Bernard Cassen, Director General of the monthly *Le Monde Diplomatique* and President of the ATTAC (Association for the taxation of financial transactions for the benefit of citizens)

"Parliaments and summit meetings"

The loss of prestige for MPs is particularly plain to see at summit meetings of multilateral organizations, such as the World Bank, the IMF, or the WTO, as well as the sessions of the Council of Ministers of the European Union. It is within these walls that the major decisions are taken, which are subsequently applied in each of the countries considered. Governments, without bothering to consult either constituents or MPs, take the decisions they wish, and in the best of cases, parliaments are invited to approve them after the event.

Dispossessing parliamentarians elected by universal suffrage of their role as depositories of popular sovereignty means reducing representative democracy to almost nothing. This is why it is important to establish standing oversight bodies within parliamentary assemblies, where they do not exist, both upstream and downstream, for monitoring government action in multilateral organizations. This is also why it is necessary, at each summit meeting, to include duly mandated MPs in national delegations as observers.

Mr. Francis Ole Kaparo – Speaker of the National Assembly of Kenya (KANU - Kenya Africa National Union)

"Parliaments should get more involved"

Parliaments should get more involved. For a long time parliamentarians have not, on an international level, made their contributions to the great events concerning their countries. Parliaments have long left this to the executive, to the governments. I think there is a trend towards parliaments taking a more active role on public affairs. In 2000, the first ever Conference of Presiding Officers of Parliaments took place at the UN Headquarters in New York. Parliamentarians subsequently met to discuss the question of international trade. This is a good thing. MPs must continue to involve themselves in matters of public policy at international level and there is no better forum for this than the IPU.

Patrice Mugny – Member of the Federal Assembly of Switzerland (Joint President of Swiss "Greens" party)

"Getting the attention of the world's decision-makers"

Unfortunately, the real answer to this question is a far cry from the reaction which immediately comes to mind. Today's world is a product of the many political balances of power, the effects of which are felt in all countries. If we discount authoritarian regimes and democracies in name only, only a few dozen countries are left in the running. If we look at the state of debate in these regions, it is clear that liberal ideology has gained the upper hand. Yet the state of the world derives from this new totalitarianism, which, as French farmer José Bové puts it, quite simply views the world as a commodity.

Logically, a world assembly that accurately reflects national parliaments would merely be yet another vehicle for this ideology. This relatively discouraging realisation must not prevent parliamentarians, who currently represent the forces of resistance (still a minority), from trying to draw the attention of the few decision-makers in the world who are not totally corrupt or fascinated by the dominant model to the fact that the key to the future of humanity is to pool our means and abilities so that we can all live decent lives in peace, not pursue an endless armed and/or economic conflict between populations.

In any event, parliaments possess only a very small part of any possible solution, which will primarily come from a broad-based, non-dogmatic social movement which recalls that the primary political priority is to establish a society that recognises the right of each and every one to live in a healthy environment and that stops considering the profit motive as its main *raison d'être*.

Female genital mutilation: an attack on human dignity



The 106th Conference of the Inter-Parliamentary Union, held in Ouagadougou, provided an occasion for a parliamentary debate on "Violence against women: Female genital mutilation". Headed by the President of the National Assembly of Burkina Faso, Mr. Mélégué Traoré (see interview below) and moderated by experts from Burkina Faso and MPs from several countries, the purpose of the panel was to present various traditional practices, such as excision and infibulation, which affect millions of girls and women in over thirty countries, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, and to make parliamentarians aware of the importance of eliminating them while respecting cultures and individuals.

Suggestions were made for action at the national, sub-regional and international levels. The participants agreed that legislation aimed at preventing, combating and punishing female genital mutilation had to be adopted in those countries where such practices persisted, and that legislation and programmes should be harmonised to ensure that girls from a country where excision was banned were not subjected to such practices in a country where the law remained more tolerant. They also stressed the importance of awareness-building campaigns and education, the retraining of female excision practitioners, the allocation of sufficient funds to support programmes, institutions and NGOs involved in efforts to combat female genital mutilation, and close oversight of government action in this regard.

