

The World of Parliaments

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“It is important for Chile to host the 108th IPU Conference”

Chile plays a leading role on the international political scene. An eagerly courted member of the UN Security Council at the height of the Iraq crisis, this country from the Southern Cone area has taken centre stage with the 108th Inter-Parliamentary Conference, due to take place in Santiago from 6 to 12 April at the invitation of the Chilean Parliament. It will be attended by the President of the Republic, Mr. Ricardo Lagos.



Photo: L. Guzmán.

From left to right : Mr. Andrés Zaldívar, President of the Chilean Senate, Senator Sergio Páez, President of the IPU Council, and Mr. Ricardo Lagos, President of the Republic of Chile.

The President of the Chilean Senate, Mr. Andrés Zaldívar, who is also President of the 108th Inter-Parliamentary Conference, briefs us on the issues at stake :

Q : Why is it important for Chile to host the 108th Inter-Parliamentary Conference?

Andrés Zaldívar : Chile has a historic vocation of openness to the world and cooperation with the international system. Our country also has a long parliamentary tradition – despite a few unfortunate interruptions – which implies a deeply rooted commitment to promoting the representative role of

institutions. As a result of this calling, we are very active on the international political scene and we work hard to strengthen representative institutions throughout the world. That is why it is important for Chile to host this Conference.

Q : In your view, can parliamentary diplomacy play an important role in the present context?

A.Z. : It has been empirically proven that parliamentary diplomacy is an effective means of bringing the positions of parliaments on a potential or real conflict closer together. Moreover, as representatives of the people, we are in essence promoters of dialogue and coordination, because we are – objectively speaking – key players in the diplomatic arena. All the more reason for us to emphasise that, as representatives of the people's will, we have indisputable legitimacy.

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Photo: IPU/H. Saigado

*Interview with Ms. Isabel Allende,
the new President of the Chamber of Deputies of Chile,
who will chair the Meeting of Women Parliamentarians*

Q : Ms. Allende, why is it a priority for you to chair the Meeting of Women Parliamentarians on the occasion of the 108th Inter-Parliamentary Conference in Santiago ?

Isabel Allende : I believe that it is IPU tradition to elect a well known woman parliamentarian from the host country. I will be chairing the Chamber of Deputies of Chile, and thus become the second woman presiding officer in my country's history. This is an honour, a challenge and a responsibility that I gladly assume, and I shall likewise be very honoured to chair the Meeting of Women Parliamentarians.

Q : Thirty years after the eleventh of September 1973, you will head the Chamber of Deputies. Is this a difficult challenge to take up?

I.A. For a woman, it is indeed a difficult challenge. Yet the fact that this comes thirty years later is also symbolic. I suppose that my father (Editor's note: the late President of the Republic of Chile, Salvador Allende) would be very proud to know that I will be the next Speaker of the Chamber of Deputies. Naturally, I regret that he will not be there, because I imagine it would have been a real pleasure for him. For me, this represents a great opportunity, a good experience and an enriching learning process.

Q : Is it sometimes difficult to bear the name of Isabel Allende?

I.A. : It depends! I feel deeply moved and I am proud of the name I bear. I believe I had a father who was a good father, a great political figure and a person who was entirely true to himself. When I travel abroad,

I am proud to realise just how much people remember and admire him. They have not forgotten what my father left us. Yet viewed from a different perspective, it was very painful to lose my father at the age of 28.

Q : What are your goals as an MP?

I.A. : We want to increase the number of women in Parliament. Some topics concerning women and the family in general are priorities for us. We are pushing for the earliest possible adoption of a law that will reform common law marriages and legalize divorce, as Chile is the only Christian and Catholic country in the Western world that does not allow divorce. I believe that the time has come to tackle this problem, because if we fail to do so we accept a sham. In my country, there is no legal framework for broken marriages, regardless of what some, including the Catholic Church, think. People are unable to remarry legally and regularise their situation. Other subjects are also of interest to us. We would like to amend the law on violence within the family. I feel very strongly about this question. Granted, we have passed very important laws to protect women and the family in general. But we cannot let this situation persist, because all we have done is ensure that the most vulnerable party remains vulnerable. We want to see legislation on alimony, visiting rights and the sharing of goods between the two spouses.

Q : What about gender parity?

I.A. : I would like to see affirmative action and legislation to ensure that neither of the two sexes has more than 60% or less than 40% of the seats in Parliament. In Latin America, the two countries that have adopted such rules – Argentina and Costa Rica - are those with the highest number of women in parliament. A genuinely democratic society is built with both men and women.

... READ IN THE PRESS ... READ IN THE PRESS ...

Female, seeking public office ? Better try Sweden

Women seeking public office have a better chance of finding it in Sweden, South Africa, Pakistan and 32 other countries than they have in Canada. A new study by the Inter-Parliamentary Union has found that Canada finishes 36th among 182 nations, with 20,6% of the seats in the House of Commons filled by women. Of 301 Canadian seats, 62 are represented by women. The figures are well behind the 45,3% posted by first-place Sweden and just below that of Nicaragua, which ranks 35th at 20,7%. Other nations that finishes ahead of Canada included Denmark, the Netherlands, Costa Rica, Iceland, Spain, Latvia, Bulgaria and Australia. "It surprises us", said Alessandro Motter, an official with the IPU at the United Nations. "It look like you have some work to do". A Canadian expert on women's representation said she was shocked by the numbers.

The Globe and Mail (Canada) – 07.03.03

Training seminar for Djibouti MPs

For the first time in Djibouti's history, a training seminar was held for members of the National Assembly. Organised by the IPU in cooperation with the National Assembly, the Ministry for the Promotion of Women and UNIFEM (United Nations Development Fund for Women), the project has been approved by the country's authorities. Targeting one of the last countries that still has no women members of Parliament, this training seminar will be particularly useful for recently elected women MPs, helping them to fulfil their role of representatives of the country, as well as the other members of the National Assembly.

