

The World of Parliaments

Quarterly Review of the Inter-Parliamentary Union

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IPU supports the Israeli-Palestinian dialogue

The Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) shares the view of the Israeli Minister of Foreign Affairs, Shimon Peres, who says that there is a «ray of hope» for the negotiations between the Israelis and the Palestinians. Since the beginning of the year, there has been a growing number of meetings between leaders of both sides. After a first contact in Sweden between Shimon Peres and the Speaker of the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC), Ahmed Qorei «Abu Ala», a meeting was held in Paris between the PLC Speaker and the Speaker of the Knesset, Avraham Burg, on 23 January, under the aegis of the President of the French National Assembly, Raymond Forni.

This first step towards dialogue, saluted by the IPU, proves that the worst can still be avoided despite the violence which threatens at any moment to trigger all-out war between the two sides. A letter from the Secretary General of the IPU, Anders B. Johnsson, was delivered by the Chairman of the Committee on Middle East Questions, Yves Tavernier, MP (France), to the Speaker of the Knesset and the Speaker of the PLC, inviting them to continue their talks in Marrakech.

«I'll be there,» assured Avraham Burg. Given the explosive situation on the ground, Ahmed Qorei «Abu Ala» replied «We shall see», intimating that a Palestinian delegation would be attending the 107th Inter-Parliamentary Conference. For, he said, «MPs are very important. They are elected by the people, both sides. Therefore they represent the wishes of people for peace. We have to try to create a kind of coalition to really support the peace process rather than let it collapse». Asked whether he and Mr. Burg would be able to convince their government's leaders to resume the peace negotiations, the Speaker of the PLC was categorical. «From our side, we



From left to right: Mr. Yves Tavernier (MP, France), Chairman of the IPU Committee on Middle East Questions, Mr. Avraham Burg, President of the Knesset, Mr. Ahmed Qorei «Abu Ala», Speaker of the Palestinian Legislative Council and Mr. Raymond Forni, President of the French National Assembly.

are convinced. We are ready. Now the ball is in Mr. Sharon's court».

The Speaker of the Knesset shares this view. «We have to resume the public talks between the two peoples, as we do here, as we should do in Ramallah very soon, and we have to do our best to bring both of our leaders and both of our government's back to the table. I will do my best,» insisted Avraham Burg.

The determination shown by Mr. Burg and Mr. Qorei indicates that MPs have become key players in the initiative to bring an end to the political stalemate in the Middle East. On 10 December last year some of their Israeli and Palestinian colleagues met at the Qalandia security check point, opening the way for a resumption of the Israeli-Palestinian dialogue.

The support of MPs around the world for this rapprochement is crucial.

The Inter-Parliamentary Union, and the President of the French National Assembly are convinced of that. When asked what MPs could do specifically to help promote peace in the Middle East, Mr. Forni replied unequivocally, «Join hands. That's what we have done». That is precisely what the IPU Committee on Middle East Questions intends to do in Marrakech. ■

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Interview with Mr. Yves Tavernier, Chairman of the Committee on Middle East Questions.

«Israeli and Palestinian MPs have to talk and try, as much as possible, to influence their parliaments and through them, their leaders»

Q: You delivered a letter from the Secretary General of the IPU to the Speaker of the Knesset and the Speaker of the Palestinian Legislative Council inviting them to continue the dialogue in Marrakech. What are you expecting?

Y.T. : This invitation is the logical continuation of meetings we had with the Speaker of the Knesset and the Speaker of the Palestinian Legislative Council last June when we went there to meet with both sides and get a first-hand view of the situation. One of the conclusions of our mission was to invite the Speakers of both legislative bodies to meet, for we felt that parliamentary diplomacy was needed at a time when there was a complete stalemate between both sides. The reality of last June is, unfortunately, even more vivid today. The situation has been worsening daily and the state of war which prevails cannot give rise to any political prospects. We are all pleased that the French National Assembly made it possible to have a first official meeting of representatives of both parliaments. This is totally in line with IPU's thinking and we hope that the direct dialogue which will be initiated during the debate organised by «Le Monde diplomatique» will pave the way for the beginning of an open political solution. In order for talks to resume, there has to be mutual respect.

Q: What are you asking of Mr. Burg and Mr. Qorei?

Y.T. : That they talk and try, as much as possible, to influence their parliaments and through them, their leaders. Mr. Burg, the Speaker of the Knesset, belongs to the ruling majority in Israel. He is a member of the Labour Party, the main group within the Sharon-led majority. Of course, there are differences within this majority and one can expect the Speaker of the Knesset to do everything in his power to ensure that political options are developed. I think it is very positive that the two men have decided to meet on an official basis given the current climate. I would imagine that Mr. Qorei is here because the Israeli authorities so agreed.