The Inter-Parliamentary Union was urged to help set up, together with the African Parliamentary Union, a think tank comprising men and women MPs from those countries where these traditional practices are routine as well as from countries of emigration for their nationals, with a view to exchanging information on legislation, programmes and good practices to be promoted in response to this complex phenomenon. The IPU has undertaken to collect the texts of existing laws in this field and intends to help set up a database on the question, in support of coordinated action by the international community. This subject is also a matter for concern for the United Nations. UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan is to present a report on the "Traditional or customary practices affecting the health of women and girls" during the fifty-sixth session of the General Assembly. ■



"One can be a good African and respect traditions without having girls excised"

Q: At the 106th Inter-Parliamentary Conference, which you chaired, you pushed for a panel discussion on excision and other forms of female genital mutilation. Why?

Mélégué Traoré: Because excision is an important question. Many societies in Africa are affected by the problem of female genital mutilation, in particular removal of the clitoris. This problem, which is widespread not only in Burkina Faso but also in a number of African countries and elsewhere, is based on religious and cultural grounds, that is, on tradition. What is needed is an awareness of the gravity and scope of the problem. There are

ethnic groups in Burkina Faso who feel that a woman or girl who has not been excised has no chance of finding a husband. MPs today must become aware of this problem. In Burkina Faso, the State has created the National Excision Control Committee, a body headed by Mrs. Bassolé. It is a standing administrative structure; the staff are paid by the State and their main

job consists of organising all activities to combat excision and mobilising the people who are well placed to help in the fight. At the start, some of these people, such as religious leaders, above all Islamic ones, and tribal chiefs, were in favour of excision; but animists still account for 50-60% of the inhabitants of Burkina Faso. In our tradition, initiation is very important, and as it turns out, one of the justifications for excision is precisely the rite of initiation, which for women automatically entails excision. In other words, excision is one of the key elements of the rite of initiation.

Q: Who can reassure parents who have their daughters excised because they fear that they will not find a husband otherwise?

M.T.: I have a reputation in my country for being a traditionalist because I am a tribal chief who presides over animal sacrifices. My children have local names, not Christian or Moslem names. I am telling you this because I believe that the main justification for excision is no longer valid today. I have two daughters and I have refused to have them excised. The people in the village have understood that there was nothing in the traditions of the Senoufo ethnic group – from which I come – that justifies excision. It was valid at the time of grand initiation, which has now disappeared and been replaced by the school. Only in part of the area inhabited by the Senoufo, in

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Côte d'Ivoire, does initiation – the poro or the cholugo - still live on. But even in this case, it is easy to see that a girl no longer needs to be excised to take her place in the Senoufo world. And what is true for the Senoufo is true elsewhere. We must start by explaining to everybody that the main justification no longer exists. I have always told the villagers to stop excising girls because excision has become meaningless. They make their daughters suffer for nothing because nothing in the teaching by the ancestors advocates excision. Not only will I tell my son that he can marry a girl who hasn't been excised, but I would say that today, in my village, all of the young people have understood that excising a girl doesn't necessarily mean that she will be more faithful!

Q: How do you explain the fact that this practice is still around?

M.T.: The problem is still around because the tradition is still there. In the 60s, soon after independence, we thought that such traditions wouldn't be around any more in the 70s. Today, we realise that you shouldn't destroy traditions – what you should do is reappropriate them and give them another meaning that is in tune with today's world and is linked to efforts to reaffirm the value of the African world. And this is possible without having to excise girls. This is where we must start. You can be a good African without having girls excised. Punishment is also needed. Not in villages, but I believe that excision is practiced in hospitals and doctor's surgeries, by State employees, and this must be punished, even if it is viewed as “healthier”. In Burkina Faso, the law forbids excision, which is deemed a criminal offence. On the other hand, in societies that apply it as a system, increased awareness is the only solution. Elderly women

account for the majority of practitioners of excision, because in our world age is imbued with prestige and respect.

Q: This question seems to touch you deeply...

