



REPORT OF THE IPU COMMITTEE ON UNITED NATIONS AFFAIRS

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The IPU Committee on United Nations Affairs met from 17 to 19 October 2011 in Bern, Switzerland, during the 125th IPU Assembly. In the context of the growing cooperation between the United Nations, national parliaments and the IPU, the Committee was called upon to play an increasingly important role. As a plenary body in which all IPU Member Parliaments were encouraged to engage, the Committee carried out three key functions: it provides a platform for regular interaction between senior UN officials and legislators on major global issues; it offers a space where legislators can review progress in the implementation of international commitments, be they agreements undertaken by UN Member States or IPU resolutions adopted by national parliaments; and it provides a framework where legislators can discuss and formulate a parliamentary input to major UN processes, such as the current international negotiations on climate change.

The Committee began its first session with a briefing and discussion with Mr. Jorge Sampaio, United Nations High Representative for the Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC). The session was chaired by Senator D. Dawson of Canada.

Established in 2005 at the initiative of the Governments of Spain and Turkey, the UNAOC aims to promote greater understanding and cooperation between nations and peoples across cultures and religions, thus countering polarization and extremism. In light of the IPU's core mission as set forth in its Statutes, and in follow-up to its resolution on *Ensuring respect for and peaceful co-existence between all religious communities and beliefs in a globalized world* (Nusa Dua, 2007), the IPU and the UN Alliance of Civilizations were developing closer cooperation.

The exchange of views with Mr. Sampaio pointed to the need to enhance the role of parliaments in dealing with popular concerns over culture, identity and migration, which challenged the core values of democracy around the world today. The 127th IPU Assembly in Quebec City in 2012 would focus on "The challenges of citizenship, identity and linguistic and cultural diversity in a globalized world".

Mr. Sampaio underscored the danger of populism in many societies. In Europe, for example, populist movements were gaining more seats in parliament, which reflected a lack of confidence in the political establishment, striking at the very heart of the European model of democracy. The UN Secretary-General, in his inaugural address to the 125th IPU Assembly, had warned that "the biggest challenge is not a deficit of resources, but a deficit of trust. People are losing faith in governments and institutions to do the right things". Restoring trust between citizens and politicians should be a major concern for all legislators.

The Committee stressed that parliaments and parliamentarians should consider various initiatives to enhance intercultural dialogue and cooperation, including the following:

- Organizing regular debates in parliament on issues relating to multiculturalism, cultural diversity, and intercultural dialogue;
- Establishing specific mechanisms to help maintain these issues on the parliamentary agenda, and continuing to take follow-up action with a view to implementing the recommendations of the above-mentioned IPU resolution;
- Playing an active role in the elaboration and implementation of national strategies for intercultural dialogue;
- Joining national delegations to the annual Forums of the UNAOC, such as the forthcoming Global Forum in Doha (11-13 December), which will focus on "Intercultural dialogue to boost development".

The second session took the form of a panel discussion on *Nuclear Weapons: The Road to Zero*. The event, chaired by Speaker Harry Jenkins of Australia, was held in follow-up to the IPU resolution on *Advancing nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament, and securing the entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty: The role of parliaments*. This resolution includes many practical recommendations on what parliaments should do to ensure universal ratification of the Treaty, promote the UN Secretary-General's five-point plan for nuclear disarmament, and support a number of steps such as reductions in nuclear stockpiles, establishment of nuclear-weapon-free zones, and commencement of negotiations on a fissile materials treaty and a comprehensive nuclear weapons convention.

The Committee heard presentations by renowned public figures, prominent experts and leading parliamentarians, and engaged in a discussion on the new visions, policies and proposals put forward to address the threats and challenges posed by nuclear weapons. It also considered possible roles, responsibilities and action by parliaments and parliamentarians, including regional perspectives and initiatives from Europe, Africa, Asia-Pacific and Latin America.