Amidst all the darkness that prevails in the Middle East, the faintest glimmer of light is significant. One has to hold on to it because the solution can come only from the Israelis and the Palestinians. I wish to add that the role played by the Americans is important. It was important when there was talk of peace during President Clinton's initiatives and it is today even in the absence of such vision. The Americans have to realise that the situation in the Middle East, like the events of 11 September, requires the solidarity of the international community. Europe also has a role to play in this matter. From the political standpoint, Europe is a giant with feet of clay. It provides considerable financing and, on the global scene, it is a very great power. Yet on the issue of the Middle East, Europe is limited by contradictions and has various sensibilities to consider which are, to a great extent, the result of History and the Shoah. Hence the reason why many States feel a sense of guilt and that prevents them from taking initiatives.

Q: Given the situation on the ground, can MPs genuinely help to restore peace?

Y.T. : Our role is to help the process to succeed. With the Americans, of course. At the 106th Conference in Ouagadougou, the Inter-Parliamentary Union succeeded in voting in a unanimous resolution which was something remarkable given the circumstances and climate prevailing in the region. It is on this basis that we are continuing our work and have issued invitations to the Speaker of the Knesset and the Speaker of the Palestinian Legislative Council. Might I add that the Marrakech Conference can be very symbolic because Morocco is playing a very particular role. It is one of the first Muslim Arab countries to offer its solidarity with the Palestinians but also one of the first countries to recognise the State of Israel and maintain a very open policy. In Morocco, different communities have always co-existed and continue to do so up to the present day. ■

Editorial

The issues of the 107th Conference in Marrakech: supporting dialogue between peoples and combatting terrorism

The 107th Inter-Parliamentary Conference, organised at the invitation of the Moroccan Parliament, provides an opportunity for parliamentarians the world over to reiterate their commitment to combatting all forms of terrorism, as can be seen from the number of requests for the inclusion in the agenda of a supplementary item on this subject.

Mindful that terrorism and the fight against terrorism are sensitive issues which are matters of concern for many countries and which have global repercussions, the Marrakech Conference will seek to strengthen the cohesiveness displayed by the IPU Member Parliaments at the 106th Inter-Parliamentary Conference held in Ouagadougou last year, at the time of the tragic events of September 11th.

From all indications, this 107th Conference, which will be opened by King Mohammed VI, will break all attendance records. MPs the world over who will come to the most enchanting of the imperial cities will debate the role of parliaments in public policy in this age of globalisation and parliamentary support for the Kyoto Protocol.

The IPU's Committee on Middle East Questions, chaired by French MP Yves Tavernier due to meet in Marrakech, will strive to promote the continuation of dialogue between Israelis and Palestinians, further to the meeting which took place at the French National Assembly between the Speaker of the Knesset, Avraham Burg, and the Speaker of the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC), Ahmed Qorei «Abu Ala», under the auspices of the President of the French National Assembly, Raymond Forni.

By joining hands to salute their French counterparts, the Speaker of the Knesset, Mr. Avraham Burg, and the Speaker of the Palestinian Legislative Council, Mr. Ahmed Qorei, «Abu Ala», showed not only that peace was possible between Israelis and Palestinians, but also that parliamentary diplomacy (see page 11) was the ultimate hope of dialogue at times when government leaders cannot talk to each other.

The IPU's Committee on Human Rights of Parliamentarians, the Group of Facilitators for Cyprus and the representatives of the parties to the CSCM Process (Conference on Security and Co-operation in the Mediterranean) will also meet within the framework of the 107th Conference in Marrakech, not to mention the MPs who will attend the Meeting of Women Parliamentarians on the eve of the Conference. ■

L.B.

Members of the IPU Executive Committee visit new HQ



The members of the Executive Committee of the Inter-Parliamentary Union met in Geneva in January for their 236th session. On that occasion, they were able to observe the progress in the renovation of the Gardiol villa which will become IPU's new headquarters.

The IPU Executive Committee met for a special session in Geneva on 21 and 22 January. Its purpose in meeting at the start of the year was twofold: to take stock of the various comments made at the Council debate held in Burkina Faso on the reform of the Union, and to discuss the attempt made the previous month to secure Observer status at the United Nations in New York.

On the subject of reform, the Committee took time to scrutinize the record of the Ouagadougou special session of the Council, and concluded that while some of the suggestions undoubtedly had to be incorporated into the architecture of the reforms, the basic plans drafted in 2001 should remain the same. In other words, the IPU meetings should continue to be clustered around two annual events, one of which would have the character of a five day plenary assembly with parallel committee debates while the other would involve a shorter three day event with panel discussions and committee work.

The Executive Committee will be putting its proposals to the Council in Marrakech. Much discussion was also devoted to the matter of the request for Observer status at the United Nations. In the event, the application failed at the eleventh hour, and the Executive Committee was keen to review the reasons for the disappointing outcome and to take steps to ensure success when the matter is back on the agenda of the General Assembly in the second half of 2002.

The Committee also reviewed the extensive list of activities planned or under consideration with a wide variety of United Nations agencies, programmes and other bodies. ■

The IPU at the World Economic Forum

The IPU Secretary General, Anders B. Johnsson, was invited by the World Economic Forum in *the Informal Gathering of World Economic Leaders (IGWEL)*, the meeting of heads of State and government, senior government ministers and heads of international and regional organisations that meets during the World Economic Forum, which took place in New York this year.