M.T.: I remember that my sister passed out the day she was excised. Today, I realise just how traumatic an experience it was for her at the time. There was no way I could know, because back then everyone felt that she was just a weakling. She was 16 years old and had lost a lot of blood. The fact that she passed out was viewed as a scandal. I know that it will take a long time, but I believe that we can manage to eliminate excision. Here in Burkina Faso, we have got results, thanks in particular to the contribution of the religious leaders, imams, tribal chiefs, Catholic priests and Protestant pastors.

Q: Are you prepared to urge your counterparts in the countries concerned to combat excision?

M.T.: I am fully prepared to do this and I call on the States in this part of West Africa to harmonise their laws on excision. This awareness-building campaign does not go against tradition. I, a tribal chief, am telling you this!

Mr. Mohammed Farouk Cassim
Member of the National Assembly of
South Africa

"Put maximum pressure on families"

We should make it the responsibility of the State to provide greater protection for the girl child. There should be very stiff legal penalties - twenty years' imprisonment - for anyone practising such forms of mutilation. We should also ensure that, prior to marriage, a girl is able to produce a certificate from a medical office indicating that she has not undergone genital mutilation. The idea is to put maximum pressure on families. All families want to make sure that their daughters are happily and successfully married. They might think twice about excision knowing that it might prevent their daughters from obtaining such a certificate.

In respect of the people who support those practices, whether they are community authorities or religious leaders, they should also be liable to judicial proceedings. Those who perform such brutal mutilations should also be held fully responsible before the law. We should try to obtain the support of the great centres of religious power, such as Rome and Mecca, which should unequivocally condemn these practices so that it is clear once and for all that they are unacceptable and are not countenanced either by religious leaders or by political or judicial authorities. We should produce films showing the hardship, the pain, the sorrow and the suffering of the victims so that people can begin to reflect on the absurdity and cruelty of these practices. For as we know, one picture is worth a thousand words. As a South African Moslem male, I would say that those who perform excision in the name of Islam should be denounced. We should condemn the people, countries and institutions that mutilate women and inflict such suffering on them, because these practices are not to be found anywhere in the Koran.

El Hadj Ibrahim Zougmore
Member of the National Excision
Control Committee, Burkina Faso

"A myth with no real foundation"

Those who perpetuate female genital mutilation have also invented justifications which are viewed as essential phases in the woman's socialisation from birth to adulthood. These justifications, which have no real foundation, are linked to six main areas: controlling the sexuality of girls and women, reproduction, the social integration of girls and women, health in general and hygiene in particular, religion and, lastly, the psycho-sexual conception of certain ethnic groups, who credit the woman's genital organ with evil powers. The religions which encourage the practice of female genital mutilation maintain that an unexcised woman is impure when it comes to religious practices, particularly prayer. Others say that even though the prayer of an unexcised woman can be accepted, it does not carry the same weight, in spiritual terms, as the prayer of an excised woman. At present, however, the points of view of certain religious leaders on this issue differ. Female genital mutilation constitutes a dynamic myth with no real foundation.

Mrs Viola Furubjelke
President of the IPU Coordinating
Committee of Women Parliamentarians
and Chairperson of the Committee on
Foreign Affairs of the Swedish Parliament

"A violation of children's rights"

The panel was a good initiative, because public debate is the only way we can change attitudes. As parliamentarians we have to use existing legal tools and find enabling mechanisms, or even adopt more stringent laws. The question was tackled head on, not only with regard to language but also in terms of the slides and video that were shown. Your immediate feeling is not to look at these very shocking pictures, but then you have to get a grip on yourself and tell yourself that in order to be in a position to change things, you have to face them and listen to the very shocking stories that people tell you.

Excision is a violation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, because most of the young girls are under the age of eighteen, and very often not more than four or five years old. And if the girls are over eighteen, then it is a violation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, because excision is one form of not recognising women's right to their own sexuality.

