

## **PANEL DISCUSSION ON REASONS FOR THE HIGH TURNOVER OF PARLIAMENTARIANS AT ELECTIONS**

*20 March 2014 (2.30-4.30 p.m.)  
(Rooms 3 & 4, Level 0, CICG)*

### Concept note

Every election leads to changes in the membership of parliament. At one level, this is a sign of a healthy democracy. Electors have the right to vote to change their representative, if they are not satisfied with their work, or if they prefer to give their vote to a different political party.

Recent years have seen high turnovers in countries in all parts of the world. In some countries, turnover exceeds 50 per cent of parliamentarians on a regular basis. The reasons for high turnover may go beyond the political choices of voters. Parliamentarians may choose not to stand for re-election. Political parties may decide not to re-nominate an incumbent parliamentarian.

Turnover can have both positive and negative impacts. It creates space for new generations of representatives to enter parliament, and can bring new energy to the institution. Regular renewal of the composition of parliament may offer the possibility to increase the number of women, young people and minority groups in parliament. However, there are also concerns that high turnover can have an impact on the effectiveness of the work being done by parliaments.

Being a parliamentarian is a complex job. It is widely argued that parliamentarians require at least one term to become skilled in the different facets of their work. This is even more the case for women and young parliamentarians, who have to master the rules of an institution that, more often than not, was created to meet the needs of older men. If incumbent parliamentarians are replaced before they have the time to master some parliamentary skills, will parliaments be less effective in holding government to account and scrutinizing draft legislation?

Political parties play a central role in deciding who will be a candidate at elections. Do parties also use this power as a way to manage their political forces, rewarding some candidates while dismissing other incumbents who have fallen out of favour?

A related issue is how legislative turnover affects public perceptions of parliament. The 2012 joint IPU-UNDP *Global Parliamentary Report* argues that recent years have seen increased public demand for greater accountability and responsiveness from parliaments and their representatives. High turnover may increase the sense of adaptation and renewal, but it may also raise questions about the effectiveness of the institution if its members are perceived as being less experienced.

The panel aims to examine the extent of turnover, the reasons for it, its impact on the work of parliament and public perceptions of the institution. It will provide an opportunity for parliamentarians from different countries and political systems to share their views on the subject and identify good practices that improve the functioning of parliament and democracy.

*Questions for consideration:*

- Is the turnover of parliamentarians high in your country? Is it increasing? What are the reasons for this?
- What is the impact of high turnover on the work of your parliament? How can new parliamentarians best acquire the skills they need to be effective in their work?
- What are the factors that lead some parliamentarians not to seek re-election? Are these the same for men and women? To what extent are political parties responsible for high turnover?
- Does high turnover create more opportunities for women or pave the way for young people or minority groups to be elected? Are these groups particularly affected by high turnover?
- How does turnover (whether high or low) affect public perceptions of parliament?
- Is the vote of younger people contributing to high turnover of parliamentarians in your country?