Excerpts of the Secretary General's speech on Global economic governance and democracy

This year's meeting of the World Economic Forum has turned its attention to the serious democratic deficit in the way global economic governance is managed. Successive Forums have grappled with the issue and this year's meeting in New York has been no exception, but the repetitive and frequently violent protests in the streets of Genoa, Göteborg and other cities hosting major inter-governmental summits have lent renewed urgency to the debate.

A huge range of economic activities, including investment, trade and cross-border capital flows, tie the world's nations closer together. The problem is that people are increasingly aware that they are not being consulted in the decisions relating to economic issues that directly affect them, that the resulting activities are not leading to a betterment of their lives and that international cooperation and multilateral decision-making are, paradoxically, posing an ever greater threat to their interests.

Globalization and the pre-eminence of economic factors in the development of nations make it imperative to strengthen political processes and the link between citizens and their representatives. It is also crucial to reinforce the role of parliaments and their members in international cooperation. The Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) was therefore pleased to have been invited to this year's "Davos" Forum to start a dialogue on the role of parliaments in relation to global economic governance.

Parliament is made up of men and women elected by the people to represent them and express their aspirations. It is the organ of the State that allows society in all its diversity to participate in the wider political process and in the development of public policy. Parliaments embody the

sovereignty of the people and can, in all legitimacy, contribute to expressing the will of the State internationally.

At the national level, parliaments must take a more active part in setting the regulatory framework for economic activities. Through their legislative and oversight functions, parliaments must ensure that laws are adopted which reflect the needs of the people, and they must oversee the implementation by the government of agreed policies.

Through constant interaction with the citizenry - their constituents - members of parliament are well placed to understand the concerns and fears of the public, and can bring a much-needed social dimension to economic decision-making. Moreover, parliament has institutional mechanisms, such as hearings, through which civil society actors can channel their contribution to the debate.

Parliament can also play a particularly important role in relation to the work of the multilateral inter-governmental structures. A start has already been made with the growing cooperation between the United Nations and national parliaments, through the Inter-Parliamentary Union, and at the World Trade Organization through the first global parliamentary meeting on international trade organized by the IPU in Geneva last year. The IPU proposes to perform similar work in relation to the Bretton Woods institutions so that the elected representatives of the people in both lending and recipient countries can review the policies of the large financial institutions.

Progress has already been made in many countries, but much remains to be done. To be successful, this effort will also require significantly strengthening the parliamentary institution and giving it the means to carry out its legislative and oversight functions. ■

Dixit: Did you say parliamentary diplomacy?

- * «Parliamentary diplomacy above all fills a new kind of democratic need. It carries the voice of the people in a world in the process of unification.»

Mr. Raymond Forni, President of the National Assembly of France

- ** «Nowadays the world seems disoriented, incapable of finding its way. The global community is facing the new millennium without a clear vision of its future, without any vision at all. In such a period of uncertainty, humankind, perhaps now more than ever, desperately needs dialogue and co-operation. In these circumstances, our role should be essentially to consolidate co-operation and inter-parliamentary diplomacy in order to eliminate the causes of international conflicts.»

Mr. Ahmed Fathy Sorour, President of the Egyptian People's Assembly and former President of the IPU Council

- *** «Parliamentary diplomacy is the instrument through which parliaments foster

relations, assimilate knowledge, construct new operational and procedural models, help formulate general State policy, participate in democratising globalisation and commit themselves to ensuring that human rights are respected.»

Mr. Luciano Violante, MP, Italy, former President of the Chamber of Deputies

- *** «Parliamentary diplomacy is faced with two interrelated challenges, namely: the structure of the new world order and safeguarding peace - a major, constant concern.»

Mr. Miguel Angel Martínez (Spain), Member of the European Parliament and former President of the IPU Council

* *La diplomatie parlementaire*. Les Actes, L'Espace Librairie du Sénat, 2001.

** *Diplomatie parlementaire - Pour la démocratie et la coopération parlementaire*, 1997.

*** *Política exterior*, vol. XIII, 1999.

Flash

Appeal by Women MPs of Commonwealth Independent States to government leaders

Women MPs of the members of the Union of Independent States have launched an appeal to leaders, governments and parliaments to ensure equal access for women and men to all the spheres and levels of decision-making. They also encourage the nomination of greater numbers of women, including their nomination through political parties by equal representation, to run for parliament and other legislative bodies, and to compete for positions in the executive branch, in order to increase their influence on State policy.

In Memoriam

Over the past months, three eminent parliamentarians have passed away. They are: Mr. Humayun Rasheed Choudhury, Speaker of the Bangladeshi Parliament, Mr. Jagernath Lachmon, President of the National Assembly of Suriname and Mr. Lhamsuren Enebish, Speaker of the Mongolian Parliament. The President of the IPU Council and the Secretary-General of IPU have offered their condolences to the respective Parliaments.

IPU and ILO launch a handbook for parliamentarians

HOW TO COMBAT THE WORST FORMS OF CHILD LABOUR?

