



International parliamentary conference

Parliaments, minorities and indigenous peoples: Effective participation in politics

31 October - 3 November 2010

Tuxtla Gutiérrez, Chiapas (Mexico)

Background note

The right to participate in decision-making is enshrined in numerous international agreements, including the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Persons belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities (General Assembly resolution 47/135 of 18 December 1992) and the United Nations Declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples (General Assembly resolution 61/295 of 13 September 2007).

Many situations around the world demonstrate that an adequate representation of minorities and indigenous peoples in policy- and decision-making by society is instrumental in breaking the cycle of discrimination and exclusion suffered by members of these groups, and their ensuing disproportionate levels of poverty and related impediments to the full enjoyment of many civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights.

Yet minorities and indigenous peoples often remain excluded from effective participation in decision-making, including at the level of the national parliament. One of the criteria for a democratic parliament is that it should reflect the social diversity of the population. A parliament which is unrepresentative in this sense will leave some social groups and communities feeling disadvantaged in the political process or even excluded altogether, with consequences for the quality of public life or the stability of the political system and society in general.

Conference objectives

The conference will focus on ways to overcome the challenges to effective participation of minorities and indigenous peoples in politics. It will seek to promote the following specific objectives:

- Encourage parliaments to adopt resolutions or motions that recognize the diversity within their societies with respect to race, ethnicity, religion and language, and the importance of reflecting this diversity in public institutions such as parliament.
- Encourage States to take measures, including special measures, to end discrimination and to ensure the effective participation of minorities and indigenous peoples in decision-making, including in parliament.
- Underscore that minorities and indigenous peoples have the right to effectively participate in every step leading to the development and adoption of such measures, with particular attention to the inclusion of a gender perspective.

In doing so, the conference will take into account the recommendations of the 2009 UN Forum on

Organized jointly by the Inter-Parliamentary Union, the Mexican Congress of the Union and the Government of the State of Chiapas, in partnership with the United Nations Development Programme; the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights; the United Nations Independent Expert on minority issues; and the Minority Rights Group International.

Minority Issues, on Minorities and effective political participation¹; and the study on the Right of Indigenous Peoples to Participate in Decision-Making, prepared by the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples².

Conference outcomes

As a result of the conference, participants are expected to be better equipped to take action in their parliaments to promote the effective participation of minorities and indigenous peoples in decision-making. Participants will have greater awareness of the issues; will have obtained information from other countries that may be transferable to their own context, especially regarding good practices in legislation and the implementation of such laws; and will have shared ideas on forms of action to be taken.

Participants may wish to adopt an outcome document that expresses the main ideas of the conference as well as a commitment to further action.

Participants

Up to 250 parliamentarians are expected to participate in the conference. Participants will include:

- Parliamentarians who self-identify as belonging to a minority or indigenous group;
- Members of parliamentary committees that deal with matters relevant to the theme of the Conference, in particular of committees on human rights, minority and indigenous questions, constitutional, legal and electoral affairs.

Modalities

The conference will take place in Tuxtla Gutierrez, Chiapas (Mexico), from 31 October - 3 November 2010.

It will be organized jointly by the Inter-Parliamentary Union, the Mexican Congress of the Union and the Government of Chiapas, in partnership with the United Nations Development Programme; the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights; the United Nations Independent Expert on minority issues; and the Minority Rights Group International.

Interpretation will be provided in English, French and Spanish.

The conference is part of the IPU-UNDP project 'Promoting inclusive parliaments: The representation of minorities and indigenous peoples in parliament' (www.ipu.org/minorities-e), funded by the Canadian International Development Agency.

¹ <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/hrcouncil/minority/forum.htm>

² <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/issues/indigenous/ExpertMechanism/index.htm>