

The World of Parliaments

Quarterly Review of the Inter-Parliamentary Union

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Special guest:

**The Rt. Hon. Pier Ferdinando Casini,
President of the Italian Chamber of Deputies**

"Parliamentary diplomacy is changing gear"



Mr. Pier Ferdinando Casini, President of the Italian Chamber of Deputies.

Q.: Italy is strongly committed to combating world hunger. The situation has given rise to great concern since the last FAO summit in Rome. What do you think can be done?

Pier Ferdinando Casini: We cannot deny that the overall picture is disappointing. Governments are reluctant to take decisions that might be misinterpreted by public opinion. It's easy enough to say, "let's help the poor countries", but much more difficult to actually do anything about it. For

example, Europe is trying to convince the drug producers in Colombia that their coca plantations have to be destroyed; but at the same time we are closing off our rich markets to Latin America's agricultural products, to keep our own farmers happy. And this is only one of many contradictions. But we are moving forward. Following 11 September the war against terrorism has become a sacrosanct priority, yet we must not lose sight of North-South relations - relations between the rich and the poor. We are deceiving ourselves if we imagine that we can build a better and more peaceful world without addressing this issue.

Q.: Should the parliaments be more closely involved?

P.C.: Parliaments must constantly scrutinise what their governments are doing. They have an extremely important function to perform, not only because of the enormous development of parliamentary diplomacy at the present time, and the new visibility of the Inter-Parliamentary Union, but also because they represent all the political forces in the country. Governments change, but by their very nature Parliaments remain everybody's home, and this is why they must ensure that their governments discuss these problems, which are everybody's business.

Q.: But can we really succeed?

P.C.: We must! It is not a matter of charity or philanthropy or a mere rhetorical exercise. I hope that politics in the
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future will not be built on mere pragmatism, without ideals. The problems raised at the latest FAO Summit were not only worthy of debate on moral grounds - discussing them is also in the interests of the wealthy countries, which would be very short-sighted if they were unable to work to establish a global balance. It is natural for the weak to appeal to the powerful: when illegal immigrants land by the thousand on Europe's shores, Europe and European public opinion must look beyond mere immigration issues or the problems of Africa. Seeing the issue from that point of view alone will never enable us to understand the complexity of the world.

Q.: *Is there really such a thing as a right to food, with all that this entails?*

P.C.: Of course there is. But saying as much is little more than futile rhetoric if we are incapable of distributing food to the hungry. The rich countries must help the poor ones, firstly at the local level, because as the FAO Director-General, Jacques Diouf, put it, it is at the local level that we must teach people to fish instead of giving them fish to eat. I also think that a multiracial, multi-ethnic and multifair society of the kind we already have in the West has to stand up to fresh outbreaks of xenophobia and racism. We have to combat corruption, waste and terrorism.

Q.: *You mentioned the Inter-Parliamentary Union. How do you see the IPU's role in terms of international co-operation?*

P.C.: Parliamentary diplomacy is changing gear. In the European countries, as in the rest of the world, there has been a huge revival of inter-parliamentary initiatives. Bilateral contacts are important, but there also have to be multilateral fora where parliamentarians can meet. Indeed, I believe that the initiatives taken by parliaments

and by the IPU may run the risk of duplication. In the Italian Parliament, for example, there are associations of parliamentarians that have signed agreements with associations from other Parliaments, and at the same time there are friendship groups within the framework of the Inter-Parliamentary Union. I think that the IPU should become the world organisation of Parliaments. All of us should be committed to fostering its development, both by increasing the number of its members and by enhancing its importance. This "forum" for parliamentary diplomacy, which brings together representatives of Parliaments from all over the world, is also vitally important to the United Nations.

Q.: *You are also deeply involved with the question of the Middle East. What do you think about it now, considering the situation there?*

P.C.: For us, the Middle East is crucial. I recently received Avraham Burg, the Speaker of the Knesset, and I have also been in contact with Ahmed Qorei "Abu Ala", the Speaker of the Palestinian Legislative Council. We want the State of Israel to be able to live in peace and in security, but we also want to see a future for the thousands of desperate Palestinians who have the right to a state of their own. The Italian Parliament has unanimously voted a motion on this issue. To be absolutely clear, the problem will not be solved by violence and terrorist attacks, or by incursions by the Israeli army. The only key to progress is returning to the negotiating table and urging the Palestinian Authority to take a stand against terrorism.

Q.: *Can the IPU help in this respect?*

P.C.: The IPU is certainly one of the best possible places in which to work to achieve this goal. ■

MPs gathered in Rome committed to promoting the right to food

The Speaker of the Italian Chamber of Deputies, Mr. Pier Ferdinando Casini, addressed the FAO World Summit on behalf of the Inter-Parliamentary Union to convey the message from nearly 200 MPs from 80 countries that they are firmly committed to fighting hunger more effectively.

"The Inter-Parliamentary Union, which I have the honour of representing today, is firmly convinced that the commitment undertaken by States during the 1996 World Food Summit, to significantly reduce hunger and poverty by 2015, should necessarily involve national legislative institutions", said Mr. Casini. He explained that the participants at the parliamentary meeting held on Tuesday 11 June in Rome, and organized by the Italian Inter-Parliamentary Group and the IPU, expressed their preoccupation that, "five years

Parliamentary meeting in Rome.
From left to right:
Mrs. Mary Robinson, United Nations High
Commissioner for Human Rights;
Mr. Antonio Martino, President of the Italian
Inter-Parliamentary Group
and Italian Minister of Defense;
Mr. Marcello Pera, President of the Italian Senate;
Mr. Pier Ferdinando Casini, President of the Italian
Chamber of Deputies and
Mr. Anders B. Johnsson, IPU Secretary General.



after the Summit, the declared goal of halving the number of undernourished people in the world by 2015 appears even more distant than ever. Only a few nations have taken purposeful measures on the scale required to meet the goal. The number of undernourished people remains unacceptably high and the rate at which their numbers are being reduced is unacceptably low”, insisted Mr. Casini.