The participants deplored the scant attention paid by parliamentarians to this crucial issue. The catastrophic humanitarian consequences of any use of nuclear weapons outweighed all the possible arguments for maintaining these weapons in the world today. It was irresponsible and unacceptable to work for their abolition after they had been used - whether accidentally, intentionally or by miscalculation. Failure to properly and urgently address this issue was tantamount to crushing the hopes and aspirations and violating the rights of citizens the world over. In addition, the huge financial resources poured into the production of nuclear weapons deprived millions of persons of access to better health care, education and development.

The Committee reaffirmed that all nations had a responsibility to address this issue diligently. Nuclear weapons States had an obligation to implement the commitments they had undertaken through the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), which inter alia called for the start of negotiations on the elimination of nuclear weapons. Non-nuclear weapon States could help establish the framework for a nuclear weapons-free world by prohibiting and criminalizing nuclear weapons in their national legislation, establishing regional nuclear weapons-free zones, and promoting common security models as alternatives to nuclear deterrence.

The Committee called on parliamentarians around the world to take action and to promote concrete measures aimed at nuclear disarmament. In support of this process, the IPU was encouraged to develop tools for parliamentarians, including a guide on good practice and model legislation intended to inspire other parliaments. The Committee recommended that the IPU maintain the issue of nuclear disarmament on its agenda and continue its work in cooperation with partners such as the United Nations, the Comprehensive Test-Ban Treaty Organization (CTBTO) and the International Committee of the Red Cross, as well as with think tanks, non-governmental organizations and parliamentary bodies such as Parliamentarians for Nuclear Non-proliferation and Disarmament (PNND).

The Committee devoted its third session to the Istanbul Programme of Action and follow-up to the Fourth UN Conference on the Least Developed Countries (LDC IV), held in Istanbul in May 2011. The session was moderated by Mr. Mélégué Traoré, a member of the National Assembly of Burkina Faso, and featured a keynote address by Mr. Cheick Sidi Diarra, UN Under-Secretary-General and High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States (UN-OHRLLS). The presentations addressed the main outcomes of LDC IV and plans for follow-up, and the important role parliaments had in the achievement of national development commitments, including the Istanbul Declaration and Programme of Action (IPoA). Participants were briefed on the joint IPU-UNOHRLLS project in support of LDC Parliaments and introduced participants to a Guidance Note developed by the IPU.

The joint project sought to enhance parliaments' contribution to the implementation of the LDC IV decisions, particularly in the areas of good governance and capacity-building. The main purpose of the project was to strengthen the ability of LDC parliaments to establish, monitor, assess, and provide follow-up to the IPoA. The IPU Guidance Note was designed to provide LDC parliaments with guidelines on possible institutional mechanisms for mainstreaming relevant IPoA commitments into their work. It sought to encourage greater involvement by parliaments in the area of development cooperation, and highlighted the advantages and disadvantages of creating dedicated parliamentary committees on the IPoA.

In the ensuing discussion, participants and presenters underscored the vital role of parliaments in the implementation of the IPoA. They agreed that the IPoA provided LDC parliaments with the basis to be involved in major policy decisions. Development-related committees or informal working groups often did not have the resources to do their work properly, but participants recognized that LDCs must pay attention to empowering parliament, and taking charge of their own development. They acknowledged that a greater dissemination of information at the national level was required, emphasizing the need for greater cooperation among LDCs at the regional and subregional levels.

In a separate session held in the afternoon of 17 October, the Committee examined developments in cooperation between the United Nations, national parliaments and the IPU. It heard a presentation by Ms. K. Komi (Finland), a member of the Advisory Group of the IPU Committee on United Nations Affairs, on the main findings and recommendations of the most recent field mission conducted by the Advisory Group to Ghana and Sierra Leone.

As was the case during previous mission to Tanzania (2008) and Viet Nam (2009), the purpose of the IPU visit was to gather first-hand information on progress made in the One UN reform and, more generally, to gain a better understanding of how UN country teams engaged with the national parliament. The mission sought to assess the involvement of parliament in the formulation of national development strategies and the oversight of aid, and to identify

modalities to address any possible shortcomings. The mission's long-term objective therefore was to help lay the foundations for greater parliamentary involvement in the improved planning and use of development funding.

