



REPORTS ON RECENT IPU SPECIALIZED CONFERENCES AND MEETINGS

**(a) REGIONAL SEMINAR ON THE EVOLVING RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN
CITIZENS AND PARLIAMENTS IN THE ARAB WORLD**

Rabat (Morocco), 5-6 June 2013

The Seminar was jointly organized by the IPU, UNDP and the Parliament of Morocco. It brought together approximately 40 parliamentarians from 15 parliaments, of whom about one third were women.

The Seminar opened with the launch of the Global Parliamentary Report for Arab countries. Published in 2012, the IPU-UNDP Report examines how citizens' expectations are changing and how parliaments, political leaders and parliamentary staff are responding to them. The challenge currently facing all parliaments, especially those in the Arab world, is to manage the expectations of voters. This means improving the way they inform and sensitize voters, so that voters have more realistic expectations of what a parliament and their elected representatives can and should do. It means introducing measures that make parliamentarians more accountable – such as a code of conduct – but also recognizing that parliamentarians need sufficient space to take decisions and perform their function of representation. This also means finding ways of saying “no” to voters locally. Instead of seeking answers to every individual citizen's concerns, parliamentarians should be trying to find strategic local solutions and parliamentary responses to national problems.

The participants highlighted three major challenges faced by parliaments in the Arab world. First, the dominance of the Executive over the Legislature meant that the latter was often hampered in its ability to legislate or hold the government to account. This imbalance of power restricts the extent to which parliaments can properly represent the concerns of voters. The discussions then turned to the need to invest parliaments with additional constitutional powers or reform parliamentary rules.

Second, people are preoccupied with their standard of living and simply want politicians to deliver improvements. At the local level, services should be provided by municipalities, not by parliamentarians. However, the limited power of local government meant that members of parliament frequently found themselves intervening in areas that were not their responsibility per se. Many argued for greater decentralization.

Third, all the participants recognized that a strong and vibrant civil society was essential for the creation and maintenance of representative politics. They also identified tensions between civil society and parliaments. It is not clear from where many civil society organizations (CSOs) derive their legitimacy and authority. Unless a constructive relationship can be built between civil society and parliament, some CSOs may simply further weaken confidence in the representative process and undermine the position of parliament.

Three broad recommendations emerged. First, both the public and parliament need to be involved in the discussion about the position and role of parliament within the framework of the Constitution. These exercises should seek to close the gap between people and parliament, and inform the public about what can be realistically expected. Second, in many Arab States, municipal government needs to be strengthened. Parliamentarians also need to find non-traditional solutions to people's problems. Third, greater efforts need to be made to build alliances between parliaments and CSOs. While they share very similar agendas more needs to be done to recognize and build upon those common interests.

The Seminar concluded by identifying a series of recommendations for newly elected parliamentarians on how to build close relations with citizens, as well as follow-up action.