Child labour is a serious issue which concerns MPs the world over. On the occasion of the 107th Inter-Parliamentary Conference in Marrakech, the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) and the Moroccan parliament are organising a round table discussion on the worst forms of child labour. Her Royal Highness Princess Lalla Meriem will be in attendance. Aware that the role of lawmakers is crucial in combating this problem, IPU and the International Labour Organization (ILO) are launching a Handbook for Legislators on this occasion.

«The handbook illustrates how concerted and resolute action by various ministries and social actors working collectively, including MPs, can foster the elimination of the worst forms of child labour. Tens of millions of children are hired to do unbearable kinds of work which deprive them of their childhood and endanger their health, sometimes even their lives. ILO Convention 182 brings to the forefront the plight of children and its aim is to eradicate the worst forms of child labour», stated the Director-General of the ILO, the Chilean Juan Somavia.

«MPs play a key role in attaining this goal. As lawmakers, they can press for ratification of Convention 182, but they can also formulate policy, pass the necessary national laws, vote in appropriate budget allocations and oversee government action. The ILO and IPU are committed to ending unbearable forms of child labour. That is the least we can do for children who have already ruined their future and those who risk the same lot unless we act swiftly», said the IPU Secretary General, Anders B. Johnsson.

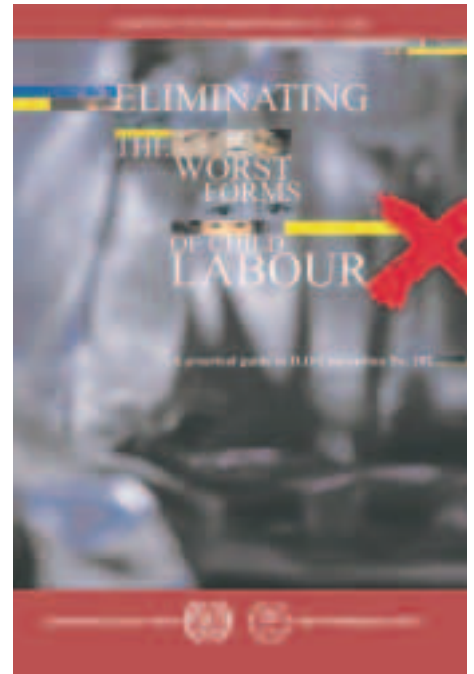
Three MPS explained the importance of this handbook, given the socio-economic dimensions of the problem.

Dr. Najma Heptulla
President of the IPU Council
Deputy Chairperson of the Indian Upper House

In some countries, sometimes, children have to work to get a meal, especially in under-developed countries, and specially in those countries which were colonised, because they have a terrible backlog of development problems. No parents want their children not to go to school and to be working in the hazardous industries. In India, for example, we have a strong law to protect children from working in hazardous industries. Members of parliaments should know what they should do and what they should not and propose suitable legislation in their parliaments and get it passed. MPs should also try to see that there should be some kind of development fund for the education, health and development of children, in the least developed countries. There should also be some kind of legislation to punish those who are abusing children not only in war, but also in some advanced countries, where some children are sexually abused. These are the things we must handle.

Mrs. Badia Skali
Member of the House of Representatives of Morocco
President of the Meeting of Women Parliamentarians of the
107th Inter-Parliamentary Conference

This handbook is one of IPU's most commendable initiatives because child labour is a critical issue, particularly for developing countries. IPU takes an interest in human rights, democracy, sustainable development and the future of our societies. Educating children is vital to constructing a future. Child labour is a scourge in several countries. It is due in part to the level of development and poverty, but the worst forms of labour cannot be tolerated at the beginning of this millennium. I refer specifically to sexual exploitation in prostitution rings and the use of children in armed conflicts. As MPs, we must strongly urge our governments to develop social policies which can offer greater access to education by making schooling compulsory and providing children with access to education. We must also help the neediest families so that their children, and girls in particular, can go to school. Labour regulations in countries where this problem exists must be respected. Laws prohibit child labour from a certain age but once appropriate measures are put in place and everything is done to ensure that those laws are respected, families will also have to respect their obligations towards their children.



Mr. Raul Lema, Member of the Bolivian Senate

Sensitising public opinion in our countries and public opinion around the world to this problem is very important. In the majority of our Third World countries, mechanisms to monitor child labour are inadequate. Not only should we be aware of abuse, but we should also pass laws to prevent it. Unless concrete measures are taken to solve this problem, our youth will be traumatised as has been the case in several countries. The handbook for legislators is very important and we should spare no effort in helping children and young people who are the future of our countries and by extension, of the world. In Bolivia, we have passed a law on appropriate treatment of children at home, at school and in their everyday life. This law prohibits activities which are harmful to their development and health. The laws passed in each country should be enforced by all sectors of society: parents, educators and those who use poor children for what I call «forced labour».

