

Report of the Standing Committee on United Nations Affairs

*Noted by the 134th IPU Assembly
(Lusaka, 23 March 2016)*

The President of the Committee, Mr. A. Avsan (Sweden) opened the session and welcomed the participants.

Referring to the first two items on the agenda, Mr. Avsan invited the Committee to adopt the report of the previous session at the 133rd Assembly and elect three new members to the Bureau following nominations received by the geopolitical groups: Mr. A. Romanovich (Russian Federation), Ms. A.R. Albasti (United Arab Emirates), and Mr. A.-F.I. Al-Mansour (Sudan).

Mr. Romanovich, having had to return to his country, was introduced by Mr. K. Kosachev as a former member of the Bureau, also from the Russian Federation. Ms. Albasti talked about her work with women and domestic violence and her interest in international affairs, particularly peacekeeping. Mr. Al-Mansour was absent.

Mr. Avsan proceeded to introduce the two sessions on the programme, which he chaired.

Session 1: **Interactive debate on the new election process for the UN Secretary-General.**

Ms. G.Ortiz, President of the Legislative Studies Committee (Senate of Mexico), and member of the Bureau of the IPU Committee on United Nations Affairs; **Mr. K. Kosachev**, Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee, Council of the Federation, Russian Federation; and **Ms. Y. Terlingen**, Representative of the *1 for 7 Billion Campaign*

This session provided members with an opportunity to comment on a new appointment process for the selection of the United Nations Secretary-General as outlined in a Secretariat background note. The note traced the history of the appointment process over 70 years of the United Nations and showed that most of the applicable rules were derived by practice and not from the UN Charter. It was possible for member States to change these rules by a resolution of the General Assembly.

As part of the ongoing reform process of the United Nations, a large number of Member States had demanded that the appointment of the UN Secretary General be more transparent and inclusive of the entire membership, through the General Assembly, and not confined to the 15-member Security Council where five permanent members (the P5 with veto power) held most of the decision-making authority. A more democratic selection process would help ensure the impartiality of the office-holder and empower him or her to act as a true representative of the “peoples” referred to in the UN Charter.

The background note proposed seven questions for discussion on the qualifications for the post of UN Secretary-General, the renewability of the term of office, and considerations for gender balance and regional representation. Most importantly, the note invited reflection on the key question of whether the General Assembly should hold a real election and not be limited to approving the one candidate recommended by the Security Council. That would require the Security Council to submit to the General Assembly more than one name.

Elaborating further, Ms. Terlingen gave a detailed presentation of a new appointment process the General Assembly had adopted in resolution 69/321 of September 2015. Mr. Kosachev and Ms. Ortiz acted as respondents to her presentation. The following 15 delegations contributed comments and questions: Bangladesh, Bahrain, Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Burkina Faso, Canada, Cuba, Kenya, Morocco, the Netherlands, Portugal, Uganda, South Africa, United Kingdom, United Arab Emirates and Zambia.

Ms. Terlingen noted that while the new appointment process represented a step in the right direction, it did not go far enough. She noted two important innovations: first, government-nominated candidates must submit their curricula vitae to the President of the General Assembly and all must be posted online; second, the General Assembly can convene informal public hearings with the candidates. The new process also more explicitly than ever invites woman candidates to come forward and stresses the need to consider gender diversity in that process, which so far had always led to the appointment of men only.

From the standpoint of the *1 for 7 Billion campaign* (an umbrella organization of 750 civil society organizations), the new rules should limit the mandate of the UN Secretary-General to a single non-renewable term (possibly extended to seven years) in order to enhance the political independence of the UN Secretary-General from the P5 and other key members whose support he/she needed to be re-elected. Most of all, the rules should allow the General Assembly to hold a vote on a slate of at least two nominations from the Security Council.