La Nation.dj – 03.03.03

The IPU and the international crisis relating to Iraq

The IPU Executive Committee met in Geneva on 19th and 20th February 2003. At the end of its deliberations, the President of the IPU Council, Chilean Senator Sergio Pérez, made the following declaration :

“The Inter-Parliamentary Union has a privileged role to defend peace by promoting democracy”

“Throughout its long history, the Inter-Parliamentary Union has striven to promote dialogue in the interests of international peace and security. It is therefore deeply concerned by the latest developments in the current international crisis relating to Iraq.

The Organisation firmly believes that all of the existing institutional mechanisms that can lead to a peaceful resolution of the crisis should be employed to the full to that end.

It maintains that the forum for resolving the issue relating to Iraq is the United Nations Security Council and that all action taken against that country should have the express authorisation of that body.

The Inter-Parliamentary Union calls upon the Parliament and Government of Iraq to cooperate fully with the United Nations Security Council and to comply immediately with the terms of Security Council Resolution 1441. There can be no doubt that a war would bring untold suffering not only to the people of Iraq but to the entire region. Such an outcome would trigger a humanitarian crisis of huge proportions that would cause particular suffering to women and children.

The Inter-Parliamentary Union has a privileged role to defend peace by promoting democracy through parliaments in all countries, and declares that it is fully prepared to continue to pursue this goal with respect to Iraq”.



Members of the IPU Executive Committee in front of the new IPU Headquarters, the House of Parliaments.

Photo: IPU/H. Salgado

Editorial

Chile, never absent for long from the international political scene

Chile, never absent for long from the international political scene, is now hosting the 108th Inter-Parliamentary Conference in Santiago from 6 to 12 April 2003.

As Senate President Andrés Zaldívar says in our pages, Chile "has a long parliamentary tradition – despite a few unfortunate interruptions". Thanks to this tradition, Chile, a country committed to multilateralism, has a head start in promoting democratic institutions. Prior to the conflict in Iraq, Chile played a leading role in negotiations to bring fellow members of the UN Security Council towards a consensus that unfortunately never saw the light of day. Against the backdrop of a world in turmoil, the 108th Inter-Parliamentary Conference in Santiago will give delegates of more than 120 delegations the chance to stage bilateral and multilateral meetings to talk over the international crisis. It will also give parliamentary diplomacy an opportunity to bring its influence to bear on the situation.

Chile is also present in international parliamentary realms because one of its Senators, Mr. Sergio Pérez, was elected President of the IPU Council in September 2002. Mr. Pérez is keenly aware of the volatile situation that is sapping international cooperation and is convinced that the voice of the people and the parliaments that represent them must be heard. In February,

he issued a declaration stating that the IPU firmly believes that all institutional mechanisms that can lead to a peaceful resolution of the Iraq crisis should be employed to the full. "The forum" he said "for resolving the issue relating to Iraq is the United Nations Security Council and all action taken against that country should have the express authorization of that body".

The Meeting of Women Parliamentarians will be chaired by Chilean MP Isabel Allende, daughter of former President Salvador Allende, the man who went down in history for his willingness to defend his political convictions and the mandate to which he was elected in 1970. Mrs. Allende has just been elected President of the Chilean Chamber of Deputies.

Another Chilean MP present on the international scene is Juan Pablo Letelier who has been working for some years to enhance the visibility of the IPU Committee on the Human Rights of Parliamentarians, which he chaired for two years. The Chairmanship has now passed to the Minister of Employment and Labour and Chief Government Whip of Sri Lanka, Mr. Mahinda Samarasinghe (see p. 7).

Last but not least Chilean MP Juan Antonio Coloma has also been playing an active role within the IPU as President of the Committee on Education, Science, Culture and Environment. ■

L.B.

IPU/European Parliament Conference on the WTO in Geneva



Photo: IPU/H. Selgado

Mr. Carlos Westendorp, Chairman of the Committee on Industry, External Trade, Research and Energy of the European Parliament.

MPs intend to enhance the transparency of WTO activities

The members of the 76 parliaments gathered in Geneva on the occasion of the parliamentary conference jointly organised by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) and the European Parliament are convinced of the need for a parliamentary dimension of the WTO. The final declaration adopted in Geneva after a two-day meeting stated that "our objective is to enhance the transparency of WTO activities".

The MPs present in Geneva declared their wish to promote further trade liberalisation which should take into account national development policies within an equitable rules-based trading system, adding that "the accession of new countries to the WTO is crucial to enable it to become a truly universal organisation. Our goal is to promote trade that benefits people everywhere, enhances development and reduces poverty".

The legislators lauded the objectives set out in the Doha Development Agenda, which puts the concerns of the developing countries at the centre of the multilateral trading system and gives them pride of

place in the present round of negotiations. "We welcome the fact that the Doha mandate tackles developing country concerns about access to export markets. We applaud the stated intent to phase out agricultural export subsidies, and we acknowledge that the establishment of the Global Trust Fund, to which every developed country should contribute, will greatly increase the resources available for technical assistance in the area of implementation", they declared.

On a more critical note, the MPs expressed their misgivings about developments that have occurred since the Doha Ministerial Meeting. "We regret that the deadlines on special and differential treatment for developing countries, and on making the TRIPS Agreement more flexible in order to improve access to medicines, have not been met. An alternative emergency solution for certain pandemics must be implemented".