Mrs. Kaïdiatou Coulibaly
Third Vice President of the National
Assembly of Mali

"The onus is on women"

We have female genital mutilation, and especially excision, in our country. Associations and non-governmental organisations have been fighting for years to end this barbaric practice, but have not succeeded. The traditions live on, with the help of religion. In Mali, we women are all aware of the consequences of excision. The onus to solve the problem is on women, not men. In Mali, a country that is 90 per cent Moslem, people misinterpret the Koran, claiming that failing to excise girls is contrary to Islam. Many people supporting excision control associations backed down after a Congress of Islamic women on the subject. If we are to find a solution in Mali, we must go through the law. The government absolutely must get involved and introduce a genuine policy aimed at eradicating excision. Otherwise it will go on. Male and female excision practitioners will at least be afraid of the law.

Mrs. Félicité Bassolé
Permanent Secretary of the National
Excision Control Committee
Burkina Faso

"Excision is based on a misinterpretation of the Koran"

Information is the most effective strategy. There is a need to create awareness overall: among men and women, and male and female excision practitioners. The emphasis must be placed on excision practitioners because if they refuse to practise, there won't be any more excisions. A law is therefore needed to protect defenceless women and girls. Fear of going against the law, which has been in force since 1996, acts as a deterrent. Our strategy works. There have been several arrests. Several other countries have adopted laws against excision: Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Nigeria and Senegal, which has now followed suit... But we must keep passing the message on, especially in the countryside, which television and radio do not always reach. More resources are also needed to build awareness among the general public, if only for travelling to remote areas. The cooperation of the imams and tribal leaders is very important. Excision is not recommended by the Koran: this is a misinterpretation of the Koran, a dupery, so to speak.



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Panel on female genital mutilation,
106th IPU Conference in Ouagadougou.

Mrs Marion Roe
Member of the House of Commons
United Kingdom

"Fines and imprisonment for those who break the law"

Female circumcision doesn't just take place in the African continent, but it also occurs in other parts of the world amongst immigrant communities. In 1985 I introduced a bill in the House of Commons to prohibit female circumcision. In that bill there are penalties such as fines and prison for those who carry out these procedures. Although we have a law, it is very difficult to bring prosecutions, because the children themselves will not testify against their families.

Children are also being sent back to Africa for a "holiday", and the operation is being done there and then the children go back to the United Kingdom. Alerts have gone out to doctors, nurses, teachers, and social workers to look for symptoms where a small child may well have had this procedure done on her, in order to try and prevent it from taking place, but also to bring to account within the law those who are taking part in it.

When I introduced my bill, in 1985, I had to educate my male colleagues who didn't understand what female circumcision was - they had never heard of it! I also had problems with immigrant communities in London who harassed me because I was taking through this bill. They called me a racist, somebody who was interfering with their religious freedoms. I also persuaded the government to allocate substantial funds to set up an education programme within the immigrant communities to explain not just to the mothers but also the grandmothers the terrible thing that they were doing to young women and the fact that it was very harmful to them and that it would affect the rest of their life. This law has an impact. The young generations are now telling their parents and grandparents that excision is breaking the law and that they do not want to do it to their children.

Mrs. Ethiopia Beyene
Member of the Council of People's
Representatives of Ethiopia

"Genital mutilation practiced in nearly all religious groups"

Female genital mutilation is the major harmful traditional practice to which 75-80% of Ethiopian girls and women fall victim. It is practiced in all regions even though the degree may vary. Sunna (removal of prepuce only) and clitoridectomy (removal of the clitoris) are commonly practiced in most regions and may account for 45% of cases. Excision and infibulations (excision of labial mafora) account for 19% and 10% respectively. Female genital mutilation is practiced in both rural and urban communities and by nearly all religious groups, especially Christians and Muslims. The major harmful effects include pain, haemorrhage, shock, urine retention, bacterial infection that may lead to septicaemia in its worst form, HIV infection, tetanus and even death. It may also bring gynaecological complication like loss of function during child-bearing, labour and delivery that may result in maternal mortality. Not to mention psychological and social consequences such as anxiety reaction, depression and psychosis.

Parliamentary developments

Australia

Electoral Law: The Electoral and Referendum Amendment Act (No. 1) 2001 was assented to on 28 April 2001. It amends the *Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918 and the Referendum (Machinery Provisions) Act 1984* with a view to incorporating technical amendments contained in recommendations of the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters' report on the 1998 federal election.