READ IN THE PRESS

IPU's Committee on Human Rights concerned about worsening situation in Colombia

The IPU Committee on Human Rights is concerned about the worsening situation in Colombia and the unpunished killing of MPs as well as the prolonged kidnapping of a Liberal Party MP who is still in the hands of the FARC, according to Juan Pablo Letelier, Vice President of the Socialist Party of Chile and re-elected Chairman of IPU's Committee on the Human Rights of Parliamentarians, who spoke to EFE. Commenting on Latin America, he said that he deplored «the dilapidated condition of the State apparatus» in Colombia where several MPs have been murdered and where the extent of impunity for these offenses is «alarming».

Letelier was critical of the fact that the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, which is negotiating a peace deal with the Bogota government, did not make a gesture of good will by releasing MP Oscar Lizcano, whom they have been holding since 5 August 2000. IPU's Committee on the Human Rights of Parliamentarians will soon be dispatching a

mission to Colombia to examine nine unsolved cases involving parliamentarians, 6 of which are assassinations, of which 5 have gone unpunished.

EFE (Spanish Press Agency) - 17 January 2002

[IPU] hopes to win release of Colombian MP

The Inter-Parliamentary Union, which last year won the release of two prominent Czechs jailed in Cuba, said on Thursday it hoped to negotiate the handover of a Colombian congressman kidnapped 18 months ago by FARC rebels.

“It has been decided to send a mission to Colombia. We will start contacts with the authorities to set a date as soon as possible to go”, IPU Secretary General Anders Johnsson told Reuters after a meeting of its human rights committee in Geneva. Johnsson said he and Juan Pablo Letelier, a Chilean MP who chairs the committee on Parliamentarians' human rights, would try to secure the release of Oscar Lizcano, abducted by Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) guerrillas.

Reuters -17 January 2002

African parliaments and the budgetary process

Transparency, efficiency and usefulness should be the basis of drawing up any national budget. After all, the budget is the government's main overall policy statement. The time has come to train MPs in public fund management. Following a training session on public finance held on 8-12 October last year and a seminar on the budgetary process on 28-30 October, Bamako will now be hosting yet another seminar. The theme of this regional event will be «Parliament and the budgetary process, including from a gender perspective». MPs from fifteen countries (out of the 20 odd listed) will be participating in this important event organised by the National Assembly and the Inter-Parliamentary Union in collaboration with UNDP and the World Bank.

L'Essor (Mali) - 21 November 2001

Statistics

Progress and setbacks for women in Parliament in 2001 : Stagnation of western democracies

The graph shows the progress and setbacks for women in Parliament, in the 36 lower or single Houses which held elections in 2001. It reflects the difference between the percentage of women in parliament after the 2001 elections, and the percentage of women in the previous legislature.

As can be seen, worldwide, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines tops the list with a gain of 18 percentage points. As for developing countries, and eastern European countries, they recorded more substantial increases in the proportion of women in national Parliaments (+15 points in Bulgaria, +11 points in Nicaragua, +7 points in Poland, Senegal, Andorra, the Philippines or Uganda) than traditional Western democracies. Surprisingly, the latter have registered little or no change in their composition in terms of women's participation, (Denmark, +0.6 points; no change for Norway) with some losses (the United Kingdom, -0.5 points or Italy, -1.7 points), even though women's presence in some of these parliaments is still among the highest worldwide (38% of women MPs in Denmark, 36,4% in Norway). The real challenge is to reach the 50% mark in terms of women's participation.

Women in the lower or single House of national parliaments for which there have been elections in 2001

Country	Percentage Women	Seats
Denmark	38.0%	68 179
Norway	36.4%	60 165
Argentina	30.7%	79 257
Bulgaria	26.3%	63 240
Australia	25.3%	38 150
Uganda	24.7%	75 304
Saint Vincent & Grenadines	22.7%	5 22
Nicaragua	20.7%	19 92
Poland	20.2%	93 460
Guyana	20.0%	13 65
Senegal	19.2%	23 120
Peru	18.3%	22 120
United Kingdom	17.9%	118 659
Philippines	17.8%	38 214
San Marino	16.7%	10 60
Trinidad and Tobago	16.7%	6 36
Andorra	14.3%	4 28
Republic of Moldova	12.9%	13 101
Chile	12.5%	15 120
Liechtenstein	12.0%	3 25
Zambia	12.0%	19 158
Singapore	11.8%	10 85
Cape Verde	11.1%	8 72
Cyprus	10.7%	6 56
Italy	9.8%	62 630
Gabon	9.2%	11 119
Thailand	9.2%	46 500
Samoa	6.1%	3 49
Albania	5.7%	8 140
Fiji Islands	5.7%	4 70
Solomon Islands	0.0%	0 50
Bangladesh	?	? 330
Honduras	?	? 128
Mauritania	?	? 81
Saint Lucia	?	? 18
Sri Lanka	?	? 225

Providing a legal framework for equality between men and women: Handbook for parliamentarians on the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and its Optional Protocol

Democracy and an equal participation of both men and women in all fields of society go hand in hand. For the IPU, the establishment of equality and a true partnership between men and women is essential to any true democracy and benefits society as a whole. «Indeed it would be folly to imagine that a society can prosper while discriminating against one half of its population. Equitable gender relations are crucial to the construction of a fair and just society,» said the IPU Secretary General.