"Trade distorting practices are unacceptable"

The MPs were also concerned at the lack of progress on the fundamental issue of enhancing real access to markets, stating that "it is crucial that agreement is reached on reducing barriers to trade in the field of agriculture, textiles and clothing. Agricultural support in wealthy countries, taken globally, is about four times the amount that is paid out in development assistance to the poor nations of the world. We consider that such trade distorting practices, and their social consequences, are unacceptable".

Legislators pledged to raise the issues in their parliaments and engage their respective trade negotiators in a dialogue. At the same time, they agreed to continue the ongoing parliamentary process relating to the WTO, especially in the lead-up to the forthcoming Ministerial Meeting in Cancun (Mexico).

The MPs stressed their shared conviction that the days when foreign policy, and more specifically trade policy, were the exclusive domain of the executive branch are over. The parliaments resolved to participate more in the running of public affairs that transcend national borders, declaring that a parliamentary interface was necessary to ensure better representation of citizens in the multilateral negotiating process.

Chilean Senator Sergio Pérez, President of the IPU Council

“Parliaments have a special role in making the international trading system more open, more equitable, more predictable and non-discriminatory”

“Parliaments have a special role in making the international trading system more open, more equitable, more predictable and non-discriminatory. The IPU is convinced that parliamentary involvement can help make the WTO more transparent and inclusive, and therefore more widely understood and supported”, declared the President of the IPU Council, Chilean Senator Sergio Pérez.

“The past two years have been packed with important international events and developments, many of which have had a considerable impact on trade relations. The global challenge of terrorism, the prolonged decline of markets, the aggravation of regional conflicts, and the looming prospect of a war in Iraq continue to make headlines which leave nobody indifferent”, added Mr. Pérez.

He stressed that as politicians, members of parliament are keenly aware of the significance of these events. “As elected representatives of the people, we are also conscious of the growing sentiment of public discontent with the consequences of globalization and particularly with trade policies. For better or for worse, these policies are embodied by the WTO, which is often portrayed as the major tool for pushing globalization. In a democracy, such criticisms cannot be simply dismissed: they require dialogue and qualified answers”.

Mr. Carlos Westendorp (Spain), Chairman of the Committee on Industry, External Trade, Research and Energy of the European Parliament

“Providing the multilateral trade system with a process in which MPs are able to express their ideas and concerns about multilateral trade”

The Chairman of the Committee on Industry, External Trade, Research and Energy of the European Parliament, Mr. Carlos Westendorp recalled that for many years, MPs have wanted to give the multilateral trading system a process in which they, as representatives of the people, can express their ideas and concerns about multilateral trade. “For many years, we have been working with the IPU towards this objective; we are convinced that we have to give a parliamentary dimension to the WTO in order to increase its transparency and improve the democratic legitimacy of its activities”.

Mr. Westendorp explained that the MPs gathered in Geneva would be debating major issues on the trade negotiating agenda and the need to promote free trade through clearly established rules.

Mr. Westendorp regretted that “trade negotiations are not progressing as we might wish. It is therefore very important that MPs from Member countries of the WTO send a firm message from this conference here in Geneva to the trade negotiators in order to give them a clear idea of what the representatives of the people are seeking”.

As to the idea of giving a parliamentary dimension to the WTO, Mr. Westendorp indicated that the MPs in Geneva would be looking at the most effective way to achieve their goal. “There are many options, one of them being, in the long term, to give WTO a permanent assembly, but there is another, this conference, which enables us to work together, maybe once a year, and on the occasion of WTO ministerial meetings, in order to keep track of WTO activities, continue the dialogue with government negotiators and exchange experiences and ideas that parliaments, as representatives of people, can transmit to the negotiators. We will inaugurate a process of meetings so that government negotiators can become aware of what the parliamentarians think”.

Mr. Francisco Thompson-Flôres (Brazil), Deputy Director-General of the World Trade Organization (WTO)

“Parliamentarians can help explain the benefits of the trading system and help citizens cope with the complexities of globalization”

The WTO Deputy Director-General, Mr. Francisco Thompson-Flôres, said that “right from the beginning, parliamentarians were involved with the WTO. Parliaments had to ratify the results of the Uruguay Round of multilateral trade negotiations before their governments could join the WTO. Since then, parliamentarians have regularly formed part of national delegations to ministerial conferences and parliamentary involvement with the WTO has intensified through initiatives such as the meetings of parliamentarians in Seattle and Doha and the IPU’s conference on trade issues held two years ago in Geneva”.

Mr. Thompson-Flôres added : “Seattle brought many lessons. Thankfully, the lessons were well-learnt as WTO Members and the Secretariat regrouped and began the long march to Doha and now on to Cancun. I believe we can all take pride in changes made to the way the WTO operates. We are now more inclusive in our processes and are doing much more to ensure smaller and poorer WTO Members can participate in our negotiations. We are cooperating with international and regional agencies more closely than ever before. We have made real progress too in our efforts to enhance the WTO’s image and engage civil society”.

In his concluding remarks, the WTO Deputy Director General said that parliamentarians could help explain the workings and benefits of the trading system, help citizens understand and cope with the complexities of globalization and encourage greater awareness and informed debate on international trade issues. “As legitimate representatives of the people, you provide an important interface between the people, civil society and governments”.



From left to right :
Mr. Renzo Imbeni, Vice-President of the European Parliament,
Mr. Sergio Pérez, President of the IPU Council, and
Mr. Anders B. Johnsson, Secretary General of the IPU,
at the press conference during the parliamentary conference on the WTO.

"Strengthening parliament means strengthening democracy. And when parliaments grow weaker, there is a danger that democracy may grow weaker".

Interview with Mr. Renzo Imbeni (Italy), Vice-President of the European Parliament

Q : How would you rate the importance of the joint IPU/European Conference on the WTO?

