

IPU E-BULLETIN

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1. **IPU Mission to Myanmar to Help Re-Build Parliamentary Democracy**
2. **IPU-UNDP Work to Strengthen Palestinian Legislative Council Secretariat**
3. **Opportunities for Greater Collaboration Between Parliaments and Monitoring Organizations**
4. **Putting Gender into the Budget Equation in Rwandan Parliament**
5. **Global Parliamentary Report Goes National**

IPU Mission to Myanmar to Help Re-Build Parliamentary Democracy – As Aung San Suu Kyi and other newly-elected members of her National League for Democracy party prepare to attend the tail end of an extraordinary session of parliament in Myanmar this week, an IPU mission to the country began work to help rebuild an effective and democratic legislative body. It will review the current functioning of parliament, including identifying urgent issues and their solutions before the next full session of parliament. It will also meet leaders of political parties, parliamentary speakers, chairs of committees, women and new members of parliament as well as parliamentary staff. The IPU team will examine, amongst other things, the relationship between the Myanmar parliament and the government; the structure and relationship of the two parliamentary chambers; the role and responsibilities of the political opposition in parliament, the relationship with the electorate and civil society in general and measures to strengthen the parliament's ability to address gender issues. It will also examine systems for legislative drafting and oversight as well as identify ways in which parliament can play a greater role in promoting and defending human rights.

The four-member mission will also begin practical work on providing parliamentarians and parliamentary staff a preliminary understanding of democratic concepts and parliamentary good practices. After submitting the findings to the Myanmar parliamentary authorities, IPU will prepare a long-term assistance programme aimed at strengthening the Myanmar parliament's legislative, oversight and representational roles in a bid to subsequently strengthen democratic and accountable governance. "The long-term plan that will emerge from this mission will not only assist Myanmar at this critical juncture, but will also provide a unique insight into how to help the country in a tangible way for those parliaments and others who want to lend effective support to Myanmar," says Anders B. Johnsson, IPU Secretary General.

IPU-UNDP Work to Strengthen Secretariat of the Palestinian Legislative Council - IPU experts have been dispatched to the West Bank town of Ramallah as part of an IPU-UNDP initiative to help the Secretariat of the Palestinian Legislative Council prepare for a future resumption of parliamentary work. The administrative detention of 23 members (nearly 20%) of the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) by Israel, including the Speaker (<http://www.ipu.org/press-e/kamp1.htm>) and the division between the two main political groups, Fatah and Hamas, have paralysed the Palestinian legislative body since 2007. Although the Secretariat of the PLC has remained operational, the absence of a functioning PLC has taken its toll on its own role and capacities.

The initiative, part of a broader support programme funded by the European Union, will help the Secretariat to become a neutral and modern parliamentary administration, better able to support the PLC in carrying out its legislative and oversight functions in the future. The IPU experts will, amongst other things, review current structures and help address the issue of divergent legal frameworks in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, controlled by Fatah and Hamas respectively. Another IPU expert will arrive next week to work on developing the research and library capacity of the Secretariat so that MPs have access to better information with which to carry out their critical work. A total of 20 expert missions will be carried out to Ramallah over the next 18 months as part of the programme.

Opportunities for Greater Collaboration Between Parliaments and Monitoring

Organizations – Acknowledging that relations between national parliaments and parliamentary monitoring organizations (PMOs) can be difficult, IPU Secretary General Anders B. Johnsson will nevertheless recommend the two look at opportunities for collaboration. Speaking at a PMO leaders' conference today (30/4) hosted by the National Democratic Institute (NDI), the Sunlight Foundation and the Latin American Network for Legislative Transparency in Washington D.C, Johnsson will highlight the many standards and tools that currently exist to help ensure parliaments are more transparent and democratic. Among them are materials developed by IPU which PMOs can draw upon in their work. The conference, on advocating for transparent and democratic parliaments, will consider a draft transparency “pledge” for greater transparency in parliaments.

Putting Gender into the Budget Equation in Rwandan Parliament - Not resting on its laurels as the country with the highest percentage of women MPs (56.3% in the lower house), the Rwandan parliament is taking gender equality to all sectors of life through efforts to introduce gender responsive budgeting in development strategies. In response to a request from the Forum of Rwandan Women Parliamentarians, an IPU team to the African country has just concluded a training of 50 MPs and parliamentary staff of both sexes, including newly elected senators, on gender mainstreaming and budgeting. The training will help in the preparations for the upcoming budget session in parliament and initiated many ideas on how parliament can deliver on gender equality on issues such as education, health and economic empowerment.

Global Parliamentary Report Goes National – National parliaments are being invited by IPU to organize national launches of the IPU-UNDP produced Global Parliamentary Report (GPR) which focuses on the changing nature of parliamentary representation. The report, internationally launched during the 126th IPU Assembly in Kampala in early April, has since been nationally presented in Ecuador by the National Assembly with an event also being organized in Bangladesh in early May. IPU members will shortly receive a letter from Secretary General Johnsson urging them to analyse the findings of the report whose theme resonated strongly during the Kampala Assembly and to engage with civil society on how to strengthen the link between parliaments and citizens. Members will also receive information on what support IPU secretariat can offer on any events organized around the GPR. To access the report and other information online, go to: <http://www.ipu.org/dem-e/gpr.htm> or <http://www.ipu.org/dem-f/gpr.htm>