With this in mind, the IPU has for some years now strongly promoted ratification and universal respect of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, which contains provisions protecting and promoting women's rights. More recently, its focus has included fostering support for its Optional Protocol, which provides for a system of individual and group complaints and empowers its monitoring body - the CEDAW Committee - to investigate grave or systematic violations by States party of the rights enshrined in the Convention.

It falls to Parliaments to ensure that the goals set in these instruments are indeed met in their countries, without which they would remain mere

commitments on paper. Dr. Najma Heptulla, President of the Council of the Inter-Parliamentary Union stressed that «Governments and Parliaments have to take more sustained efforts to provide for a legal framework which promotes equality in all fields».

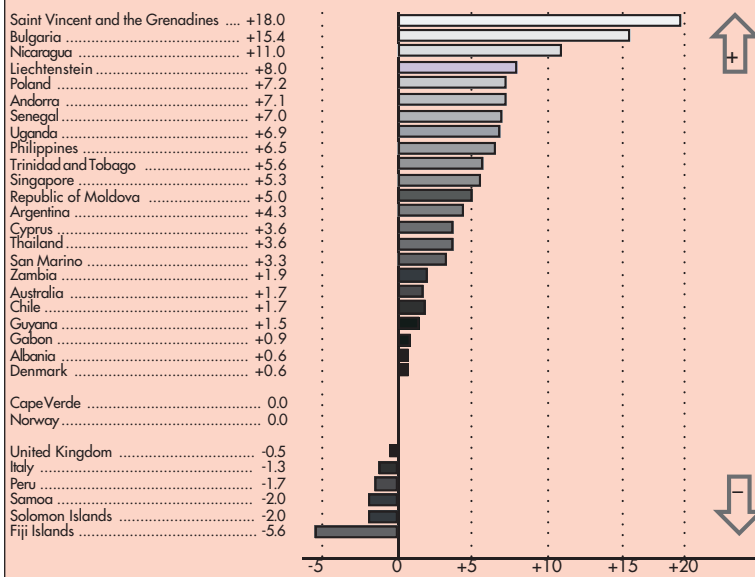
To assist Parliaments in meeting this challenge, the IPU and the United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women produced a handbook for Parliamentarians on the CEDAW and its Optional Protocol. The handbook aims at helping members of Parliament, men and women, to become familiar with the contents of the Convention and its Protocol and with its mechanisms, and at encouraging parliamentarians to take necessary measures to transpose the fundamental principles set out in the Convention into domestic law.

The handbook was produced with the financial support of the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), and will be launched in English, French and Spanish and distributed to all Parliaments, as well as to the United Nations Commission for the Status of Women, the CEDAW Committee and all other bodies and organisations dealing with the promotion of women's rights. ■

PROGRESS AND SETBACKS IN 2001

Progress and setbacks of women in the lower or single House of national parliaments for which there have been general elections in 2001

The figures reflect the difference (in percentage points) between the percentage of women in parliaments further to the 2001 elections and the previous legislature



Results of the 2001 elections in Bangladesh, Honduras, Mauritania, Saint Lucia and Sri Lanka are unavailable to date.



Historical Focus

Foundation of the IPU Secretariat

Although the yearly Inter-Parliamentary Conferences had been decided upon through the resolution of 30 June 1889, a fixed and permanent organisation was still lacking. That organisation only saw the light of day at the Rome and Bern Conferences in 1891 and 1892, and was completed in 1894 by the adoption of the Statutes.

The second Conference, which was held in London in 1890, with Lord Herschel and Philip Stanhope as Presidents, was indirectly of decisive importance for the organisation of the Union, since it was really international in character and thus proved that the idea was a feasible one. Eleven Parliaments were represented by 111 Deputies, including thirty-nine foreign members. Declarations of sympathy had been received from more than a thousand members of Parliaments. In his speech the British MP Randal Cremer described the presence of German representatives as being the most gratifying feature of the meeting.

As regards organisation, it was decided that an Inter-Parliamentary Committee should be formed in each country for the purpose of exchanging ideas and if necessary of discussing differences of opinion. The resolution of 1889 to hold a meeting every year was renewed, and Rome was chosen as the next Conference venue. A Committee of thirty members was appointed to carry this proposal into effect.

Curiously enough, however, a resolution which was not adopted was of still greater importance. At the close of the session the Danish representative, M. Bajer, suggested that a General Secretariat should be set up. We learn from Cremer that there was no time to vote on the proposal; but the Italian Committee treated it as if it had been adopted and referred to this imaginary "Resolution N° 8" as its authority for including the question of the execution of the decision on the agenda of the Rome Conference.

