



STRENGTHENING THE ROLE OF PARLIAMENTARIANS IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF UNIVERSAL PERIODIC REVIEW RECOMMENDATIONS

organized jointly by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) and the Commonwealth Secretariat

IPU headquarters, Geneva

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Opening Session: Welcome and Opening

Good morning Honourable Members of Parliament, representative of the Secretary General of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, representative of the Secretary General of the Inter-Parliamentary Union, our seminar speakers, IPU colleagues, ladies and gentlemen:

I would like to warmly welcome you to this seminar jointly organised by the Commonwealth Secretariat and the Inter-Parliamentary Union. We are most appreciative that so many parliamentarians from across our membership, have been able to set aside time to participate in this seminar, which we hope will have direct and far reaching impact on better rights protection.

One of the key programmes of work of the Commonwealth Secretariat is strengthening the respect, protection and promotion of human rights in the Commonwealth. To this end, one of our strategic aims is to assist Commonwealth Member States to participate constructively in the UN Human Rights Council's Universal Periodic Review. Over the past 4 years we have been engaged in developing the capacities of our member states to prepare for their reviews as well as to develop modalities for post-review follow-up and implementation. This we have done with governments, civil society, national human rights institutions and Parliamentarians.

For the past 4 years we have assisted in building the capacities of 158 participants representing more than 50 of our member states that were reviewed during that period. Our capacity development work will continue over the next 4 years, with a specific focus on helping our member states to implement accepted UPR recommendations. Some of the thematic human rights issues which will be taken forward include national human rights action plans; ratification and treaty body reporting obligations; prison and police reform; as well as human rights education. In this work we will continue with our quadripartite approach involving governments, civil society, Parliamentarians and national human rights institutions.

We have also produced two publications relating to engagement with the UPR process: the first in 2009 which focused on best practice for UPR preparation, and the second in 2011 which reviewed the experiences of Member States on their engagement with the UPR process. We are currently developing a third which will focus on best practice modalities for follow-up and implementation.

Parliaments and parliamentarians have a fundamental role in promoting the protection of human rights domestically and internationally. Parliamentarians are one of the key stakeholders that can help to implement UPR recommendations through various parliamentary processes. They can do so in a number of different ways:

- Firstly, parliamentarians can influence the development of new legislation or by amending existing legislation which seeks to give effect to UPR recommendations;
- Secondly, parliamentarians can ask oral or written parliamentary questions or hold parliamentary debates to highlight key human rights concerns raised in UPR recommendations and call for reforms in government policy, practice or legislation;
- Thirdly, parliamentarians can work collectively in formal committees or informal groups that have a mandate to consider the extent to which governments and public bodies are complying with their domestic and international human rights obligations.

We are hopeful that this seminar will lead to definitive outcomes and actions which we all could commit to in the interest of harnessing increased Parliamentary participation in the UPR process as well as implementation of UPR recommendations.

I look forward to engaging with many of you over the next 2 days, getting to know some of your challenges and how these can be addressed.
Thank you.