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COOPERATION WITH THE UNITED NATIONS SYSTEM

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE IPU AND THE UNITED NATIONS

Overview of progress in IPU-UN cooperation since 2005

1. The Second World Conference of Speakers of Parliament (2005) provided an important impetus to an enhanced cooperation between the IPU and the United Nations system. In their final declaration, entitled *Bridging the democracy gap in international relations: A stronger role for parliament*, parliamentary leaders pledged to support a reformed United Nations that would have more frequent and structured interaction with national parliaments. Important objectives of this interaction included contributing to and monitoring international negotiations and debates at the UN and related agencies, overseeing the enforcement of what is adopted by governments, and ensuring national compliance with international norms and the rule of law.
2. The Declaration adopted by the Second World Conference of Speakers of Parliament was submitted to the 2005 United Nations Summit, held soon thereafter at UN Headquarters in New York. The UN Summit Outcome Document included a distinct section on cooperation with parliaments, which called for *Strengthened cooperation between the United Nations and national and regional parliaments, in particular through the Inter-Parliamentary Union, with a view to furthering all aspects of the Millennium Declaration in all fields of work of the United Nations and ensuring the effective implementation of United Nations reform.*
3. Subsequent sessions of the UN General Assembly took stock of progress in cooperation between the two organizations, through comprehensive Reports of the UN General Assembly issued in 2006 and 2008, and consensus Resolutions adopted by member States which outlined the way forward (A/RES/61/6 and A/RES/63/24).
4. Cooperation with UN specialized agencies, programmes and funds continued to develop, with increased activities at the national and regional levels on issues of common interest. This was particularly the case for ILO, UNAIDS, UNCTAD, UNICEF, UNIFEM, WHO and others. New cooperation agreements were signed with the UN Democracy Fund (2006) and with the United Nations Development Programme (2007).

5. In order to assist in bridging the implementation gap of international commitments and forging a stronger role by parliaments on global issues, the IPU and various UN bodies worked together on the production of over a dozen new publications since 2005 (handbooks and guides for parliamentarians), such as those on missing persons, combating human trafficking, taking actions against HIV/AIDS, rights of persons with disabilities, elimination of violence against children, gender budgeting, and reducing gun violence through parliamentary action. A full list of publications is available at <http://www.ipu.org/english/handbks.htm>

6. With the establishment of new United Nations bodies further to the 2005 UN Summit, the IPU was in a position to influence and play a much more visible and substantive role in the work of the United Nations. This was the case primarily for the UN Peacebuilding Commission, the Development Cooperation Forum, and the new Human Rights Council.

7. In relation to the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC), this new UN body undertook to work systematically with the IPU and engage national parliaments in the countries under consideration by the Commission in efforts to promote democratic governance, national dialogue and reconciliation. To that end, parliaments were included in United Nations activities on the ground, whereas the IPU expanded its programs in both Burundi and Sierra Leone in support of an inclusive political process. More recently, the IPU and the PBC began consultations on capacity-building support that could be provided to the Parliament of the Central African Republic.

8. The United Nations invited and acknowledged the contribution by the IPU in shaping the agenda and work of the Development Cooperation Forum (DCF) of ECOSOC. The IPU has a seat on the DCF Advisory Board and ensures a robust parliamentary participation in preparatory and main sessions of the DCF. The decisions and recommendations endorsed by the DCF then serve as the basis for follow-up action by both the IPU and the United Nations. The overall objective is to reinforce capacities in national parliaments to play a meaningful role in the areas of development cooperation and aid effectiveness.

9. The United Nations encouraged the IPU to strengthen its contribution to the new UN Human Rights Council, particularly as it relates to the universal periodic review (UPR) of the fulfillment of human rights obligations and commitments by Member States. A dedicated IPU meeting on the UPR in 2009 demonstrated that there is indeed interest among parliaments in the process, in particular in terms of debating the draft national report in parliament and receiving the outcome of the UPR review for further consideration. The IPU plans to follow up on these recommendations and further develop its work in this area.