Renzo Imbeni : It is important because for some time now, and more particularly since the Seattle Conference, we have been thinking of giving a parliamentary dimension to the World Trade Organization, a governmental organisation. The government delegations that negotiate at the WTO report directly to their respective governments. At the WTO parliamentary conference in Geneva, we decided to gather information on how the governments of all WTO member countries report to their respective parliaments. This meeting is important because, united by friendship and solidarity, parliamentarians from different countries of the world have decided to work together, to reform the WTO so to speak, to make it more transparent, easier to understand and more visible as far as citizens are concerned. Many of the anti-globalisation demonstrations are due to the fact that very few citizens are familiar with the decision-making process, because it is not visible. The fundamental role of parliaments is to oversee action taken by governments, acting on behalf of their citizens. Granted, this is hardly possible at the world level, and we do not intend to create a sort of WTO parliament that would oversee representatives of governments. What we do have in mind is a forum for discussion, for monitoring steps taken by the WTO, which can be useful when it comes to briefing the public on the objectives of the WTO, whether they be positive objectives or critical ones from elsewhere.

Q : Should parliaments be more active on the international political scene?

R.I. : I believe so, for parliament is the fundamental expression of democracy. Even if we know that it is not enough, citizens express their will by voting; they elect the people who represent them, and parliamentarians in turn decide, by a majority, what the government of a given country should be, on the basis of the votes cast by its citizens. Strengthening parliament therefore means strengthening democracy. And when parliaments grow weaker, there is a danger that democracy may grow weaker.

Q : Do you feel parliaments are on the defensive?

R.I. : Today, the problem is different, because with economic and financial globalisation, decision-making power has shifted from the national level of democracy, as we know it, to the supranational level. This implies that national parliaments are less able to oversee decision-making centers at the world level. Today, there is an enormous historical problem: how can we ensure that admittedly legitimate decisions taken inside international organizations do not *de facto* limit the powers of the national parliament? When a WTO decision affects the health conditions of 250 million persons living in ten or twelve countries, what power do the parliaments of these countries wield? That is the question. And that is the question which, in our modest way, we have tried to answer by acting on the supranational level.

Meeting of the IPU Committee on the Human Rights of Parliamentarians

Mr. M. Samarasinghe, Minister of Employment and Labour and Chief Government Whip of Sri Lanka is elected President of the IPU Committee on the Human Rights of Parliamentarians

Mr. Mahinda Samarasinghe, current Minister of Employment and Labour and Chief Government Whip of Sri Lanka, was elected as the new President of the Committee on the Human Rights of Parliamentarians of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) during its 100th session, held from 20th to 23rd January 2003, at the new IPU Headquarters in Geneva *The House of Parliaments*. The Committee also elected Mr. Mahamane Ousmane, President of the National Assembly of Niger, as Vice-President.

“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, because 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”, said the new President.



Photo: IPU/Mohr

The IPU Committee of the Human Rights of MPs met in the new IPU Headquarters, *The House of Parliaments* in Geneva, for its 100th session, from 20 to 23 January 2003.

President of the National Assembly of Niger is Committee Vice-President

The new Vice-President of the IPU Committee on the Human Rights of Parliamentarians, who is also President of the National Assembly of Niger, said "the importance of this Committee lies in the fact that it is a body set up by the world organisation of parliaments, which is composed of 144 parliaments, represented by deputies and senators from both the majority and the opposition. The importance also lies in the subjects it treats: the defense of the human rights of parliamentarians. Contrary to what you might think, MPs often face enormous difficulties and it is essential to have an institution made up of parliamentarians that look into the predicament of their colleagues. Often the Committee manages to find a solution to the problems faced by the parliamentarians. I have been part of initiatives on the African continent, for example in Togo, where the Committee's intervention lead to the release of Mr. Agboyibo on the eve of the IPU Conference in Marrakech in March 2002".

Case load increasing

During its 100th session, the Committee examined public cases in the following countries : Belarus, Burundi, Cambodia, Colombia, Ecuador, Gambia, Honduras, Indonesia, Madagascar, Malaysia, Mongolia, Myanmar, Pakistan, Rwanda, Turkey and Zimbabwe. The public report of the Committee is available upon request.

Over the years its case load has greatly increased; at its first session in 1977, the Committee examined the situation of 40 MPs in nine countries while at the present session it examined 51 cases of allegations of violations of human rights affecting 132 MPs in 28 countries. In 2002, the Committee dealt with a total of 72 cases of which it closed 27, many of them concluding on a satisfactory result.

The Committee

Established in 1976, the Committee, which meets in camera four times a year, is composed of five members of Parliament : Mr. Mahinda Samarasinghe (Sri Lanka, Minister of Employment and Labour and Chief Government Whip, President), Mr. Mahamane Ousmane, (President of the National Assembly of Niger, Vice-President of the Committee), Mr. Juan Pablo Letelier (Chile, MP), Mrs. Ann Clwyd (United Kingdom, MP), and Mrs. Veronika Nedvedova (Czech Republic, MP).

Women in parliaments

Political will indispensable for steady progress in women's participation in parliament

“Political will is indispensable for steady progress in women's participation in parliament. Modern societies will only be more humane and more equitable when all of their subjects are actively involved in the decision-making process”, said the President of the IPU Council, Chilean Senator Sergio Páez, on the occasion of International Women's Day. (Latest statistics available on the IPU Website www.ipu.org - Women in parliaments).