The Conference, which sat from 3 to 7 November 1891 under the chairmanship of Signor Biancheri, the President of the Chamber, dealt chiefly with the question of organisation... The proposals which were adopted contained the following provisions. "The annual Conference is to be convened by the Parliamentary Committee of the country chosen as the meeting-place of the Conference. Each Parliamentary Committee, moreover, is to have the faculty to convene an extraordinary Inter-Parliamentary Conference. In order to facilitate the work of these Committees a General Secretary is to be created with the duty, among other things, of proposing the questions to be brought before the Conferences. The direction of the Secretariat to be entrusted to a Secretary General nominated annually by the Conference.

The foundations for the organisation of a permanent Bureau and of a Secretariat were thus laid.



Metropolitan Hotel in London, venue of the 2nd IPU Conference

Photograph by H.M. Office of Works

Excerpts from *The Inter-Parliamentary Union from 1889 to 1939*
Librairie Payot & Cie

Parliamentary developments

CAMEROON

On 5 December 2001, the National Assembly passed a law creating an election monitoring body known as the National Elections Observatory (known by its French acronym as ONEL). Lawmakers from the ruling Cameroon People's Democratic Movement (CPDM) and their allies of the National Union for Democracy and Progress (UNDP) voted in favour while five opposition parties walked out of Parliament, claiming that this body, as proposed in the law, would not be sufficiently independent and impartial given that its members are to be appointed single-handedly by the President of the Republic, himself the leader of a political party.

COMOROS

On 23 December 2001, voters in a constitutional referendum on granting greater autonomy to each of the nation's three islands overwhelmingly approved a new Constitution. About three-quarters of the Indian Ocean archipelago's 224,000 registered voters cast ballots and 77 percent of them supported this new Constitution. It seeks to end secessionist sentiment and bring political stability by giving the individual islands greater control over their own affairs and turning the Federal Islamic Republic of Comoros into a new federation, the Union of the Comoros. A new government of national unity, which was put in place in January 2002, will oversee the transition to general elections scheduled for April 2002.

CZECH REPUBLIC

On 13 December 2001, the Chamber of Deputies approved an amendment to the country's electoral law, clearing the way for parliamentary voting in June 2002. One month later, on 17 January 2002, the Senate passed the same bill which came into force a week later, when President Vaclav Havel ratified it. The new amendment provides for 14 election districts and designates Friday and Saturday as election days instead of Sunday.

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

On 19 December 2001, the Chamber of Deputies committee that studied the bill on constitutional reform recommended it be adopted as received from the Senate. The bill would allow changes in the 1994 Constitution to allow the re-election of President Hipolito Mejia in 2004. The bill would reduce the percentage needed to win a presidential election in the first round and enable legislators to extend their terms two more years. On 23 December 2001, the bill was passed by the Congress of

the Republic. Nevertheless, on 4 January 2002, the Supreme Court of Justice annulled the law, asserting that it violated procedures established in the constitution.

EAST TIMOR

On 31 January 2002, the Constituent Assembly voted to turn itself into the country's first legislature. During its first term of office, the Parliament will comprise 88 members on an exceptional basis. Section 151 (Transformation of the Constituent Assembly) was passed with 65 in favour, 16 against and 2 abstentions after a nominal vote in which each member had to declare his position. The United Nations transitional administration in East Timor (UNTAET) has supported the plan, stating that electoral officers had warned that legislative elections would have been impossible to organise ahead of independence on 20 May 2002. Nevertheless, opponents of the move continue to call for legislative elections.

LESOTHO

On 9 January 2002, a new electoral law paving the way for general elections later in 2002 came into force. The National Assembly Election Act of 2001 was approved by the Interim Political Authority, established after controversial elections in 1998 to supervise fresh elections. The new Act introduces a «mixed member» system under which 80 MPs are to be elected under a first-past-the-post constituency-based system, with another 40 members to be elected on the basis of proportional representation. According to the bill, proportional representation seats will be allocated to parties by dividing the total votes by 120 or any number of constituencies that successfully contested elections. Officials say the new system will ensure a more equitable distribution of National Assembly seats in line with the authority's recommendations. It will also give smaller parties in Lesotho a say in national affairs. On the other hand, Lesotho's NGOs find the two ballot papers needed for the mixed member system to be confusing.

MALAYSIA

On 16 January 2002, the cabinet approved extensive changes to the election laws that would be taken to Parliament in March 2002. The changes include granting a right of appeal for election petitions and raising the deposits for candidates running for a parliamentary seat to 10,000 ringgit (\$2,631) from 5,000 ringgit.

On 24 January 2002, the country's largest opposition party dropped a ban preventing women from running for elections. The Pan-Malaysian Islamic party's ruling

body decided to allow women to run as party candidates for the next elections if they get permission from their husbands. New national elections must be held in 2004, but are widely expected to take place in 2003.

PAPUA NEW GUINEA

On 12 December 2001, the Prime Minister, Sir Mekere Morauta, announced that the National Executive Council had endorsed a recommendation to increase nomination fees for election candidates. The increases were recommended after investigations by the Constitutional Development Commission. The national election nomination fee has been raised from K1000 to K5000 (from about \$500 to almost \$2,500) to discourage an excessive number of persons contesting seats. In the Commission's view, the increasing number of candidates has caused confusion among voters, hampered effective administration, and added to the cost of the election process. The nomination fee will be refundable to successful candidates who have registered with a political party.

