

# IPU E-BULLETIN

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**Connecting Politics and Trade, Parliamentary Conference on the WTO** - More than 250 MPs and parliamentary experts specialising in trade issues will gather in Geneva for the [annual session of the Parliamentary Conference on the World Trade Organization \(WTO\)](#) on 15-16 November. With the Doha Round of trade negotiations still in deadlock and the impact of the global financial crisis still widely felt, parliamentarians will look at how to provide strong international rules and political leadership on trade and economic policy. The conference, a process initiated ten years ago by IPU and the European Parliament, will strive to provide a political impulse to the multilateral negotiating process and strengthen parliamentary oversight over world trade talks. Under this year's theme 'Back to Basics: Connecting Politics and Trade', participants will meet with fellow MPs, WTO officials and government negotiators to debate trade as a tool of economic growth, job creation and poverty alleviation; hold a hearing with WTO Director-General Pascal Lamy and hear first-hand information from a newly-established WTO expert panel on the future of trade. The conference will conclude with an outcome document on what is needed to achieve a fair and balanced multilateral trading system.

**IPU Calls for Legislative Commitment to End Violence Against Women** – IPU is calling for strong legislative frameworks to outlaw violence against woman as the Organization marks the International Day to End Violence Against Women on 25 November. A scourge common to all countries worldwide, IPU is providing resources and tools for parliaments to mark the day with special events around this year's theme [Using legislation to end Violence against women and girls](#). While almost 75 per cent of countries in the world guarantee gender equality through legislation and a growing number outlaw domestic violence, implementation lags behind and violence against women remains widespread. IPU's campaign on Violence against Women (VAW) launched in 2008 has helped organize vital parliamentary leadership on the issue and supported legislative processes in many regions of the world. The campaign was instrumental in bringing about ground-breaking legislation against domestic violence in the Maldives passed earlier this year. In Africa, IPU has helped to break the taboo surrounding violence against women and girls as well as female genital mutilation and has assisted in drafting comprehensive bills currently under review in Togo and Burkina Faso. A regional seminar to help parliaments in East and Southern Africa monitor the implementation of laws on violence against women will be held on 5-6 December in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania.

**IPU Parliamentary Workshop on political representation and constituency work in the Caribbean region** – Parliamentarians and government ministers from the Caribbean region will gather in Trinidad and Tobago late November to find practical ways to reconnect with their electorate at a time of growing mistrust towards political leaders and increasing demands for political accountability. The two-day event to take place in [Port-of-Spain on 26-27 November](#) and organized by IPU and the Trinidad and Tobago Parliament, will build on the findings on the IPU-UNDP [Global Parliamentary Report](#) aimed at helping MPs better understand and respond to the needs of citizens and at improving their representative role. MPs and Ministers will share the challenges they face in meeting voters' expectations and their experience in handling the variety of requests from their constituencies. Over the two-days, participants will also develop practical ways to strategically manage their casework and identify immediate steps parliaments can take to

improve constituency service at the local and national levels. It will also provide an opportunity for the region's parliaments to explore ways of inter-parliamentary cooperation through IPU.

**New Report Underlines Unprecedented Use of Social Media by Parliaments in Citizen Engagement** - Parliaments around the world are making unprecedented use of social media and mobile technologies to facilitate MPs work and increase citizens' engagement, according to the latest data analysed in the [World e-Parliament Report 2012](#). The report, a joint initiative of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) and the United Nations, used information provided by 156 parliaments around the world on their use of ICT and analysed the data against two previous polls in 2007 and 2009. For the first time, social media is among the top ten communication methods used by parliaments to engage with citizens, the report shows. Parliaments' use of mobile technology is also booming. More than 50 per cent of them now provide smartphones or tablets to MPs. While significant progress has been made on communicating with citizens, this area is still lagging behind compared with other uses of ICT, the report finds. Overall, financial and staff constraints remain the two greatest obstacles to fully reaping the benefits of information and communications technology (ICT) in all countries, the report concludes.

**Strengthening the Role of Parliamentarians in the Implementation of the UN Universal Periodic Review Process** - As part of IPU's efforts to promote human rights and strengthen parliamentary contribution to the work of UN Human rights promotion mechanisms, IPU and the Commonwealth Secretariat organised a seminar this week in Geneva on the participation of MPs in the Universal periodic Review (UPR) process. Through the newly established UPR, the UN Human Rights Council regularly assesses all UN Member States human rights record. In a series of case studies and discussions, around 90 participants from all regions of the world shared their experience in the process, identified challenges and discussed ways to more successfully engage in a country review and in the domestic implementation of recommendations from the UPR.

**Historic Number of Women Elected to US Congress** – With final results still pending, the latest elections in the United States have already seen the largest number of women ever elected to the US Congress. Women make up close to one in five Senators with 20 seats, the highest ever in the country's history. At least 77 women so far will hold seats in the House of Representatives with final numbers still to be confirmed. Four states have elected women to the US Senate for the first time with New Hampshire the first state to be exclusively represented by women in both chambers as well as at the executive level with a female governor. Prior to the latest elections, the US ranked joint 80<sup>th</sup> in the IPU world rankings of women in parliament with a total of 17 per cent of women in both chambers, though those figures are likely to change when final results are in. The developments in the US elections come at the end of a year that has seen several important milestones for women in parliament in Algeria, France and elsewhere and are a welcome step towards greater progress on gender parity in politics.