Although it may appear modest, the percentage of the world's parliamentarians who are women, amounting to 14.8% in January 2003, is a sign of progress. Despite what appears to be a very slow increase over the past five years, a close look at the latest IPU graphs and statistics gives ground for hope. The data presented shows developments in 50 countries where elections were held in 2002 as well as comparative regional and world data. It reveals that only a few countries now have less women MPs than before and that most regions of the world have registered progress, the most significant changes coming from the Nordic countries and the Arab world.

Nordic countries and Arab countries: steady progress at their own levels

The top of the chart has traditionally been occupied by the Nordic countries which show the highest regional level, averaging 39.9% of women in parliament. In this group, Sweden, the leader, has managed to improve its score by a 2.6 percentage point increase: women now account for 45.3% of parliamentarians

in the Swedish Riksdagen whereas they represented 42.7% of parliamentarians in the previous legislature. Despite showing the lowest regional average, the Arab countries have consolidated their move towards gender equality in politics. In Morocco, women now account for 10.8% of the lower House: a 10 percentage point leap. In Algeria, women MPs have doubled from 12 to 24, a 3.3 percentage point increase to reach 6.2% of women MPs.

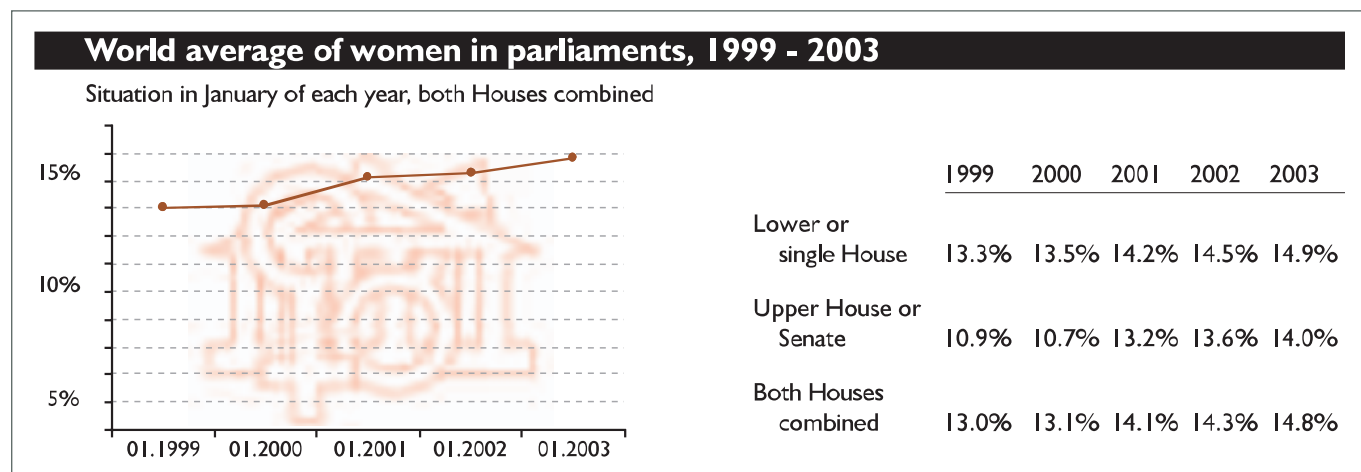
But beyond figures, there is encouraging evidence of a new political will to ensure women's presence in the political field. Morocco's progress came about after the introduction of a quota in parliament reserving 30 seats for women. In Bahrain, for the first time, women were able to vote and stand as candidates in a national poll. Though no women won seats, 8 stood for election and two made it to the second round. In Djibouti, the quota law stipulating that every party had to present at least 10% of candidates of both sexes was adopted in December 2002. The results of the 2003 elections saw the unprecedented arrival of 7 women in parliament, accounting for more than 10% of the newly elected parliamentarians. In Jordan, the electoral law was amended, in view of this year's elections, to reserve 6 seats to women in the Lower House of the Majlis.

Eastern European countries show encouraging signs of progress as well: + 10.8 points for the FYR of Macedonia (with 18.3% of women MPs); + 7.1 for Bosnia and Herzegovina (with 14.3% of women MPs); + 6.7 for Slovakia (with 19.3% of women MPs).

Strong political will necessary

The country to have made the greatest progress in women's representation in parliament is Pakistan. Its first elections since the October 1999 coup have seen the arrival of 72 women, an 18.7 percentage point

Women in Parliaments in the last five years, 1999-2003



increase (with 21.1% of women MPs). This is partly the result of a new quota law reserving 60 seats for women in the National Assembly. The wider use of affirmative action measures highlights the more proactive approach taken by political authorities to tackle women's low showing in politics. As mentioned above, quota laws were introduced in several countries, including in Morocco, Djibouti and Jordan. Recently, Indonesia passed a bill ordaining that at least 30% of parliamentary candidates must be women. Amend-

ments to the electoral law are also under consideration in Slovakia and envisaged in Hungary.

Fewer women at the top

In general, male presiding officers of parliament continue to predominate: only 22 out of the 249 presiding officers (of both lower and upper houses) are women, most of them in developing countries. Last year, women accounted for 24 of the 244 presiding officers.

IPU supports women MPs elected for first time to the National Assembly of Djibouti

From 1 to 4 March 2003, the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) ran a training seminar in Djibouti for MPs recently elected to the National Assembly. The seminar was organized at the invitation of the National Assembly, in cooperation with the Ministry for the Promotion of Women, Family Well-being and Social Affairs, and with the backing of the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM).

The parliamentarians, whose discussions were moderated by two international experts, Mrs. Foumakoyé, former Minister of Social Development, Population, Promotion of Women and Protection of Children, and former MP from Niger, and Mr. Efova Mbozo'o, former MP and Secretary General of the National Assembly of Cameroon, took up topics relating to the functioning and role of Parliament, relations with the Executive and the role of the opposition. A good deal of time was also devoted to gender issues: two days of discussions were set aside for recently elected women MPs, to assist them in their new role.