“At its recent session in Marrakech, the Inter-Parliamentary Union approved a special message to the Summit”, added Mr. Casini, pointing out that IPU member parliaments consider it particularly important to reaffirm the right of every person to adequate food and to be free from hunger; to take urgent action, nationally and internationally, to ensure that the target of halving the number of undernourished people by 2015 is attained; to pursue, in the context of multi-lateral trade negotiations on agriculture, the establishment of terms and conditions which are conducive to improving food security.

Finally, Mr. Casini mentioned that “Paragraph 10 of the Declaration of the *World Food Summit: Five years later* calls on States to establish a set of guidelines for the progressive realisation of the right to adequate food for all. We are convinced that the guidelines should stress the right to food as being binding and suggest concrete modalities for their implementation. They should also specify which obligations must be assumed by States, at national and international level, without overlooking the responsibility and the contribution of other intervening parties to make their contribution, including the international organisations and - possibly - the private sector”. He concluded by saying that there was a need for all to show enthusiastic commitment to the ambitious and compelling objectives of the World Food Summit. Parliaments and the IPU would do their utmost in order to offer the most wretched of the earth the prospect of a life of hope and dignity. ■



Photo: Luvardp/Italian Chamber of Deputies

Editorial

Democracy, you said?

As the President of the Italian Chamber of Deputies, Mr. Pier Ferdinando Casini, states in our columns, "parliamentary diplomacy is changing gear". And there is no gainsaying that from Rome – *World Food Summit – Five years later* – to Johannesburg – *Summit on Sustainable Development* and New York – *Summit on Children*, legislators have never worked so hard to find solutions to the problems facing citizens throughout the world.

The notion of parliamentary diplomacy implies the democratisation of institutions, which means greater justice. So why this bitter analysis which the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) sums up in its *Human Development Report 2002*: "Economically, politically and technologically, the world has never seemed more free - or more unjust"?

It may relate to the fact that citizens, whatever their political persuasions and geographical origins, all seem to feel that while they enjoy greater political freedom – even though, following the September 11 attacks, the fight against terrorism raises a few questions – they have lost control over their destiny, because the major decisions that affect their daily lives are taken elsewhere than in the parliaments that represent them, in places where their voices are not heard. It is therefore no coincidence that UNDP recommends strengthening democratic practices in international institutions.

So what can be done to humanise democracy and democratise the international institutions that govern people's lives? The answer to this question lies partly with parliaments, which are fighting for more leverage on the international political scene and for closer cooperation with the United Nations and the international financial institutions. Democracy, you said? ■

L.B.

Mr Antonio Martino, President of the Italian Inter-Parliamentary Group and Minister of Defence states:

"We need to deal with the underlying causes of hunger in the world"

Q: How do you see the outcome of the parliamentary meeting in Rome?

Antonio Martino: The outcome is positive. It is also positive that world hunger is being discussed at all. The problem has very precise causes and concerns specific parts of the world. If we tackle those causes, we can hope for good results. On the other hand, if we work from the hypothesis that hunger is a global problem, we won't get anywhere.

Q: Should parliaments be associated with the decisions taken at the major summits and in particular at the G8 Summit?

A.M.: My answer to that is a personal one which others may not share. The G8 is not the government of the world. On that understanding, the positions of those that contest the G8 and those that support it are only of relative importance. The G8 provides an opportunity for the leaders of eight powerful countries to meet for talks on subjects of general interest. It is more a forum for discussion than for taking decisions. That being the

case, parliaments do not need to be associated with it. On the other hand, if the G8 were to become a forum for specific decisions, parliaments would have a rightful place in it.

Q: As President of the Italian Inter-Parliamentary Group, what are your feelings about the reform of the Inter-Parliamentary Union?

A.M.: To my mind, one thing is important: at IPU conferences, we should try to be very specific in selecting subjects for debate so that we can take on concrete problems and discuss practical solutions. Because when the debates have no specific theme, everybody addresses their own interests and the meeting loses its focus. This is especially true of the general debate on the political, economic and social situation in the world, which is of little interest to anybody. To make the debates more lively, we could circulate a document prepared by an expert in advance of each session, which would provide a frame of reference for the debate. The meetings would thus become more trenchant.

They said:

Two experts also participated in the parliamentary meeting organized by the Italian Inter-Parliamentary Group and the IPU and attended by 10 Speakers of Parliament: Mr. Jean Ziegler, UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, and Mr. Jeffrey Sachs, Director of the Center for International Development at Harvard University.

Mr Jean Ziegler, UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food

"Parliaments – the cornerstone of the right to food"

for merely adopting a law enshrining the right to food is not enough. With a framework law, you have to start by drawing up a list of all existing laws in a given country, in order to arrive at an overall picture of laws that are negative and can infringe upon the right to land and water, in violation of the right to food. We need to take a number of positive steps which have yielded immediate benefits in practice, even in the poorest countries.

Q: What can parliaments do to combat hunger in the world?

J.Z.: I am optimistic. It is parliaments that will supply the support, assistance and solidarity we need to safeguard this new right. The right to food exists henceforth. On the international level, it is recognised as a human right, on a par with civil and political rights. Now, the real battle is to make this right legally enforceable, i.e. to ensure that the groups of men and women affected by this scourge or individual persons may turn to national and international legal bodies to secure effective access to land – via land reform – and access to an income that enables them to purchase the foodstuffs they need to live. There is also a need for protection against multinationals, which privatise water and sell drinking water at far too high a price, as is the case at present in several cities in Brazil. The right to food comprises a wealth of aspects as far as enforceability is concerned. Enforceability means law. And it is parliaments which make the laws. Here in Rome, the forum of parliamentarians is perhaps more important than the FAO meeting because it is parliamentarians who will now have to take adequate legislative measures to make the right to food enforceable in court.