10. The IPU has continued to accompany the main deliberative and negotiating processes under way at the United Nations, and to mobilize parliamentary input to them. World conferences, such as those on new or restored democracies, HIV/AIDS, innovative forms of financing for development, the financial and economic crisis, or climate change, have all carried a parliamentary component.

11. The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and parliamentary action in support of achieving the MDGs have been mainstreamed into IPU's own agenda of work. Gender equality, child and maternal health, combating HIV/AIDS, environmental sustainability and global partnership have been areas of particular focus. In turn, the UN has invited the IPU to share its findings and results, and to contribute to the preparatory process for the 2010 UN Summit, which will focus on the evaluation of progress and challenges and on the acceleration of efforts in order to fulfill these objectives by 2015.

12. In terms of the main political agenda of the United Nations, the IPU has increased its engagement and participation in the General Assembly (GA), formally addressing the GA on over a dozen agenda items each year and circulating IPU Resolutions and other official documents in the General Assembly.

13. There has been an increased effort to coordinate agendas of the two institutions. Recent IPU resolutions, such as those on renewable energy, nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation, respect and peaceful co-existence among religious communities and belief, and parliamentary oversight of state policies on foreign aid, have all been fed into UN efforts in these areas.

14. As a concrete example of how the IPU has been influencing the international agenda, in the fall of 2007 the UN General Assembly endorsed the proposal by the IPU to designate September 15th as the International Day of Democracy (the date that coincided with the tenth anniversary of the Universal Declaration on Democracy adopted by IPU member Parliaments). Since then, this international day has provided an important occasion for both organizations to raise awareness and initiate new efforts in support of democratic practice around the world.

15. A more regular program of parliamentary activities at the United Nations has been developed. Each year, there is a one-day parliamentary meeting in the context of the annual session of the Commission on the Status of Women, and the results of the parliamentary meeting are presented to the CSW plenary. Members of parliament are encouraged to join their national delegations to the high-level segment of the General Assembly each year (General Debate), and the IPU convenes a briefing session for them in conjunction with the Office of the President of the General Assembly.

16. In 2006, the General Assembly formally welcomed the Parliamentary Hearings at the United Nations as a regular feature of the UN programme of activities held on the occasion of the annual GA sessions, and called for them to be organized as a joint UN-IPU event. In recent years, the Hearings have grown in prestige. They provide a unique opportunity for legislators, UN officials, ambassadors and academics to come together and engage on issues that are high on the international agenda. The Report of the Parliamentary Hearing is circulated as an official document of the General Assembly.

17. Also in 2006, the General Assembly called for the closer involvement of the IPU in the elaboration of system-wide strategies for consideration by the United Nations System and the UN System Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB – made up of the heads of all UN agencies and specialized bodies). This was seen as an important step towards building greater coherence in the work of the two organizations and ensuring greater parliamentary support for the United Nations. Two years later, the General Assembly went on to specifically call for a regular annual exchange between the CEB and

the senior leadership of the IPU, as suggested by the UN Secretary-General himself. This decision has yet to be implemented. The consolidation of the IPU's status as an international organization, accompanied by a decision to conclude a formal relationship agreement with the United Nations, would evidently go a long way towards facilitating this process.

18. As an important policy development, in 2008 the UN General Assembly - for the first time - formally welcomed the growing practice of including legislators as members of national delegations to major United Nations meetings and events, and invited member States to do so in a more regular and systematic manner (A/RES/63/24). If implemented in good faith by the executive branch of UN member States, such a policy has the potential to bring about a qualitative leap in the manner in which national parliaments engage on the global issues of our time.

19. Moreover, in recognition of the unique role of national parliaments in support of the work of the United Nations, the UN General Assembly decided to regularly include, as a distinct item on its annual agenda, the issue of Cooperation between the United Nations, national parliaments and the IPU. A first consideration of this agenda item will take place at the upcoming session of the General Assembly, in the fall of 2010. A report by the UN Secretary-General will be submitted on this occasion, and the IPU will also be in a position to circulate its own documents. During the debate, individual member States will have an opportunity to address the item under consideration. From this perspective, a prior consultation among parliaments and foreign ministries at the national level would be highly advisable.