The Committee held an exchange of views on the various recommendations included in the mission report, which were applicable to many other countries. In order to fully exercise its functions and oversight role, efforts aimed at building parliamentary capacity and providing technical assistance must be pursued. Regional parliamentary organizations were called upon to play a more active role, including as depositories of relevant information and expertise.

The Committee considered that there was greater scope for the United Nations to engage with parliament as a serious partner, not just as a recipient of international assistance, but also – and more importantly – as a major player in the design and implementation of national strategies and plans. While promoting the Delivering as One approach, the United Nations as a system should be prepared to provide clearer guidelines on how UN country teams could best engage with national parliaments on various policy issues.

As observed by the IPU field mission and highlighted in the responses to the IPU Survey on how parliaments organize their work vis-à-vis the UN system (July 2010), this relationship varies from country to country, depending on a wide range of variables. UN General Assembly Resolution 65/123 specifically calls for "a regular annual exchange between the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination and the senior leadership of the Inter-Parliamentary Union, with a view to building greater coherence in the work of the two organizations, maximizing parliamentary support for the United Nations and helping to forge a strategic partnership between the two organizations". The Committee called for this provision to be acted upon without further delay.

The Committee took stock of preparations for the UN General Assembly debate on "Interaction between the United Nations, national parliaments and the IPU" - a stand-alone item on the agenda of the General Assembly at its current 66th session. While underscoring the importance of the previous General Assembly Resolution (65/123) and the need to further consolidate the gains achieved, it was agreed that there was scope for further progress in this field. The Committee encouraged national parliaments to seriously consult on this issue, among themselves and at the national level with their respective foreign ministries, with a view to identifying the main elements of a rich debate at the United Nations and a new and strong General Assembly resolution. It was agreed that the Committee's Advisory Group would further examine this matter at its next meeting, to be held in New York in late November, on the occasion of the 2011 Parliamentary Hearing at the United Nations.

In the morning of 19 October, the Committee held a panel discussion on the topic *The green economy: A breakthrough for sustainable development?* The debate was held in the context of preparations for the 2012 United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, also known as the Rio+20 Conference. This event, which aims to assess progress in meeting the international commitments on sustainable development adopted by States 20 years ago, was expected to focus on two main themes: the green economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty reduction; and the institutional framework for sustainable development.

The panel was moderated by Brazilian MP Hugo Napoleao, and featured a prominent group of parliamentarians, UN officials, international experts, and representatives of civil society and the private sector. The participants addressed the different meanings and

applications of the "green economy", and its attendant green technologies, as well as questions about the conditions required for the concept to fully encapsulate all three dimensions of sustainable development. They also provided a critical perspective on the green economy, particularly from the standpoint of the following three objectives of the broader sustainable development agenda: changing production and consumption patterns; decoupling economic growth from environmental degradation; achieving equity, poverty reduction and greater well-being for all.

The concept of sustainable development was often confused with that of environmental sustainability, but sustainable development was actually a broader and more complex construct that rests on the fusion of environmental (quality), social (equity) and economic (prosperity) dimensions into a single policy approach. The sustainable development agenda relates to both developed and developing countries and by most standards remains today largely unrealized. The economy was using up far more resources than could be replaced or preserved and almost all natural assets - forests, oceans and biodiversity - were threatened at the cost of a lower quality of life, and poverty and inequality persisted in spite of an overall increase in total wealth. Given the direct impact of this reality on the lives of citizens all over the world, parliaments and parliamentarians were called upon to play a proactive role in both national policy-making as well as in the international process leading up to Rio+20.

In its last sitting, the Committee discussed the state of play in preparations for this year's session of the United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP 17/CMP 7), to be held in December 2011 in Durban, South Africa. The session was chaired by Mr. Cedric Frolick, coordinator of preparations for the Durban Conference in the South African Parliament. The Committee was briefed on the current negotiations, challenges and requirements for the conclusion of a global agreement on climate policies that encompassed adaptation, mitigation, finance, technology, forests and capacity-building. The Committee exchanged views on a draft parliamentary message to the UN Conference, which should be a succinct but powerful political declaration for both governments and parliaments.