Q: Are parliaments prepared to do this?

J.Z.: Most of the MPs here today come from large democracies based, according to Montesquieu, on the system of separation of powers. We know that international negotiation on a State-to-State level is a matter for the Executive, which implies that parliaments are shut out of international negotiations. A new round of negotiations is due to start at the World Trade Organization (WTO). It will last for several years and is intended to complete the trade liberalization process and ensure universal acceptance of patents. The ensuing decisions will have a very tangible impact on the fate of hundreds of millions of people throughout the world. What will happen if MPs are shut out of these negotiations and if the WTO fails to recognise the right to food? Some European and developing countries feel that market liberalization is a must, provided that food sovereignty is guaranteed. This implies that markets can only be liberalized if food self-sufficiency is complete and guaranteed. Yet the only way to meet this food security condition, for which the non-governmental organisations and the social movements present here in Rome are pushing, is for parliaments to force their governments to include it in their negotiations with the WTO. Accordingly, parliaments are the cornerstone of the fight for the right to food.

Q: What must be done to support the right to food?

Jean Ziegler: To make the right to food enforceable in the courts, we need a framework law, as suggested by Mrs. Robinson, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. The question is a complex one,

Mr Jeffrey Sachs, Director of the Center for International Development at Harvard University

"True partnership from rich to poor countries"

governments in each of the countries adopt the international goals - the Millennium goals, the development goals, the goals of this World Food Summit - and put in place the national policies that can make them real. For example, in the rich countries, parliamentarians have to help increase international financial support for the poorest countries of the world. In the poorer countries, parliamentarians have a major role in ensuring that the domestic policy framework supports openness, transparency, democracy, human rights and the commitment to the social challenges of health, education, agricultural productivity and elimination of hunger. This is a partnership that must involve all countries of the world and therefore - almost by definition - all parliaments of the world.

Q: How do you explain the lack of political will?

J.S.: I think that there is a misperception in many rich countries that the problems either are unsolvable or will eventually just go away. Neither is true. These problems are solvable but they won't solve themselves without action and they cannot solve themselves just within the poor countries. It requires true partnership from rich to poor beyond words, because words are cheap, words are easy. I am talking about dollars, euros, real financing to help solve these problems. And I think that when it is better understood in the rich countries that more money tied to better policies are both necessary, and that the amounts of financial help that are needed are larger than what we have now but not so large as to cripple any rich economy (because I am talking about very small amounts of money relative to the great incomes of the rich countries), then we will get more international support.

Q: Is food a right?

J.S.: Of course, food is a right in the sense that when people don't have enough food, they die. And the right to life is the most basic right. In this sense, when we see famine or the risk of mass famine as we do right now in southern Africa, the world has to respond, not as a matter of right and wrong but as a matter of international human rights standards. It should react fast because bringing food support when it is too late does not do any good, the people are already dead. And when we face multiple crises as we do in Africa where there is drought and hunger and massive disease problems, then the need for adequate help and attention is of course even more urgent.

Q: What would you recommend that parliaments do in order to fight hunger?

Jeffrey Sachs: I think that Parliament, as the legislative force in all of the countries of the world, has an enormous role in making sure that the

What can parliaments do to combat hunger in the world?

The views of three MPs present at the Rome meeting

Ms Marthe Amon Ago, First Vice-President of the National Assembly of Côte d'Ivoire

"Parliamentarians must be empowered to help the people"

Marthe Amon Ago: Parliaments can do a great deal, as the people's elected representatives are persons well suited to taking the people in hand. As they travel to the most remote villages, MPs are aware of everything that is going on. MPs can be educated; they must be given the means to follow things up, to create associations, to inform women's and children's cooperatives as well as people out of work.

Q: In practical terms, are you asking them to be more active, for example by trying to convince governments to take action?

M.A.A.: You know, in our country, for example, MPs do not have much chance, institutionally speaking, of influencing the government, because they cannot overthrow the government. We live in a presidential system, so MPs are not able to act on governments. What we are asking is for international organisations to channel funding directly to Parliament, for example, to enable MPs to monitor the use of certain credits. Let's say that a group of young people wish to set up a small agricultural cooperative. Even if the operation only costs a thousand euros, they are unable to get under way for lack of funds. They turn to parliamentarians because they see the latter as being close to the people. Yet parliamentarians do not have the means to assist them. If aid could be provided in this respect, it would be very useful indeed.

Mr. Rafael Moreno, Chilean MP

"Parliaments must reflect what citizens feel"

They must reflect what the citizens we represent feel, the truth of those who elect us, rather than passing on the rhetoric of governments. What are our voters looking for? Work and markets for their products. They want us to understand the consequences of globalisation and the displacement of populations from their place of origin. For there is a real gap between what governments say and reality. The bulk of those suffering from hunger come from rural areas, and those who go hungry in the cities go hungry because they have abandoned the rural sector. So we need a more practical policy. For example, how can we come to an agreement with the US Government when it grants more than US\$ 125 billion worth of subsidies to its farmers over a five-year period? What does such an agreement mean for Chilean producers? Nothing. It merely means that we must lower our customs duties, open up our borders and depopulate our agriculture, all this to depend on the surplus-generating agriculture of other countries which are not poor countries.

Ms. Julia Valenzuela Cuellar, Member of the Congress of the Republic of Peru

"Parliamentarians must pass laws which benefit the public"

Parliamentarians have a very important mission, a very serious commitment towards our voters, in the light of the realities in our respective countries. We must take legislative initiatives which reflect the people's needs and legislate accordingly. We must do so in cooperation with the European Union and the rich countries. One hears much talk of combating violence and protecting human rights, but this has become mere rhetoric. Citizens no longer believe in such fine-sounding words. What the people and families need is for their leaders and their representatives in parliament to act to represent them, to adopt laws that benefit the general public. It is pointless to adopt too many laws that do not serve the interests of all citizens. We parliamentarians must check corruption, combat drug trafficking, narcoterrorism, prostitution and trafficking in the girl child, domestic violence, and child abuse, which is constantly growing within the home itself. We are taking remedial action, e.g. by setting up reception centres in an attempt to resolve this problem. Of course, we have NGOs and other institutions that are active in this field, but they operate on an isolated basis. What we need is access to the instruments and means to work together to face this new form of corruption, which is unwholesome for the public.