In his opening speech, the IPU Secretary General, Mr. Anders B. Johnsson, emphasized that the seminar "has come at just the right moment because for the first time in its history, women have been elected to the National Assembly of Djibouti. For the Inter-Parliamentary Union, the question of gender equity is at the heart of democracy. The arrival of a large contingent of women MPs representing over 10% of total membership is thus a victory for democracy that we can only welcome". With 10.8% of women in parliament, Djibouti has leapt forward in the world ranking of parliaments.

The recommendations adopted by the seminar participants reflect a strong political will to promote women in political life – a will that the Inter-Parliamentary Union pledges to support in the near future.

The IPU and the UN produce a Handbook for MPs on the Convention for the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women

Mrs. Gwen Mahlangu, Member of the Parliament of South Africa and President of the IPU Coordinating Committee of Women MPs, took the floor at the 47th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women, in New York, in March 2003. She declared that for several years, the IPU has made every effort to secure parliamentary awareness of the Beijing objectives and, more recently, the Outcome of the Beijing +5 Special Session of the General Assembly. "Our attention has also focussed on the Convention for the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) with a view to ensuring its universal ratification and respect of the rights it enshrines. Clearly parliaments and parliamentary committees need to keep close track of the implementation of the Convention. With this in mind, we have recently worked with the United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women to produce a Handbook for Parliamentarians on the CEDAW and its Optional Protocol. The Handbook, which should be available shortly, presents easily accessible and concise information on the Convention and the Optional Protocol - the objective being to enhance parliamentary action for the ratification and implementation of this essential tool for the respect of women's rights". Mrs. Mahlangu thanked the Division for this "very fruitful cooperation. I am convinced that this is only the beginning of cooperation for the promotion of respect for women rights".

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Iraq-UN-USA

IPU calls for peaceful settlement within UN framework

The Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) has asked that "all of the existing institutional mechanisms", particularly within the UN framework, be used to ensure a peaceful resolution of the Iraqi crisis and has warned that a war would trigger a "humanitarian crisis of huge proportions". In a declaration by its President, Chilean Senator Sergio Pérez, immediately following a meeting of its Executive Committee in Geneva, the Organisation, which comprises 144 national parliaments and five regional parliamentary assemblies, said that it was "deeply concerned by the latest developments in the current international crisis relating to Iraq". The IPU "firmly believes that all of the existing institutional mechanisms that can lead to a peaceful resolution of the crisis should be employed to the full to that end", added Mr. Pérez.
Agence France Presse (AFP) – 20.02.03

Parliamentary developments

ARGENTINA

On 23 May 2002, a law was passed reforming the Electoral Code and including a requirement for candidate selection through open nationwide primaries held on the same day for all political parties fielding more than one presidential candidate. The primary elections were initially scheduled for 15 December 2002. Nevertheless, before that date, on 28 November 2002, a new law was promulgated establishing that primary elections would not be held for the presidential elections scheduled for April 2003.

AUSTRALIA

The Standing Orders of the House of Representatives were amended on 22 August 2002, with effect from 16 September 2002. The amendment related to proceedings in the Main Committee and were moved as a response to the House Committee on Procedure's report entitled *The Second Chamber: Enhancing the Main Committee*. Among the innovations introduced is a provision for interventions (brief interruptions of a Member's speech by a question from another Member) during debate in the Main Committee with a view to encouraging interactivity and spontaneity in debate. It is also foreseen that if disorder arises in the main Committee the Chair may now adjourn the Committee as an alternative to suspending it as the Standing Orders previously provided. This change is to avoid the Main Committee having to reassemble after a suspension solely for the purpose of formally adjourning.

The Senate's Standing Orders were amended on 19 November 2002 when recommendations made by the Senate Procedure Committee in its second report of 2002 were accepted. The changes relate to chairs and quorums in committees. *On the first subject, the amendments establish that either the chair or the deputy chair, when presiding at a meeting of a committee, may appoint another member of the committee to act as chair during the temporary absence of the chair or deputy chair for that meeting only. On the second, the requirement for the chair to suspend a meeting of a committee whenever there is not a quorum present has been removed from the Standing Orders; committees are now placed on the same basis as the Senate, namely, that a quorum is called only if a senator draws attention to the absence of a quorum.*

On 1 July, the salaries and office holders' allowances for senators and members of the House of Deputies were increased. The base salary passed from \$A90,000 gross per annum to \$A98,000 per annum.

BELGIUM

On 17 December 2002, two amendments were made to Article 157 of the Constitution. The first was to phase out military courts in peacetime, which can however be reinstated in time of war. Offences committed by servicemen will be tried by ordinary criminal courts. The common law of penal procedure will be adapted to the specificities of military life whenever necessary. The second amendment is to set up courts for the application of sentences. The latter are designed to replace the parole boards and will be entrusted with other tasks. Their method of functioning, composition and powers will be determined by law.

Between 17 June and 18 July 2002, three laws were adopted in the electoral field. These instruments are aimed at ensuring equal representation of men and women on electoral lists for the various elected assemblies in Belgium (European Parliament, Federal Legislative Chambers, Council of the German-speaking Community, Walloon Regional Council and Council of the Region of Brussels-Capital). These three laws stipulate that the gap between the number of candidates of each sex cannot exceed one and that the first two candidates must be of different sexes.

On a temporary basis, however, they provide that for the next legislative elections, due to be held by June 2003 at the latest, the first three candidates on each list may not be of the same sex.