Belgium

Standing Orders: 31 January 2001 marked the entry into force of the amendments to the Standing Orders of the Senate and House of Representatives consisting of inserting a new article in each set of Standing Orders in order to limit possibilities for MPs to hold more than one office concurrently. The new provisions stipulate that when an MP takes up office, he or she must provide the Speaker of his or her Chamber with all information on the other mandates, functions and offices of a political nature that he or she exercises, with a view to the application of the provisions relating to incompatibilities and prohibitions concerning ministers, former ministers and ministers of States, as well as members and former members of legislative chambers.

Canada

Parliament of Canada Act: On 4 June 2001, the Government introduced amendments to this Act regarding increases in MPs' salaries. The legislation was based on the recommendations of a Commission to Review Allowances of Parliamentarians, which was appointed following the November 2000 federal general election. As recommended, the bill proposes to convert the tax-free expense allowance into a taxable allowance and adds it to the base salary of MPs, which would accordingly be increased by 20%.

Denmark

Standing Orders: On 24 April 2001, the Standing Orders of the Folketing was amended introducing changes regarding the Parliamentary Groups and the collective employment agreement for the staff of the Folketing Ombudsman.

The practice of approval of a parliamentary group entitled to parliamentary rights and benefits corresponding to those of the parties, has now been codified in the Standing Orders.

It is stated that in order to be considered a parliamentary group, such a body must consist of several members:

- a) who have been elected in the last parliamentary election representing a certain political party, and who still represent this party;
- b) who establish a new group and a new party which obtains the right to nomination according to the rules of the Parliamentary Election Act;
- c) who join an existing party which is not represented in the Folketing, but entitled to nomination, or
- d) of whom nobody belongs to the party on whose ticket they were elected, but who continue as a united group with a common policy.

The Standing Orders also now entitle the Folketing Ombudsman to enter into agreements with two major unions concerning payment of the employees of this institution.

Germany

Constitution: Two articles of the German Constitution have been amended. One amendment now makes possible to establish a legal arrangement for the extradition of Germans to an international court of law or to a Member State of the European Union as an exception to the general ban on extraditions. The other amendment permits women to serve in the German armed forces in a combat role on a voluntary basis.

Federal Election Act: On 4 May 2001, two amendments to this Act were passed. The first one facilitates the formation of election committees and restricted access to personal information in election registers as well as establishes a more detailed definition of requirements for the nomination of candidates by parties. It also lays down new regulations for compensation paid to the state governments for costs incurred in connection with the general election. The second refers to the adjustment of constituencies to population trends in the Federal Länder.

Members of Parliament Act: Various sections of this Act were amended at the end of 2000 to allow an increase in the salary and expense allowance for Members of Parliament as of 1 January 2001 in three annual steps of 1.9% each, as well as adjusting accordingly the basis for assessment of the old-age pension of Members.

Hungary

Law on the status of MPs: This law was amended to stipulate that MPs and all members of their family living with

them must submit annual written declarations of assets. According to the law, this declaration is made public by the Speaker of the National Assembly.

Standing Orders: The Standing Orders of the National Assembly were amended to specify the steps to be taken by the Speaker of the National Assembly and parliamentary committees in order to protect State secrets that are contained in an individual motion, in an address preceding the establishment of the agenda of the plenary sitting or in a committee motion. The new provisions have enhanced the transparency of the proceedings of the National Assembly by requiring the minutes of sittings to be posted on the Internet.

Ireland

Constitution: On 7 June 2001, two changes to the Constitution were approved in a referendum. One amendment (the 21st to the Constitution) prohibits the Oireachtas (Parliament) from enacting any law providing for the imposition of the death penalty. The other amendment authorizes the State to ratify the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court done at Rome on the 17th day of July, 1998.

Jamaica

Standing Orders: A new paragraph has been introduced creating the Committee on Tax Measures with responsibility for examining all matters relating to new tax measures for the ensuing financial year presented to the Parliament and making such recommendations to the Parliament as may seem fit and appropriate; the Committee consists of nine members and is required to report to the Parliament within sixty days of any tax measures being referred to it.