Committee on Human Rights of Parliamentarians to celebrate its 25th anniversary

The Committee on the Human Rights of Parliamentarians, created by the IPU 25 years ago, held its 98th session in Geneva, from 24 to 28 June 2002. The five members of the Committee as well as the leader of the opposition in Togo explain the importance of this mechanism created by the world organisation of parliaments.



Photo: ST/IPU

Members of the IPU Committee on the Human Rights of Parliamentarians. From left to right: Mr. Mahinda Samarasinghe, Mrs. Ann Clwyd, Mr. Juan Pablo Letelier, Mrs. Veronika Nedvedova and Mr. Mahamane Ousmane.

Mr Juan Pablo Letelier (Chile),
Vice-President of the Chilean Parliament,
President of the Committee on the Human
Rights of Parliamentarians

"The IPU and its Committee help stop human rights violations"

The IPU is a very important international organisation, for it is the international body bringing together virtually all national parliaments. This institution and its Human Rights Committee have proven their worth. Through their specific mechanisms and thanks to their public and confidential procedures, the IPU and its Committee have in many cases helped to stop violations of the human rights of parliamentarians and to increase awareness in parliaments as to how to defend MPs. Our Committee also urges representatives of IPU member parliaments to take urgent action in defence of parliamentarians all around the globe when their lives are endangered or their rights threatened.

Mr. Mahinda Samarasinghe,
Minister of Labour of Sri Lanka,
Vice-President of the Committee on the
Human Rights of Parliamentarians

"A key factor for democracy"

Safeguarding the human rights of parliamentarians is the very basis of democracy, for parliamentarians are the legislators who put in place the legal framework required for any democracy and who see to it that the laws they adopt are actually implemented. Working to ensure that parliamentarians enjoy freedom of speech without fear of retaliation as they perform their duties and are able to exercise fully their fundamental freedoms is essential for democracy itself, for safeguarding the human rights of parliamentarians means safeguarding the rights of all citizens and, in the final analysis, the institution of parliament itself and with it democracy! In this connection, appropriate legislation can have an impact on the lives of citizens in their respective countries. This helps us to appreciate the key role played by the Committee when it makes every possible effort to ensure that MPs can simply do their jobs.

Mrs. Ann Clwyd,
MP United Kingdom, Member of
the Committee on the Human
Rights of Parliamentarians

"You can see some evidence of its success"

You can see some evidence of its success. I have not been a member for long but I have seen how the influence of this Committee has managed to assist members of parliament in trouble all over the world through its procedures. When you can assist people, elected representatives like ourselves, to have the freedom that we have ourselves, I think this is a very important activity. The procedures have proved to be good procedures. And they have meant that people have been released from jail, from exile on occasion. Members of parliament talk a lot, but this is one case where talk leads to action.

Mrs. Veronika Nedvedova,
MP Czech Republic,
Member of the Committee on the Human
Rights of Parliamentarians

"We have to help wherever MPs' human rights are violated"

The Committee plays an important role in safeguarding parliamentary democracy. Each MP is a part of this, for violations of the human rights of parliamentarians put democracy in danger. The Czech Republic could name a lot of sad examples of this kind taken from its history of a totalitarian regime. Flouting human rights puts any democracy in danger. Flouting the human rights of parliamentarians is a direct attack on democracy. As a member of the Czech Parliament and a citizen of a country which has known a totalitarian regime, I could mention many examples from sad memory. Democracy cannot be taken for granted, we must act, to the limits of our abilities, wherever violations of MPs' human rights are committed, inter alia by using parliamentary diplomacy. This Committee, which knows how to employ parliamentary diplomacy at the right moment, is a good tool for defending the human rights of parliamentarians, and we must make extensive use of it.

Mr. Yawovi Agboyibo, lawyer, Leader of the opposition in Togo, Former member of the Committee on the Human Rights of Parliamentarians

"Without the IPU's Committee on the Human Rights of Parliamentarians, the situation would be disastrous"

Q: *The IPU organised a seminar on relations between majority and minority parties in parliament. Do you feel that the opposition is more present today in African political life?*

Yawovi Agboyibo: As far as I am concerned, and given a number of practices in countries with which I am familiar, I would say that this is very difficult. Let me take my country as an example. The regime in power – and what I say for Togo holds true for other African countries – is not prepared to accept the opposition, especially the parliamentary opposition, as something normal. This is not the first time that we have a single-party Assembly. We have 81 MPs, all of whom side with the government. And this type of anomalous situation is not specific to Togo – you can find it in several African countries. In some African countries, where the opposition is represented in Parliament, its real impact is unfortunately very limited. There are a few exceptions, such as Benin, where the parliamentary opposition wields real power and makes its voice heard. And I am convinced that it does positive and constructive work. But in the majority of African countries today, the opposition has a very hard time expressing its views.

Q: *So seminars like the one the IPU organised in Libreville are necessary...*

Y.A.: Yes. I attended the one in Libreville. This type of seminar builds awareness both among the government and among the opposition. I can assure you that it has had an extremely positive impact in my country. This is also true for other African countries. In Libreville, our discussions focused on the adoption of a model set of statutes for the opposition. These statutes have been approved, and now the opposition parties have to make sure that they become a reality.

