



Inter-Parliamentary Union

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IPU Statement

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UN Human Rights Council

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Mr President,
Your Excellencies, Permanent Representatives,
Mr. Director,
Madam Deputy High Commissioner,
Distinguished delegates,
Colleagues of OHCHR,
Ladies and gentlemen,

It gives me great pleasure to address this panel discussion today. I am sure it will provide an opportunity for a fruitful and in-depth discussion of how parliaments can more effectively support the work that the Human Rights Council does. I am hopeful that this will be buttressed by progress that has been achieved since the matter was placed on the agenda of the HRC. I am pleased to note that much of what the IPU does is relevant to your work.

The IPU, the global organization of parliaments encompasses the diversity of parliaments and parliamentary systems that can bring more legitimacy to international governance, including in the area of human rights. Today, 170 national parliaments are Members of our Organization and participate in our work through delegations that reflect the entire political spectrum in parliament. They debate issues that are high on the global agenda, not least among them human rights. At our next Assembly in October this year, our Members will consider how parliaments can address situations of serious human rights violations and prevent them from turning into violent conflict.

The IPU has a Standing Committee dedicated to Human Rights and Democracy. We have a Programme that helps parliaments gain a better understanding of international human rights and their own role in monitoring implementation. The IPU also has a special committee for addressing human rights violations affecting individual parliamentarians. It is based on the premise that MPs can only speak out in defence of those they represent if their own human rights are protected.

So, many of the themes that you address are priorities for the IPU, for instance, promoting gender equality. The IPU has a full-fledged programme to promote a genuine partnership between men and women in politics. We work closely with the Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW Committee) to help implement women's rights. I am pleased to have pledged our commitment to the Geneva Gender Champions initiative. Our cooperation with the UN Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women to promote legislation that addresses such violence is equally rewarding.

Another priority for the IPU is youth empowerment. The IPU has gone to great lengths to help ensure that young people can make an impact today and directly participate in

the political process Earlier this year, the IPU released its first report on global levels of youth participation in parliaments. It is also against this background that we are very pleased that the Council is addressing the question of youth and human rights and that later this year your Forum on Human Rights, Democracy and the Rule of Law will address ways to enhance youth engagement in political decision-making.

We also welcome the essential role the SDGs Declaration assigns to parliaments in translating the goals into action, through legislation, resource allocation and oversight of government action. Goal 16 on peace, justice and the building of effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels is particularly relevant in this respect. The IPU has embarked on an ambitious programme to help parliaments become *fit for purpose* in delivering on the goals and in a way that is firmly grounded in human rights.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Let me now turn more directly to the work you carry out under the Universal Periodic Review (UPR).

Since your first panel discussion on the contribution of parliaments to your work, the IPU has carried out, in collaboration with OHCHR, several capacity-building seminars for parliaments across the world. What we see is that parliaments are increasingly becoming aware of your work and want to make a contribution to it.

Indeed, ever more parliaments are being consulted when national reports are being drafted. Parliamentarians are also more and more included in national delegations when the report is presented to you. During the 2nd cycle, thus far 10 per cent of the national delegations included at least one MP.

More importantly, parliaments have started to take an interest in what comes out of the UPR and how they can play a decisive role in ensuring national implementation.

Ladies and gentlemen,

A genuine partnership between parliaments and the Council also implies strong engagement from the Council with parliaments.

Of course, each country is sovereign in deciding on the modalities for compliance with its human rights obligations and how its parliament should be involved in the process. But even so, nothing prevents you from taking into account more systematically the role of parliaments.

At each stage of the UPR procedure, parliaments can play a role that can be shaped depending on what the national constitutional framework looks like.

While some believe that parliaments would do well to contribute to the preparation of the national report, others consider this the preserve of the executive or feel that such involvement would compromise parliament's independence. Whichever view you hold, there seems to be consensus that, at the very least, parliament must be informed of the report and have an opportunity to debate it.

When it comes to the systematic inclusion of members of parliament in official delegations to the Council, no one disagrees that it could be useful for members of parliament, in an observer capacity and as part of their official delegation, to attend the interactive dialogue in the Council. Ideally, parliamentarians attending the Council

session should represent the political diversity in Parliament and work directly on human rights issues.

Regarding implementation, although your direct counterpart is the executive, it makes perfect sense for you to inquire about parliamentary involvement. Indeed, parliaments can help promote public debate on human rights and seek input from all segments of society. Moreover, they can lend democratic legitimacy to the outcome of that debate and galvanize public support for implementation. Most of the UPR recommendations require legislative and budgetary action. Taking parliaments into account is therefore also about making sure that those recommendations do not end up gathering dust on some shelf or in some drawer.

Ladies and gentlemen,

As you are approaching the third UPR cycle, we have an opportunity to encourage some fresh thinking about how to reach out to parliaments. Let me therefore conclude by making three specific recommendations that I would like you to consider.

First, I would like to call on the Permanent Representatives based in Geneva to be more robust in encouraging their own capitals to integrate parliaments more systematically into the UPR process. Ideally, you can help get the message across that the Council stands much to gain from strong parliamentary involvement. You can also convey the message that it is crucial that the national report and its presentation to the Council mention how the parliament was involved in the implementation of previous recommendations and consulted on the preparation of the latest national report. Additionally, the Permanent Representatives can encourage their capitals to include information in the presentation by their national delegations on how they intend to bring the latest UPR recommendations to the attention of parliament.

Second, the CEDAW Committee adopted a comprehensive statement in 2008 on the relationship between the Committee, IPU and parliaments. In 2010, it decided to systematically include a paragraph in its concluding observations on the need for parliamentary involvement in its reporting procedure. As you will soon embark on the third UPR cycle, Council members may wish to draw inspiration from the CEDAW example with a view to ensuring that national delegations that come before the Council are systematically asked about parliamentary engagement.

Third, when organizing panel discussions and other similar activities, the Human Rights Council may wish to take further steps to guarantee that the work of parliament is more comprehensively taken into account in shaping the focus of these discussions and inviting panellists. Of course, the IPU stands ready to assist you with this.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Building effective national human rights protection systems that include all relevant national stakeholders is critical to making sure that human rights resonate at the national level. The case for more systematic parliamentary involvement in the UPR is strong. The same holds true for the need for stronger outreach by the Council to parliaments. I therefore hope that you will seriously consider the recommendations I have just made.

Thank you.