Another amendment to the Standing Orders deals with the Standing Finance Committee and establishes that its deliberations shall be public, instead of private as in the past.

Japan

Standing Orders: On 31 January 2001, an amendment went into effect to the Diet Law, on the reorganisation of the Standing Committees. In line with the restructuring of the central government ministries and agencies effective in January 2001, the Standing Committees of the House of Representatives and the House of Councillors have been regrouped into seventeen Committees for each House. The Rules of both Houses were also amended to fix the membership of each Committee and to provide for matters coming under its jurisdiction.

On 15 March 2001, there was another partial amendment to the Rules of the House of Representatives, regarding the notice on non-attendance for reasons of childbirth. The

rule stipulates that when a woman Member is not able to attend the House for reasons of childbirth, she may give the Speaker notice of non-attendance in advance, specifying the number of days.

Law on punishment of those who have profited from influence-peddling while in public office: On 1 March 2001, a rule came into effect establishing that "If a Member of the House of Representatives, a Member of the House of Councillors, a member of a local assembly or the head of a local government has profited financially as a reward for exerting influence from his/her position in order to make public servants carry out official duties, or prevent them from carrying out official duties, he/she is liable to a three-year maximum prison term".

Thailand

Standing Orders: In May 2001, the new Rules of Procedure of the National Assembly (NA), the House of Representatives and the Senate were promulgated to replace, respectively, the 1996, 1997 and 1998 rules.

The new Rules of Procedure of the National Assembly give its President new powers and duties which include setting dates for sittings of the National Assembly and appointing committees to perform the functions as mandated by the National Assembly. Voting by show of hands has been replaced by the use of the voting machine and alphabetical roll call.

With reference to the House of Representatives, the new Rules of Procedure increase the number of Standing Committees to 31 from the previous 23. A chapter concerning the consideration of all bills submitted by voters in accordance with Section 304 of the Constitution has been introduced. Furthermore a member is now entitled to submit a candidate to be Prime Minister, who must be seconded by not less than one-fifth of all existing members. Finally, the membership of the Ombudsmen Recruitment and Selection Committee has been increased to 31 members.

As regards the new Rules of the Senate, the casting of votes shall be secret if not less than 10 members second the motion (in the past 20 members were required to second a motion). Five new Standing Committees have been created in addition to the 16 that existed under the old Rules. The new Rules also stipulate that in cases where the National Assembly approves the further consideration of all bills or organic law bills, further proceedings must be handled as emergency items on the agenda.

Zambia

Electoral Law: In March 2001, the National Assembly passed an amendment to the Electoral Act stipulating that the register of voters will henceforth be compiled, maintained and updated on a continuous basis. Before this was done once a year.

Historical focus

ALBERT GOBAT (1843-1914)
Nobel Peace Prize
First IPU Secretary General

Albert Gobat (Switzerland), the first Secretary General of the Union, was also one of the eight leading figures in early IPU history who were awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. He won this award, which he shared, in 1902, with his friend and compatriot, Elie Ducommun, in recognition of their dedication to the cause of peace.

Gobat held the following offices: State Councillor for the Canton of Berne from 1884 to 1912; National Councillor from 1890 to 1914; Secretary General of the Inter-Parliamentary Union from 1892-1909; and Director of the International Peace Bureau from 1911 to 1914. In 1882, he was appointed by two electoral communities to the Grand Council and was nominated State Councillor. He further served as Head of the Department of Public Education of the Canton of Berne (1884-1906) and of the Department of Domestic Affairs (1906-1912).

Gobat staunchly supported the principle of equal pay for men and women, especially in the case of telegraphers. In 1902, he prompted the adoption of a resolution whereby the Confederation would always resort to arbitration to resolve disputes concerning the interpretation of trade agreements. The pursuit of such objectives was to characterize Gobat's political activities throughout his mandate as Secretary General of the Inter-Parliamentary Union.