Q: *The IPU set up the Committee on the Human Rights of Parliamentarians. Do you think that there is greater respect for the human rights of parliamentarians in Africa today or that, on the contrary, such rights are increasingly flouted?*

Y.A.: The context is not easy. In countries moving towards democratisation, there is very strong resistance when it comes to respect for MPs' rights. I continue to think that, were it not for IPU and its mechanism, the Committee on the Human Rights of Parliamentarians, the situation would be disastrous. My case illustrates this perfectly! If I am here in Geneva today, it is above all to express my gratitude for IPU's tremendous role in securing my release. I can assure you that without the pressure brought to bear by the Committee and in particular the prospect of what was going to happen in Marrakech, those in power in Togo would have never released me. It is up to us to make the most of the mechanisms available to MPs. Unfortunately, the circulation of information about cases involving such violations sometimes leaves something to be desired. Despite the confidentiality of the cases, we must from time to time find ways of publicising the IPU's efforts to ensure protection of MPs' rights.

Mr. Mahamane Ousmane,
Speaker of the National Assembly of Niger, Member of the Committee on the Human Rights of Parliamentarians

"The Committee can have a snowball effect"

As parliamentarians are elected officials who enjoy the trust of the peoples who have appointed them, it is important that, as such, they enjoy the full range of immunities and prerogatives that are attached to their status of representatives of the peoples. It is therefore essential that institutions like the Committee on the Human Rights of Parliamentarians see to it that parliamentarians are able to enjoy their rights and privileges. If this is not the case, then we are all headed for disaster, for if an MP's human rights can be violated with impunity, what will become of the ordinary citizen who has elected him, who has placed his faith in him and who is relying on him to defend his rights – this citizen who is counting on the parliamentarian he elected to pass laws and oversee the action of the government? It is therefore extremely important that the Committee on the Human Rights of Parliamentarians not only has sufficient means to carry out its mission effectively but also that its action enjoys good visibility, as this favours the promotion of these values which have now become universal: respect for the rule of law, respect for democracy and respect for the human rights of all citizens. The key to promoting these values is very effective action by the Committee, because this will have a snowball effect.

RESOLUTION OF THE SOCIALIST INTERNATIONAL ON PARTICIPATION OF POLITICAL PARTIES AND PARLIAMENTARIANS

At its last meeting, held in Casablanca, the Socialist International (SI) adopted the following resolution:

Shaping globalisation also means influencing global developments more politically and democratically. The participation of political parties and parliamentarians is essential in global political decision-making processes.

This requires concrete actions and measures:

1. Participation of parliamentarians

1.1 On a global level today, parliamentarians cooperate in the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU). The IPU has to have more institutionalised authority within the United Nations system. The Socialist International considers the strengthening of a global parliamentary dimension essential to the international decision-making processes in the 21st century and invites the IPU and the UN to advance with concrete initiatives in this sense.

1.2 Parliamentarians should participate in delegations of UN member states to UN Conferences.

2. Participation of political parties

International organisations of parties should have a special status in the United Nations system, different from NGO status.

3. The Socialist International:

- Will hold meetings in connection with the UN General Assembly and other Global Conferences.
- Will establish a Committee on the UN.

A country's budget must take gender equality into consideration



Photo: Joseph Muegg

Participants to the Seminar "Parliament and the budgetary process, including from the gender perspective", Manila (Philippines), 23-25 July 2002.

Russian Federation and Sri Lanka: Mr. José de Valencia Jr., Speaker of the House of Representatives of the Philippines, Mr. Mark Malloch Brown, UNDP Administrator (who was in Manila for the world launching of the Human Development Report 2002, prepared with input from the IPU), Mr. Rick Stapenhurst, representing the World Bank Institute, and Mr. Martin Chungong, representing the IPU Secretary General.

In his final report, Philippines Senator Ramon B. Magsaysay Jr. stressed that training parliamentary staff and Chairs of committees in gender analysis of policies and budgets was essential. "This can be done at regional level using the available expertise and the services of a global institution such as the IPU", he concluded.

The Manila seminar is part of a series of regional meetings which the IPU has organised for legislators over the past two years. The world organisation of parliaments intends to use these events to make law-makers aware of the role that Parliament plays and must play in the budget process as a whole and urges them to reflect on ways of incorporating the concerns of men and women in this process in an egalitarian manner, so that all decisions taken, be it at the level of parliament or at the level of government, give equal consideration to the concerns of both genders.

Previous seminars were held in Nairobi (Kenya, 2000) and Bamako (Mali, 2001). ■

"It is essential to strengthen the capacity of parliamentarians and parliamentary staff to analyse the budget, scrutinize relevant reports and understand general economic issues, including from a gender perspective". This is one of the conclusions of the seminar entitled *Parliament and the budgetary process, including from the gender perspective*, which took place in Manila from 23 to 25 July 2002.

Organised by the Inter-Parliamentary Union and the Congress of the Philippines, with the support of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the World Bank Institute, the event was opened by the President of the Senate of the Philippines, Mr. Franklin M. Drillon, in the presence of the President of the Parliament of East Timor, Mr. Francisco Guterres "Lu-Olo". At the inaugural ceremony, the following personalities addressed delegates from the parliaments of the ASEAN area (South-East Asia), joined by their counterparts from China, the



Photo: Alex Nuevaesparta

Mr. Francisco Guterres "Lu-Olo",
President of the Parliament of East Timor

In the words of the President of the Parliament of East Timor: "The task before us is beset with difficulties"

For the first time since the country became independent, a parliamentary delegation from East Timor took part in a meeting of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), namely the regional workshop on *Parliament and the budgetary process, including from the gender perspective*, which was held in Manila (Philippines) in July 2002. The President of the Parliament of East Timor, Mr. Francisco Guterres "Lu-Olo", who led the delegation, summed up the priorities of the world's youngest parliament.

Q: This is the first time that a delegation from East Timor has attended an inter-parliamentary seminar. What does this mean for you?