Moreover, on 13 December 2002, Parliament adopted several amendments to the Electoral Code. Candidates in legislative elections will henceforth be able, in certain conditions, to stand simultaneously for election to the Chamber and the Senate; the category of substitute candidates has been reinstated; the electoral districts for elections to the Chamber have been redrawn to match the limits of the provinces; finally, an eligibility threshold of 5 per cent has been introduced.

CANADA

In October and November 2002 respectively, the Senate and the House of Commons each created a new Standing Committee on Official Languages. The existing Standing Joint Committee on Official Languages ceased to function. On 7 November 2002, the Senate adopted a report from its Standing Committee on Rules, Procedures and the Rights of Parliament to permit committees to meet on any weekday the Senate stands adjourned during a Senate sitting week. On 28 November 2002, the House of Commons established a special committee to consider and make recommendations on the modernization and improvement of the procedures of the House of Commons.

GHANA

Parliament has introduced an amendment to its Standing Orders to include two more Committees. The first one is the Judiciary Committee, which will be empowered to consider all matters relating to the judiciary that come before Parliament. The other newly created Committee is the Special Budget Committee, which will prepare, examine and consider the budget of Parliament as well as examine and adopt the budget of the judiciary and the budgets of all other constitutionally independent bodies, namely, the Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice, the Electoral Commission and the National Commission for Civic Education.

GERMANY

On 26 July 2002, a bill was passed to amend the Constitution. The new instrument makes the protection of animals an official government policy, although there are no specific provisions for government action.

With regard to electoral law, two bills were passed. On 27 April 2002, a bill was adopted to facilitate voting for disabled voters. On 31 July 2002, a bill was adopted amending the Federal Elections Law to redraw the boundaries of electoral districts. As of 1 January 2003, federal election laws will require Federal Government authorities to reimburse associations for the blind for costs incurred in connection with producing and distributing ballot templates in Braille. The Federal Government has also agreed to establish polling places that can be accessed by persons in wheelchairs.

HUNGARY

On 17 December 2002, Parliament unanimously voted to amend the Constitution to permit the country to join the European Union in 2004. The government agreed to drop from the final draft three provisions to which the opposition FIDESZ party had objected. These provisions concern ministerial decrees, refugees, and the transfer of powers to international organisations. The amended Constitution will stipulate that the EU and Hungary may jointly exercise some constitutional powers and that certain EU institutions may exercise particular authority independently. It also specifies that a binding referendum on EU admission is to be held on 12 April 2003.

INDIA

The 86th amendment to the Constitution adopted in December 2002 provides that the State shall endeavour to provide free and compulsory education to all children aged 6 to 14, thus making the right to education a fundamental right. It also provides that the State shall endeavour to provide early childhood care and education to all children until they complete the age of six years. Finally, it stipulates that it shall be the obligation of the parents to provide opportunities for education to their children between the age of six and fourteen years.

IRELAND

On 7 November 2002, the Twenty-Sixth Amendment of the Constitution Act 2002 was adopted. This Act allows the State to ratify the Treaty of Nice amending the Treaty on the European Union, the Treaties establishing the European Communities and certain related Acts signed at Nice on 26 February 2001. The amendment establishes that the State may exercise the options or discretions provided by or under certain Articles of the Treaty, while stipulating that any such exercise shall be subject to the prior approval of both Houses of Parliament. It further provides that the State shall not adopt a decision taken by the European Council to establish a common defence where that common defence would include the State.

June 2002 marked the adoption of the Electoral (Amendment) (No.2) Act, which extends *from 56 to 90 days* the period specified in Section 36 of the Electoral Act of 1997 during which statements can be submitted for expenses incurred in relation to general elections to the Dail Eirean.

JORDAN

On 9 February 2003, King Abdullah II endorsed an amendment to the provisional Parliamentary Elections Law, allocating seats for women for the first time in the country's history. The amendment fixes the total number of seats in the House of Deputies at 110, including those set aside for women. According to the law, deemed "temporary" because as the government passed it while Parliament was suspended, the six women candidates with the highest number of votes after the winners of the 104 seats have been declared, will comprise the women's quota in the House of Deputies. The number of seats allocated to women by this law was criticised by women activists, who had called for a quota of at least 20 per cent of the House membership.

LUXEMBOURG

On 17 July 2002, the Chamber of Deputies amended several articles of its Standing Orders, in particular all those referring to the Clerk or Assistant Clerk. Following this change, the title of Clerk has been replaced by that of Secretary General, and the Standing Orders provide for two Deputy Secretaries General in the stead of the Assistant Clerk.

NEW ZEALAND

From August to December 2002, some orders modifying the Standing Orders were made by the House of Representatives. These relate particularly to party votes, public organisations, reprinting bills or the implementation of outcomes from the Public Access to Legislation (PAL) project and the printing of parliamentary information. For instance, from 2003 questions for written answers by Members to Ministers will be lodged, and replied to, only electronically and the notice paper will be discontinued but the Parliamentary Bulletin will be endorsed as published under the authority of the House and will include the Journals of the House and contents formerly in the notice paper. Another modification concerns the appointment of Officers of Parliament. The procedures require the Speaker, through the Officers of House Committees which the Speaker chairs, to consult widely with members of all parties represented in the House and implement an appointment process. The relevant Ministers of the Crown are to be specifically advised of the consultation and to participate in it.

On 18 December 2002, assent was given to the Remuneration Authority (Members of Parliament) Amendment Bill. This instrument provides for the determination of both remunera-

tion and expenses of Members of Parliament by the Remuneration Authority (as the Higher Salaries Commission is renamed). The bill seeks to implement recommendations set out in the report of the Review Group on Improving Current Arrangements for the Determination and Administration of MPs' Salaries, Allowances and Other Entitlements, established by the Parliamentary Service Commission. The bill requires, as soon as practicable after 1 April 2003, the Parliamentary Service Commission to review travel, accommodation, attendance and communications services in respect of Members of Parliament and the Minister responsible for Ministerial Services to review any such additional or alternative services in respect of the Executive. The bill also clarifies the tax treatment of MPs, who will be treated as employees for tax purposes, and will prevent them from claiming tax deductions for expenses as if they were self-employed.

