



ACTION BY THE IPU TO STRENGTHEN DEMOCRACY AND PARLIAMENTARY INSTITUTIONS

Activities to strengthen parliaments and democracy in 2012 are described in the Secretary General's annual report on the activities of the IPU and in the Financial Results for 2012. The present report reviews developments since January 2013 and should be read in conjunction with the above-mentioned documents.

Strengthening parliaments

The IPU is providing support to the Parliaments of Bangladesh, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Egypt, Libya, Myanmar and Palestine.

- Egypt: Expert assistance has been provided to the Shura Council in examining the country's new electoral law. The IPU has recommended the inclusion of measures in the law that would allow for better representation of women in parliament. The IPU is preparing to assist the Council in building its law-making capacity through a more efficient committees system.
- Libya: In December 2012 the IPU signed a cooperation agreement with Libya's interim parliament, the General National Council (GNC). Under that agreement, the IPU is helping the GNC assess its needs and those of the future parliament with a view to designing a comprehensive programme for the development of the institution. The IPU is providing training to staff and helping them streamline the organization of the secretariat. Future activities include a review of the Standing Orders and assistance in drafting a new constitution. Working visits abroad are also foreseen for members of the GNC.
- Myanmar: The IPU is helping the parliament establish an efficient library and research service. An IPU resident adviser in Myanmar is assisting with this work and helping the parliament design a longer-term programme of assistance.
- Palestine: the IPU is pursuing its cooperation with UNDP and the European Commission in support of the Secretariat of the Palestine National Council. Key areas of this support include developing the Secretariat's internal administrative functions and processes.
- Pacific Island Parliaments: The IPU is cooperating with the Parliament of Australia in developing a programme of assistance to the Pacific Island parliaments. Under this programme, it will serve as a principal partner in developing and delivering assistance to the parliaments in question on an ongoing basis.

Research and standards-setting

The IPU is participating in the discussions on the post-2015 development architecture (see document EX/266/7(a)-R.1). Its contribution focuses largely on an area where it has special competences: democracy and democratic governance.

In this connection, the IPU has started to refine its work in setting standards for democratic parliaments by developing more specific indicators for measuring the effectiveness of parliaments. The indicators will build on and complement the standards and criteria for democratic parliaments the IPU has already developed. They will be accompanied by the gradual implementation of a peer review mechanism. This mechanism should allow parliaments to report on their progress and receive constructive feedback from their peers on ways to improve their performance.

The IPU has been invited to contribute substantively to the World Conference on Indigenous Peoples, which will take place in September 2014. It plans to build on the work it has done on mapping the representation of minorities and indigenous peoples in parliament. This project will involve data collection on indigenous parliamentarians and electoral mechanisms to ensure that indigenous peoples are represented in parliament and to advocate for greater parliamentary engagement in the realization of the rights of indigenous peoples. The Parliament of New Zealand has expressed an interest in seconding a senior expert to work on this project, the costs of which will be covered by existing core and extrabudgetary resources.

Advancing gender equality

Promoting parliamentary action to support women's rights and combat violence against women has been the cornerstone of the IPU's gender work in recent months. In Togo, the Organization assisted the parliament in passing a law on violence against women. Training was provided to the women's parliamentary caucus and other stakeholders, leading to the adoption of an advocacy strategy to accelerate the adoption of the law in question. Similar training was provided to the women's parliamentary caucus in Burundi in a bid to raise awareness of the need for legislation on gender-based violence and to strengthen the parliament's capacity to pass such legislation.

Protecting and promoting human rights

The Committee on the Human Rights of Parliamentarians held its most recent meeting in Geneva when it examined 82 cases regarding 225 MPs in 39 countries. It adopted decisions on 18 cases in the following countries: Bahrain, Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo, Madagascar, Malaysia, Maldives, Palestine/Israel and Sri Lanka. The Committee has also been closely monitoring developments in the Maldives, where concerns have been raised regarding the treatment of several members of parliament from the main opposition party, the Maldivian Democratic Party.

The Committee President subsequently undertook two missions to discuss cases with the authorities in Chad and Togo, while the Secretary General travelled to Cambodia, Egypt, Myanmar and Sweden (regarding a case from Rwanda) to follow up on cases being examined by the Committee.