Mr. Francisco Guterres "Lu-Olo": This is indeed the first time that a parliamentary delegation from our country is taking part in an inter-parliamentary seminar. This is an important event for us, the inhabitants of East Timor, in particular for the delegation representing us. As you know, East Timor gained its independence less than three months ago, after a long struggle for self-determination. Our infrastructure was completely destroyed. These difficulties represent a major challenge. We are now entering the rebuilding phase in our country, which

calls for a strong, courageous and effective government capable of providing the good governance to which our fellow citizens now aspire. And our presence at this forum, albeit modest, has enabled us to benefit from the experience of our neighbours which have also sent delegations. We have been quite impressed by the quality of the presentations delivered by the keynote speakers. All this has been very useful for our delegation.

Q: What are the main priorities of the new Parliament of East Timor?

F.G. L.O.: East Timor is a small country with a people who are just as modest but who aspire to the grandeur of its sovereignty. The National Parliament represents it in conformity with the Constitution and the Law. Nothing could be possible if the National Parliament were to pass legislation against the aspirations of the people. Hence the need for legislation that is as coherent as possible.

Q: What are the main tasks before the parliamentarians of East Timor?

F.G. L.O.: The task before us is beset with difficulties. The most immediate one is the need to improve the vocational and technical training of the parliamentary staff. Our facilities are in satisfactory condition, but not for plenary sessions. We also lack annexes where standing committees can work. All we have are a few prefabricated buildings for the secretariat of the National Parliament, along with other basic equipment. Despite all these difficulties, parliamentarians are determined to overcome the obstacles. ■

British MPs support cooperation between IPU and financial institutions

The governing Council of the IPU is holding its 171st session and Special Session in Geneva in September. The main theme of the Special Session being *Financing for Development*, we asked two British MPs for their comments on the IPU's actions aimed at strengthening cooperation with financial institutions.

Q: Can the IPU play a role when it comes to cooperating with financial institutions?

Mr. John Austin, Chairman of the British Inter-Parliamentary Group

The principal responsibility of MPs is to represent their people, and increasingly decisions in a globalised economy are taken not just by governments but by international organizations which are outside the parliamentary process. It is right that the IPU is seeking to find some way of engaging with organizations like the World Bank or the World Trade Organization, as well as the inter-governmental agencies like the United Nations and its agencies, so that parliamentarians can begin to engage with the organizations where decisions are made. I am one of those parliamentarians who believes that the influence that we wield within the European Union in order to agree policies in Europe can actually be a more powerful voice within organizations like the WTO.

Mr. John Wilkinson, British MP

I am a British parliamentarian. I think we have a particular difficulty in as much as for the United Kingdom, as a member country of the European Union, our trade policy is in essence decided for us by the European Union. So as British national parliamentarians we don't have the direct input into the policy-making process, that would be healthy, and we have to do it at one remove. First by pressure on our Government through the Council of Ministers so that sensible policies can be pursued, and intergovernmentally through the Union itself and through the World Trade Organization. Any enhanced dialogue that can be secured with these bodies is thoroughly healthy. I am pleased that the Inter-Parliamentary Union is working to bring that about - in particular with the World Trade Organization - and I think that can only be for the good.

Q: The United Kingdom is one of the co-founders of the IPU and the British Parliament is holding a major conference in 2004. How would you assess the importance of this conference?

Mr. John Austin: It is important for us because we were co-founders of the IPU but I don't think we are so arrogant that we believe we can tell the rest of the world how to organize their democracy or run their parliaments. We are going through a very substantial period of change ourselves within our own democracy with the devolution of power to regional and national assemblies. And indeed, in reforming and changing the procedures in our own Parliament, including fundamental change with regard to the second chamber of our Parliament, I think we still have a lot to offer to other democracies but I think we also have much to learn from them.



From left to right: Mr. Anders B. Johnsson, IPU Secretary General; Mr. John Wilkinson and Mr. John Austin, British MPs; Miss Christine Pintat, former IPU Assistant Secretary General and Mr. Kenneth Courtenay, Secretary General of the British Inter-Parliamentary Group.

Mr. John Wilkinson: I strongly agree that we have a great deal to learn and it is thoroughly healthy, at a time when in our own country there is some apprehension that parliamentary scrutiny and control of the Executive may be becoming less effective, that we share with colleague parliamentarians in a very public way in our capital city, our mutual interest in making parliament as an institution work. As John said, we have an immense amount to learn. As we are going through a process of change and reform in the United Kingdom other parliamentarians will be very interested to see what we have achieved so far and where our policy of reform is leading, particularly with regard to devolution to the component parts of the United Kingdom. Regional government is now being talked about in the United Kingdom as well. So, it looks as if it is going to be a very timely and fascinating conference.

Mr. John Austin: I am in agreement with John in terms of the role of parliamentarians in the scrutiny of the Executive. I think we will both concur from different political perspectives that, under the previous Conservative governments and the present Labour government, we have seen a concentration of power in the hands of the Executive and a diminution of the scrutiny role of parliament. In the United Kingdom it is interesting to see that we have devolved some powers to national assemblies in Wales and in Scotland and, in some areas, the new legislatures have given greater powers to the parliamentarians over the Executive than we have in Westminster. ■

MPs pledge action beyond the World Summit on Sustainable Development

The 312 MPs from 62 countries and several regional assemblies, gathered by the Inter-Parliamentary Union and the South African Parliament for two days in Johannesburg, pledged to “review in [their] respective parliaments the Plan of Implementation of the World Summit on Sustainable Development and to speedily implement, through legislation, including budgetary measures, the provisions of the Plan that come under [their] purview”. (For the whole text of the Final Declaration, please refer to the IPU's web site: www.ipu.org).

As members of parliament, they consider it their duty to work to strengthen governance by reforming government and its decision-making processes to better reflect the imperative of sustainable development. The MPs will work “to put in place new regulatory and administrative foundations to make the integrated approach of sustainable development permeate every act of government”. They insist on “national strategies for sustainable development to provide a coherent policy framework and measurable targets, as well as additional requirements for environmental impact assessment”.