REPUBLIC OF CONGO

By decision dated 7 September 2002, the Supreme Court put an end to the transition period. The decision came after the new Constitution was approved by referendum in January 2002 and the new Parliament was established, following the legislative elections held on 26 May and 23 June 2002 to elect the members of the National Assembly.

SERBIA AND MONTENEGRO

On 4 February 2003, both houses of the Yugoslav Parliament approved the Constitutional Charter establishing the new State of Serbia and Montenegro. The country will be a single entity called Serbia and Montenegro. The new State will have a joint unicameral Parliament with 135 seats, a joint Defence Ministry and a single seat in the UN, but each republic may conduct its own international relations provided that this does not conflict with the new State's common foreign policy. Free movement of people, goods, capital, and services is guaranteed. Political leaders and the media widely hailed the document as a compromise.

SUDAN

During the second half of 2002, the General Electoral Act was amended via the introduction of a new article stipulating that any member of the National Assembly or a State Assembly or a Local Council who was occupying a public post, may choose between leave without pay or ending his/her services through resignation. Another modification introduced to the Electoral Act establishes that the number of members that should form the State Assemblies shall vary depending on a given state's population: if the state has less than three million inhabitants, it will have 36 members, and if it has more, it will have 48 members.

TOGO

On 30 December 2002, the Togolese Parliament amended Article 59 of the Constitution relating to the election of the President of the Republic, paving the way for a possible additional term for the current Head of State, Mr. Gnassingbé Eyadéma. According to the new provisions, the President of the Togolese Republic is "elected by direct and secret universal suffrage for a five-year term, and shall be eligible for re-election". The previous Article 59 stipulated that the President was "elected for a five-year term and eligible for re-election once", adding that "in no event could he or she serve more than two terms".

On 7 February 2003, the National Assembly adopted a new version of the Electoral Code, amending some 84 articles out of the 272 contained in the previous text, via the introduction of 27 new provisions. The major innovation is that this new Code henceforth entrusts the Ministry of the Interior with the task of preparing and holding elections, while the National Independent Electoral Commission (CENI) is only responsible for supervising voting. The new Code also specifies that it is up to the Ministry of the Interior to set up polling booths in the communes and prefectures and that each one of them shall have four members, all appointed by the Ministry, whereas the previous Code provided for members designated on an equitable basis by the government and the opposition.

Iraq crisis

IPU President : the UN is the appropriate forum

The Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) called for the employment of all existing institutional mechanisms that can lead to a peaceful resolution of the Iraqi crisis. And added, in a declaration by the President of the IPU Council following the conclusion of the IPU's Executive Committee meeting, that it maintains that the forum for resolving the issue relating to Iraq is the United Nations Security Council and that all action taken against that country should have the express authorization of that body. It also called upon the parliament and government of Iraq to cooperate fully with the United Nations Security Council and to comply immediately with the terms of Security Council resolution 1441.

Kuwait News Agency – 20.02.03

MPs from all over the world criticise limits to trade - (Santiago, EFE)

More than 400 MPs who came from all over the world to meet in Geneva harshly criticised the protectionist practices and subsidies for agricultural production, textiles and clothing of the industrialised countries. The lawmakers expressed their points of view in the Final Declaration of the Conference, particularly with regard to international trade, access to markets and the development of the poor countries. The event was co-hosted by the Inter-Parliamentary Union – currently chaired by Chilean Senator Sergio Pérez -, the European Parliament and the World Trade Organization (WTO). The Final Declaration tried to harmonise the different points of view of the developing countries and industrialised nations, particularly those of Europe.

La Nación (Chile) – 19.02.03

Towards a "parliamentary conference" of the WTO - Geneva (ATS)

Nearly 500 MPs from 75 countries decided in Geneva to meet once yearly to supervise the activities of the World Trade Organization (WTO). They considered that the WTO lacked transparency. In a declaration adopted at the close of a two-day meeting in Geneva, the parliamentarians announced the creation of a "WTO parliamentary conference". The first will take place on the occasion of the next WTO Ministerial Conference, in Cancun (Mexico) in September. Five Swiss MPs took part in the meeting, organised by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) and the European Parliament: Liliane Chappuis (PS/FR), Claude Frey (PRD/NE), Brigitta Gadiant (UDC/GR), Paul Günter (PS/BE) and François Lachat (PDC/JU). The Vice-President of the European Parliament, Renzo Imbeni, explained that the purpose of the annual parliamentary conferences on international trade was not to apply pressure, but rather to ensure that negotiations under way at the WTO were followed up. The MPs will have an opportunity to proffer proposals and criticism before agreements are signed.

La Tribune de Genève – 18.02.03

Inter-Parliamentary Conference on WTO opens with large Moroccan delegation in attendance

The opening in Geneva of the Conference organised by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) on the World Trade Organisation (WTO) was marked by the presence of a strong delegation of Moroccan MPs : no less than seven delegates from the Chamber of Representatives and the Chamber of Advisors are attending the event, which is called to set up an annual conference responsible for following up WTO activities. Opening the Conference, the President of the IPU Council, Senator Sergio Pérez, welcomed the fact that the Organisation has managed to bring together more than 450 delegates from 74 countries, most of whom are actively involved in international trade issues within their respective parliaments.

Maghreb Arab Press Agency (MAP) – 17.02.03

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