The origins of the Inter-Parliamentary Union go back to 1889, when parliamentarians representing nine countries met in Paris on the initiative of two parliamentarians: Frédéric Passy from France and William Randal Cremer from the United Kingdom. Albert Gobat did not attend that meeting but took part in the IIIrd Inter-Parliamentary Conference in Rome in 1891. As soon as he got back, he set up (and headed) a Swiss parliamentary Group. The following year, the Union met in Berne and Gobat was asked to serve as Secretary General in spite of opposition from the British, who preferred one of their own men, Randal Cremer, and hoped that the headquarters might be closer to England. Finally the Swiss won, as the French preferred the Union to be based in a neutral, republican country rather than in a conservative monarchy.

The IVth Inter-Parliamentary Conference was held in Berne in 1892. The presidency and organization of the Conference was entrusted to Gobat, who master-minded a project to establish a "Permanent Central Bureau" under the official title "Inter-Parliamentary Bureau for Permanent Arbitration". Most of what the project proposed was accepted by delegates. The Bureau's Headquarters were to be in Berne and its director was to be appointed by the National Groups.

The Bureau's running costs were shared out among the National Groups proportionately, according to total population. Gobat got down to work as soon as he was appointed Secretary General of the IPU. One of his tasks was to draft the *Parliamentary Correspondence* which informed MPs of the latest news of the National Groups. Gobat wrote this journal between 1892 and 1897 during his spare time. He was also in charge of writing up yearly reports on the IPU's activities.

His experience as a politician led him to open up membership to countries where parliamentary government was still a new concept. Accordingly, he did his utmost to further the cause of parliamentarianism in Russia. To speed up membership, he even introduced a special clause stipulating that the admission of non-constitutional countries would be possible upon government authorization. Gobat visited the Russian Ambassador in Berne to inform him in person of the decision of the VIIth Inter-Parliamentary Conference allowing membership of non-constitutional States.

In 1899, Count Mouraiev invited States to attend a peace conference in The Hague. Parliamentarians, especially Gobat, welcomed the initiative. At last governments were showing an interest in what they had been working on for several years! Their work had not been in vain. Gobat addressed the legal aspects of international arbitration and the need for regular peace conferences in the speech he gave at the Kristiania Nobel Institute in 1899.

Excerpts from an article by Verdiana Grossi
Doctor of History at the University of Geneva

THE IPU SECRETARIES GENERAL

At the 106th Inter-Parliamentary Conference in Ouagadougou in September 2001, Mr. Anders B. Johnsson (Sweden), elected to the post of IPU Secretary General in 1998, was re-elected to a four-year term. He succeeds the following leading figures:

1987 – 1998 :	Mr. Pierre Cornillon – France
1970 – 1986 :	Mr. Pio-Carlo Terenzio – Italy
1953 – 1979 :	Mr. André de Blonay – Switzerland
1933 – 1953 :	Mr. Leopold Boissier – Switzerland
1909 – 1933 :	Mr. Christian Lange – Norway
1892 – 1909 :	Mr. Albert Gobat - Switzerland

Did you say Peace?

Dixit

In order to guarantee the maintenance of peace and friendly relations among nations, the members of the Inter-Parliamentary Conference once again urge the conclusion of arbitration treaties under which, without impairing their independence and autonomy, nations would pledge to submit to arbitration all disputes that might arise between them.

**Resolution adopted at the Second
Inter-Parliamentary Conference in London (1890)**

He who speaks of peace has a brighter future than he who speaks of war. For war is but a passing state. We wage war to arrive at peace, but we do not make peace to reap war.

Paul Léautaud *

When kings wish to live in peace, they take a nom de guerre.

Paul Morand *

It is far easier to make war than to make peace.

Georges Clemenceau **

If peace cannot be maintained with honour, it is no longer peace.

John Russell **

They make a wilderness and call it peace.

Tacitus **

*Dictionnaire des citations

**A Dictionary of Political Quotations

Female genital mutilation, continued from pages 5, 6 and 7

Mrs Marie-José Boucher Camara
Deputy Secretary General,
National Assembly of Senegal

"Explaining the dangers linked to excision"

Although we have made enormous progress, the pace has been slow, because we are up against a deeply rooted tradition which can only be overcome with a large-scale information campaign to explain the dangers which women and girls face. In Senegal, the caucus of women MPs joined forces with the women's associations with a view to raising awareness of the need to abandon this practice, which can damage women's health in both the short and the long term.