Ms. Terlingen said, “the UN Secretary General represents the conscience of the world and plays an important role in helping Member States rise above their national interests”. It is important that his or her selection be as inclusive and representative as possible. To that end, she suggested that parliamentarians should play a role in the process by: holding debates on the qualifications required for the post; by helping identify qualified candidates; by scrutinizing the eventual nominations; by proposing questions to be asked of the candidates at the hearings of the General Assembly; by insisting that the office-holder be free to appoint his/her cabinet based on merit alone (i.e., not as patronage appointments); by advocating a single term of office; and by insisting that the Security Council submit more than one recommendation to the General Assembly, thus making the process more democratic.

In his response, Mr. Kosachev cautioned that any changes to the current system must be carefully considered bearing in mind the long-term consequences. The new process for 2016, which would lead to the appointment of a new UN Secretary-General effective January 2017, was not the only window of opportunity to effect change. For Mr. Kosachev, the mandate of the UN Secretary-General as defined in the Charter was primarily of an administrative nature, as head of the Secretariat. The UN Secretary-General's political functions were very limited and subject to guidance from the General Assembly. From that standpoint, it was not aberrant for the UN Secretary-General to be dependent on the membership instead of being empowered to act alone.

According to Mr. Kosachev, regional rotation of the post of UN Secretary-General was welcome so that the whole world would eventually be represented in the position. Gender balance was also welcome, provided the best qualified person was chosen in the end. On the question of term limits, Mr. Kosachev disagreed with the argument that a single term was more empowering than two consecutive terms. On the key question of whether the P5 members of the Security Council should retain the power to veto a nomination, Mr. Kosachev argued that the system was much more constraining than people thought because it forced the P5, and indeed the whole membership of the Security Council, to reach a consensus.

Ms. Ortiz remarked on the discussion from the gender perspective of the selection process. She welcomed the fact that more Member States were supportive of women candidates and hoped that would lead to a woman being elected for the first time in 2016. While noting that the Security Council's control of the process was undemocratic, Ms. Ortiz expressed concern that the gender composition of the Security Council was another issue that needed to be addressed. If the Council was to remain in control of the selection, and if the selection was equally open to women and men, then the Council itself needed to be reformed to ensure gender parity. A male-dominated Council was less likely to select a woman candidate than one in which women were equally represented.

In the ensuing debate, a few participants expressed general satisfaction with the status quo while most expressed support for further democratization of the appointment process. Those interventions clearly signalled that the selection process must become transparent and involve all Member States, not just

those who sat on the Security Council, and reinforced the view that the UN Secretary-General was accountable to the more representative General Assembly. Two interventions went further, recommending that the process should end with a vote by the General Assembly on more than one candidate, as was the practice at the IPU. Three participants supported the idea of a single, non-renewable term.

The participants expressed strong support for women candidates to be considered. One intervention specifically suggested that the focus should not be limited to inviting women candidates but more importantly to making sure a woman was actually elected. Several UN agencies had been or were being led by women and there was no question as to the availability of highly qualified women to take on the top job of UN Secretary-General. To ensure gender balance in the outcome of the selection process, one delegate suggested that a gender “rotation” should be instituted so that the post would alternate between a man and a woman (i.e. admitting only male candidates or only female candidates on each occasion).

Participants underscored that parliaments should have a role in the selection process. Several speakers expressed support for many of Ms. Terlingen’s recommendations, particularly the idea that parliaments should hold debates on their governments’ nominees and even submit their own proposals. A specific suggestion was that parliaments needed to support the UN Secretary-General in his/her efforts to implement key administrative reforms that were required to strengthen the United Nations.

Concluding the debate, participants asked the IPU to transmit the following three questions to all candidates in the running in 2016:

1. Agenda 2030 will be successful if members of parliament are involved in the development of their national action plans, in monitoring implementation, and in aligning budgets and legislation to the agenda. As UNSG, will you advocate among Member States for parliamentary engagement in the implementation of the new 2030 Agenda and attendant SDGs?
2. Numerous UN General Assembly resolutions and UN Secretary-General reports recommend a strong relationship between the United Nations and national parliaments, as well as with the IPU. As UN Secretary-General, what specific actions would you take to strengthen these relationships at the global and national levels to more effectively serve the people?
3. As representatives of the people, parliamentarians want to ensure a more democratic UN Secretary-General selection process. How do you think parliamentarians, through the IPU, as the world organization of parliaments, can have a role in this process?