For the President of the IPU Council, Dr. Najma Heptulla, “parliamentarians, in their law-making capacity, their budget-making authority, and their role as monitors of the Executive, are central to the implementation of what will be agreed in Johannesburg. We must voice the aspirations of our people at the negotiations so that the final document is comprehensive and is reflective of popular aspirations”. She recalled that MPs and the people “aspire for a world in which individual interests would be subordinated to the common good”.

The President of the IPU Council stated that the success of the World Summit (WSSD) will be measured in terms of actual implementation of the negotiated outcome. “A strong parliamentary follow-up mechanism to the Declaration and Plan of implementation is crucial for its success”, she emphasised.



Photo: Neeran Naidoo

Parliamentary meeting in Johannesburg. From left to right: Mr Valli Moosa, Minister for Environmental Affairs and Tourism of South Africa; Mrs Najma Heptulla, President of the IPU Council; Mrs Frene Ginwala, Speaker of the National Assembly of South Africa; Mrs Naledi Pandor, Chairperson of the National Council of Provinces of South Africa; Mr Nitin Desai, Secretary General of the World Summit on Sustainable Development and Mr Anders B. Johansson, IPU Secretary General.

President of IPU Council addresses the WSSD

Speaking at the World Summit on Sustainable Development, the President of the IPU Council, Dr. Najma Heptulla, informed the governmental delegations of the commitments of the MPs gathered in Johannesburg. In her concluding remarks, she said that “far too many governments and institutions in the position of power take decisions with only narrow interests in mind. More often than not, they do not represent fairly the will of the people and certainly do not pursue the common good. Only too often, decision-makers do not listen to the people, and especially to the poor, and are instead pursuing parochial interests, and, in the worst cases, are entirely corrupt”.

“Parliamentarians have accepted that if there is no implementation now as there was very little after Rio, in many ways it will be our fault and we have to take that responsibility”

In an interview with The World of Parliaments, the Speaker of the National Assembly of South Africa, Dr. Frene Ginwala, explained the main result of the parliamentary meeting.

Q: What is the main result of this meeting ?

Dr. Frene Ginwala: It allows parliamentarians to come together. It emphasizes that we have an important role to play. Parliamentarians have accepted that if there is no implementation now as there was very little after Rio, in many ways it will be our fault and we have to take that responsibility. That is the challenge for parliamentarians: we keep saying that we have a role to play, but now we have to play that role. We have to be seen to be playing that role and we have the agreement. None of us is working in isolation. That was recognized by every-

body. So in a sense what comes out of this is that the success of implementation, the success of making it happen after the agreements will be dependent on the parliaments. That is the most important thing.

Q : Do you think that governments are today more ready to listen to your voice?

F.G. : It varies from country to country. And I think it also depends on parliaments. Speaking as South Africa, I think our Minister's briefing to the opening session showed the way the executive needs to relate by taking them into confidence and so on. Hopefully that should have been done in every country. And I think if parliaments did not have that kind of briefing before they came here, maybe they should find out why. There are many MPs here that are part of the government delegations and they are interacting and feeding into the negotiations themselves. That is very important as well. It needs to be taken further.

The Secretary General of the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD), Mr. Nitin Desai and the Minister for Environmental Affairs and Tourism of South Africa, Mr. Valli Moosa also took the floor at the parliamentary meeting. They explained to The World of Parliaments the reason why it is important that parliaments be involved in environmental issues.

Mr. Nitin Desai

The environmental actions will require legislation, will require the use of budgetary resources, and there are certainly things which the executive has to do. Parliaments have a role in all three areas. In addition parliaments are an expression of people's will and if you really want to mobilize people then we certainly have to see that the people's will is reflected in parliament. And I think increasingly parliaments play a very important role in being able to stand back and evaluate what is happening and what needs to be done.

Mr. Valli Moosa

You cannot talk about sustainable development unless all of society is involved. It is a cross-cutting issue and often sustainable development requires some very difficult decisions. That is the reason why you need parliaments to be applying their minds to it constantly so that we have a long view taken and not just short term decisions on matters which do not just affect us but also future generations.

The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, and the United Nations Volunteers, with the support of the IPU held a Side Event Panel Discussion at the WSSD on community involvement and volunteering in sustainable development, with the participation, among other speakers, of the President of the IPU Council, Dr. Najma Heptulla and the President of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, Mr. Juan Manuel Suárez del Toro. Mr. Suárez del Toro explained to The World of Parliaments the importance of the role of parliaments in support of volunteering in sustainable development.

Mr. Juan Manuel Suárez Del Toro

In Johannesburg we said we wanted to avoid too much regulation which would deprive the volunteer movement of its spontaneity or restrict people's selfless wish to do something for others; nonetheless, we did stress the need to institute a worldwide framework which would advance the acceptance of volunteering in society. Parliaments could push for this kind of legislation, so as to help civil society to take shape, become more organized, and enjoy a certain degree of security in its benevolent work. It would help volunteers develop a sense of structure. People want to do something, but there is no normative framework within which volunteer groups can grow. The idea of the framework would not be to regulate or stage-manage volunteering, but simply to make it even more effective. I think all parliaments should take steps in this direction.

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Parliamentary Developments

ARGENTINA

On 5 July 2002, a new law amending the Electoral Code was promulgated. The changes include a 90-day limit on presidential election campaigns and a 60-day limit on campaigns for legislative posts. The bill also limits election advertising in the media to 30 days prior to the polls and provides that any party that violates media advertising restrictions will no longer be entitled to any public financial contributions for a period of one to four years.

AUSTRALIA

On 12 March 2002, the Standing Orders of the House of Representatives were amended to increase the number of general purpose Standing Committees from nine to thirteen. The titles of the committees and the scope of subjects were also amended to reflect better the current portfolio arrangements of government administration.