REPUBLIC OF CONGO

Voters went to the polls on 20 January 2002 in a constitutional referendum. According to government figures, 84.26% of voters in the referendum favoured the draft Constitution while only 11.29% voted against it. The official turnout was just under 78% of 1.6 million eligible voters despite calls by a dozen opposition parties for a boycott. The main provisions of the new Constitution are as follows:

- Direct election to a seven-year term, renewable only once, of a president who wields executive power;
- Introduction of several requirements for presidential candidates: Congolese nationality, between 40-70 years of age, and permanent residency in Congo for a period of 24 months leading up to registration;
- Introduction of a bicameral parliament with a National Assembly and Senate.

Presidential elections are due on 10 March 2002 and parliamentary elections will follow on 12 May 2002.

SIERRA LEONE

On 20 December 2001, Parliament approved a new voting system for use in legislative elections to be held in May 2002. Under this new system, parties will submit names of candidates in each electoral district and the election of party representatives will be based on the percentage of votes polled by parties in the district. It replaces a system of proportional representation under which parties were awarded seats in Parliament on the basis of the percentage of votes they polled in the various constituencies throughout the nation.

SRI LANKA

As reported in issue 4 of the World of Parliaments, on 3 October 2001, the 17th amendment to the Constitution was passed by Parliament. It establishes a Constitutional Council comprising of the Speaker, the Prime Minister, the Leader of the opposition and seven other eminent persons. This Council will, inter alia, recommend the appointment of suitable persons to key offices in the Executive, Judiciary and the Legislature, including the Chief Justice, the Judges of the Supreme Court, the Judges of the Court of Appeal, the Attorney General, the Auditor General, the Secretary-General of Parliament, the Inspector-General of Police. Moreover, the amendment sets up various commissions of an apolitical nature to be in charge of elections, public service, police, investigation of bribery and corruption, and finance.

UKRAINE

On 13 December 2001, Parliament adopted a law on the holding of mandatory television debates during presidential and parliamentary election campaigns. The new bill gives the right of participation in such debates to all candidates to the presidency of the Republic as well as to all leaders of parties and blocs and all candidates (in single-seat constituencies) contesting the parliamentary elections. The bill also obliges all countrywide television channels, irrespective of their form of ownership, to hold election debates.

UZBEKISTAN

Uzbeks went to the polls on 27 January 2002 in a referendum criticised by human rights groups. The referendum, which was approved by the Parliament in December 2001, asked voters two questions: whether to extend the five-year presidential term to seven years, and whether to introduce a two-house Parliament. Election officials said that turnout was more than 91 percent, or 12.2 million of the country's 13.2 registered voters. Of those, only 8.9 percent voted against the first measure and 6.7 percent against the second one.

ZIMBABWE

On 10 January 2002, Parliament passed a bill amending the Electoral Law. The electoral amendments contained in the General Laws Amendment Bill, were passed by a vote of 62 in favour and 49 against. The bill bans foreign and independent local election monitors and prohibits the display of election posters and leaflets without prior permission. The government says the laws (the General Laws Amendment Bill and the Public Order and Security Bill that was passed the same day) are necessary to maintain law and order before the presidential election due in March 2002.

Rwanda seminar: "Parliament, guardian of human rights"



Members of the seminar visit one site of the 1994 genocide

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Under its technical co-operation programme to assist the transitional National Assembly of Rwanda, the Inter-Parliamentary Union organised, with financial support from the UNDP and in collaboration with the Commission on National Unity and Human Rights of the transitional National Assembly of Rwanda, a seminar on «Parliament, guardian of human rights». The event was held on 22-24 January 2002 at the premises of the transitional National Assembly in Kigali.

The seminar began with a visit to three sites of the 1994 genocide, which provided a bitter reminder of the terrible impact on the country and its people of the tragic events of that year. 1994 was the year when Rwanda went back to square one, particularly with respect to human rights. The role of the transitional National Assembly, which resumed in November 1994, was crucial in finding the way to national reconstruction and the establishment of the rule of law, and it remains equally important today.

The aim of the seminar was to assist the National Assembly to do precisely that by analysing various mechanisms and strategies which would enable the parliament and its members to better promote and protect human rights. The presence of human rights experts and MPs from Burundi, Uganda, Tanzania, South Africa and Benin was instrumental in allowing participants to discover different parliamentary practices and exchange views on the subject.

The seminar focused on the role of parliament as a legislative body, including budget-related matters and on its important oversight role. Furthermore, it was stressed that in order to carry out that function well, MPs should enjoy freedom of expression and parliamentary immunity to shield them from any arbitrary measure which the Executive might decide to take. The accountability of each and every MP, as a key player on the national scene, was underscored.

The three days of lively debate and questioning bear testimony to the keen interest aroused by this seminar which has certainly shed more light on the role of MPs as guardians of human rights. ■

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