Session 2: Briefing on the institutional arrangements for the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals

Mr. L. Borbely, Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee, Chamber of Deputies of Romania; **Ms. P. Torsney**, Head of the Office of the Permanent Observer of the IPU to the United Nations; **Mr. A. Motter**, Senior Adviser for Economic and Social Affairs, IPU; **Mr. C. Chauvel**, Parliamentary Adviser, Democratic Governance Group, UNDP.

Following a decision of the Bureau at the October 2015 session, the overarching aim of the session was to provide the Committee with a structure enabling it to work as the IPU’s main body for a regular review of SDGs implementation over the next 15 years. The panel presented various approaches and elaborated on concrete suggestions.

After presenting an overview of various new or established review mechanisms, Mr. Motter described the entry points for parliaments to engage in SDGs implementation at three levels: national, regional and global. At the national level, a key role for parliaments was to deepen national ownership of the goals and to ensure a national plan to localize the goals were firmly in place. Key to the accountability role of parliaments was the fact that their governments presented to them an annual report of progress on the implementation of the plan. At the global level, he noted that parliaments had an opportunity to contribute to the work of the new High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) on sustainable development that would be the

main UN hub for an annual global progress review. Among other things, parliaments should participate in national voluntary reviews and join their national delegations to HLPF sessions.

An initial step all parliaments could take towards implementation was to adopt a motion or a resolution on the SDGs. Mr. Avsan introduced a template resolution the IPU has prepared. He noted that the parliaments of Mali and Trinidad and Tobago had already adopted resolutions and encouraged all delegations to follow suit. He reported that several members of the Bureau, such as those from Canada, Sudan, Morocco, Norway and Sweden, had pledged to table a resolution in 2016.

The IPU was gearing up to help parliaments institutionalize the SDGs. Ms. Torsney provided one illustration in the form of a self-assessment toolkit the IPU intended to publish in May. She invited interested members to provide feedback to her on the toolkit, which was still in draft form. The delegations of Mali and Lesotho expressed an interest in being part of that exercise.

Exploring the regional level of implementation and review, Mr. Borbely highlighted the case of the Eastern European region. His parliament was host to a regional conference on the SDGs in 2015 and would again convene a meeting in April 2016. He noted how all SDG-related processes presented an opportunity to strengthen parliaments' accountability role. In his parliament, the sub-committee on sustainable development would play a key role in mainstreaming the SDGs in the committee system, thus strengthening policy coherence. He urged the IPU to integrate the SDGs in its new five-year strategy and to focus on assisting parliaments in institutionalizing the SDGs in their day-to-day work. For his part, Mr. Chauvel outlined how the United Nations was gearing up to help parliaments implement the SDGs at the country level. He recalled that the 2030 Agenda rested on open, inclusive and participatory reporting, a people-centred approach, and evidence-based support. He noted that there was strong agreement in principle that parliaments were a key stakeholder in implementation, along with civil society and other actors, but that would not translate automatically into action to engage or support the parliaments. Proactive efforts would be required. Some of the impetus would need to come from citizens themselves. The United Nations would retool the existing My World survey facility so that people could use it to provide feedback on government policy and services directly to their members of parliament.

The following delegations participated in the debate: Cuba, France, Kenya, Mali, Morocco, South Africa, Thailand, United Arab Emirates and Zimbabwe. They elaborated on some of the points made by the panel with further ideas and suggestions. Several comments in particular pointed to the need to strengthen parliaments to allow them to play a strong role in implementation. Two interventions elaborated on the role of the national sustainable development plan as the centrepiece of implementation in each country.

It was agreed that each spring session of the Committee on United Nations Affairs would henceforth be utilized to perform three basic tasks: to take stock of global progress on the SDGs (UN reports); to prepare concerned parliaments for the voluntary national reviews to the HLPF; to prompt parliaments to perform a self-assessment of their capacity to implement the SDGs and to showcase best practices.