Mrs Florence Aya
Member of the Nigeria House of
Representatives

"A strong commitment by leaders"

This panel discussion was very useful because it showed the importance of a strong commitment by leaders. We really need strong legislation, and opinion-leaders, ministers, and MPs must speak openly, which in turn will help to build awareness among communities. We have a great deal of respect for traditions, but excision represents violence and suffering as far as our society is concerned. One thing which struck me very much was the video. When men see how cruel it really is, no one can oppose legislation to combat this harmful tradition. We need the cooperation of MPs and members of the Executive to stamp out this custom.

Mrs Rebecca Alitwala
Deputy Speaker of the Parliament of
Uganda

"A crime against humanity"

Excision is torture. It is inhuman and it is very degrading to the girl child. It is something which we, as political leaders, must combat on behalf of the girls of our entire continent. I would like it to be declared a crime against humanity so that, wherever and whoever those criminals are, we can catch them and try them for violating human rights. The men must come on board, because the reason men give in favour of excision is that it makes women good wives. Women are forced to undergo all this suffering to protect men, but it is men who should be on the forefront of this fight, because it is waged for their benefit. Men should say that they do not want excised women. In my country, one tribe practises excision. Unfortunately, in this tribe, the Sabine, men first marry women who are excised and then abandon them and go to women who are not excised !

THE WTO KEPT IN CHECK

Even though WTO decisions are indeed taken by consensus, in practice the votes of the US and the EU carry more weight than the votes of India and Nicaragua. Although national parliaments are in fact called to ratify trade agreements, with the exception of the US Congress, they have little means of influencing negotiations. Hence the idea of reinforcing the oversight of national parliaments over the debates in the WTO. In early June, 315 MPs from all over the world adopted a statement to this effect at a meeting of the Inter-Parliamentary Union. This question is also on the agenda in Berne.

L'Hebdo (Switzerland) – 26.07.2001

IPU COMMITTED TO FIGHTING AIDS AND PROTECTING CHILDREN

The 106th Conference of the Inter-Parliamentary Union adopted on Friday in Burkina Faso a series of resolutions on HIV/AIDS control and the protection of children. The MPs in attendance adopted a resolution calling on States to combat torture and violence against children, child labour, sexual exploitation of and trafficking in children, and the use of children in armed conflicts.

For UNICEF's Regional Director for West and Central Africa, Rima Salah, "it is a comprehensive resolution which, if applied, will change the situation of children in the world"... The Conference has published a contribution of parliaments to the settlement of the situation in the occupied Arab territories and adopted a resolution condemning the recent terrorist attacks against the United States of America.

Reuter – 14.09.2001

IPU CALLS ON INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY TO LIFT ALL EMBARGOES

The 106th Conference of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) ended Saturday in Ouagadougou with an appeal to the international community to lift all "embargoes and other sanctions in the world" which hit children hardest. The IPU "strongly" urged the international community "immediately to take the necessary steps to lift the embargoes and other sanctions which have harmful effects on children in the different parts of the world"... At the close of the Conference, which brought together 141 national parliaments, including 39 African parliaments, a report prepared for submission to the UN was approved.

Agence France Presse (AFP) – 15.09.2001

IPU. PARLIAMENTARY POWWOW IN OUAGA

... Chaired, as is customary, by the Speaker of the host Parliament, in this instance, Mr. Mélégué Traoré, the 106th IPU Conference also condemned "these monstrous acts [the events which took place in the US], in keeping with [its] mission to promote the ideals of peace and security of the Inter-Parliamentary Union". This resolution was published before the three other resolutions, traditionally adopted at the final plenary sitting, which, among other things, called on "States, pharmaceutical laboratories and the scientific community to give priority to research on diseases prevalent in the developing countries, in particular HIV/AIDS", and urged governments to "give priority to human rights over commercial interests"...

Jeune Afrique l'Intelligent – 25.09.2001

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The World of Parliaments
IPU Quarterly Review is an
official publication of the
Inter-Parliamentary Union

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Web site :

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Printed at Sadag SA - France

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