BELGIUM

On 7 March 2002, a law was adopted amending the Electoral Code in order to enable Belgians living abroad to vote in elections to the Federal Legislative Chambers and to introduce freedom of choice for agents in the case of voting by proxy. Three electoral laws were also adopted, in February 2002. One is designed to ensure that a minimum number of Flemish-speaking representatives are elected to the Regional Council for Brussels-Capital. The two other texts aim to promote equal opportunity between candidates and to see to it that preferential votes cast by voters are given greater consideration. To this end, it is planned to halve transfers of votes to candidates at the top of the list. The system of substitute candidates will also be scrapped: non-elected candidates will automatically become substitutes.

DENMARK

On 21 February 2002, the Standing Orders of the Folketing were amended to establish a new parliamentary Committee, the "Committee on Foreign and Integration Policy", set up following changes in the jurisdiction of several ministries. Another amendment stipulates that resolutions from MPs to the Prime Minister during the debate on his/her account of the general state of the Realm must not exceed 150 words.

GERMANY

On 28 June 2002, an amendment to the Political Party Law was approved introducing more stringent accounting standards and more precise details concerning the duties of political party members accepting donations. According to the amendment, violations of the law on financing of political parties are now a criminal offence, punishable by up to three years' imprisonment.

INDIA

An amendment to the Salary, Allowances and Pension of Members of Parliament Act was enacted in June 2002 to raise the minimum pension of former MPs who had served as members of the House of the People (Lok Sabha) twice but in aggregate of less than four years and members of Provisional Parliament from Rs. 2500 per month to Rs. 3000 per month, with effect from 14 September 2001.

In May 2002, the Salaries and Allowances of Officers of Parliament and Leaders of Opposition in Parliament (Amendment) Act, 2002 was enacted which provides, with effect from 17 September 2001, for Rs. 2000 per month as a sumptuary allowance for the Speaker of the House of the People (Lok Sabha) and each Leader of the Opposition in the House of People and the Council of States (Rajya Sabha), on a par with Cabinet Ministers. Similarly, the Deputy Chairman of the Council of States and the Deputy Speaker of the House of the People have been allowed a sumptuary allowance of Rs. 1000 each, on a par with Ministers of State.

Also in May 2002, the Salaries and Allowances of Officers of Parliament Act, 1953 was amended to provide for family pensions of Rs. 6000 per month, the use of unfurnished residential accommodation without payment of licence fee, and medical treatment for spouses of Speakers who die in office. The minor children of such Speakers shall also be entitled to free medical treatment henceforth.

JAPAN

On 1 April 2002, an Amendment to the Law concerning remuneration, transportation and other allowances of the National Diet Members entered into force. It reduces the monthly remuneration of National Diet Members, including Presiding Officers and Vice-Presidents of both Houses, by 10 per cent for the period running from 1 April 2002 to 31 March 2003. It also abolishes payment of the special transportation

allowance of 300,000 yen a month to Members with 25 years of service or more and whose service has been recognised by a Resolution of Commendation.

LITHUANIA

On 14 March 2002, a resolution was adopted changing the number of members of Seimas Committees. With the introduction of this resolution, the number of committees have passed to 14 ranging in size from seven members (Committee on Environmental Protection) to 24 members (Committee on European Affairs).

On 4 June 2002, a new Referendum Law was approved which provides for two types of referendums: obligatory and consultative. Obligatory referendums will be organised for amendments to articles of the Constitution, the amendment of the Constitutional Act "On Non-Accession of the Republic of Lithuania to Post-Soviet Eastern Unions," and on Lithuania's participation in international organisations when the partial transfer of duties of State bodies to institutions or jurisdictions of international organisations is involved. Consultative referendums will be held on other matters. Referendums will be considered valid if more than half of all eligible voters turn out. The law will go into effect on 1 January 2003.

NEW ZEALAND

The Electoral Amendment Act 2002 became law on 27 February 2002. The aim of the new legislation was to improve the electoral administration in time for the following general elections (July 2002). Among other things, the new legislation provides for a system of continuous enrolment; facilitates the establishment of a regional management structure under the direction of the Chief Electoral Officer; simplifies the issue and return of the writ of the election; further simplifies the preliminary and official count processes by replacing the current prescriptive provisions in the Act with more general empowering provisions; simplifies the declaration of final election results by making the Chief Electoral Officer responsible for declaring them and returning the writ, as well as for the receipt of candidates' returns of election expenses; allows the party votes of special voters who, although registered, voted in the wrong electorate; facilitates the provision of ordinary Maori facilities in every polling place; and facilitates the provision of better service to overseas voters.

SLOVAKIA

An amendment to the Rules of Procedure of the National Council was approved. The change introduces the obligation for the Government to submit to Parliament international treaties on human rights and fundamental freedoms; international treaties the execution of which does not require an act, and international treaties which directly establish rights or obligations of natural persons or legal entities with precedence over laws containing a so-called precedence clause.

THE FORMER YUGOSLAV REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA

In June 2002, the Assembly of the Republic adopted the laws on the election of Deputies of the Assembly of the Republic, on voters' lists and on constituencies. These new electoral laws introduce a proportional voting system in six multi-member constituencies, 20 deputies being elected in each of them. The nomination lists may be submitted by parties, coalitions of parties or groups of at least 500 voters. At least 30 per cent of the candidates on each list must be of different gender. Each voter votes for a list and seats are distributed on a proportional basis, according to the D'Hondt formula.

In July 2002, the Assembly of the Republic adopted the new Rules of Procedure that align the provisions for the organisation and the functioning of the Assembly with the Constitution of 1991 and its Amendments of November 2001.

UNITED KINGDOM

On 14 May 2002, amendments were made to those provisions of the Standing Orders relating to select committees. The House of Commons approved the First Report of the Select Committee on Modernisation of the House of Commons relating to Select Committees, which gave a commitment to more specialist and support staff for select committees and will lead to the establishment of common objectives for select committees. The House also agreed to make arrangements to pay the chairmen of select committees and to ensure that no Member who has chaired a select committee for the two previous Parliaments continues to do so. Select committees will also be allowed to share the results of their work with committees in the devolved legislatures.