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## Translating international human rights commitments into national realities: The contribution of parliaments to the work of the United Nations Human Rights Council

Seminar for Asia-Pacific parliaments organized jointly by the Senate of the Philippines and the Inter-Parliamentary Union, and in collaboration with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

**26 - 27 February 2015, Diamond Hotel, Manila (Philippines)**

### PROGRAMME

#### Background and objectives of the seminar

On 29 May 2013, the Human Rights Council, with the support of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and the IPU, held a panel discussion in Geneva on the contribution of parliaments to promoting human rights at the national level and to the work of the Council. The participants concurred that parliaments had a critical part to play in ensuring respect for human rights domestically and that parliaments and the Human Rights Council stood to gain much from closer cooperation. To this end, participants formulated the following recommendations:

- Further enhance awareness among members of parliaments of the existence of the Human Rights Council and its Universal Periodic Review (UPR) and the need for their full involvement in its work;
- Foster greater involvement of members of parliament in the three different reporting stages of the UPR; and
- Promote the adoption, by the Human Rights Council, of practical steps to engage with parliaments and to take their work into account.

In recent years, the Inter-Parliamentary Union has made it a priority to raise awareness among parliaments about the Council and its UPR and the contribution they can make to them. The IPU systematically informs parliaments of the forthcoming examination of their countries' national reports. The IPU organizes capacity-building workshops for parliamentarians to enhance their understanding of the UPR and their role. A recent survey conducted by the IPU found that many parliaments are still unfamiliar with the work of the Council or its UPR. The tide is turning, however, and parliaments are increasingly taking an active interest in the work of the Council.

On 27 June 2014, during its 26<sup>th</sup> session, the Human Rights Council adopted a resolution<sup>1</sup> endorsing the need to involve parliaments in its work and to benefit from their contribution to the promotion of human rights.

The regional seminar in Manila aims to inform participants about how the Human Rights Council functions and alert them to the importance of becoming more involved. The meeting aims to identify good parliamentary practices in working with the Council and in promoting and protecting human rights in general, in particular, by initiating an effective and continuous dialogue with other stakeholders such as national institutions and civil society. It also aims to determine the appropriate cooperation framework among other stakeholders, in particular the executive, national human rights institutions, civil society and parliaments with a view to maximizing the latter's contribution to the promotion of human rights.



<sup>1</sup> A/HRC/26/L.21 (<http://www.ipu.org/Un-e/a-hrc-26-L21.pdf>)

## Thursday, 26 February 2015

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8 a.m.	<b>Registration</b>
9 a.m.	<b>Opening Ceremony</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- <b>Mr. Giorgidi Aggabao</b>, Deputy Speaker of the House of Representatives (Philippines)</li><li>- <b>Ms. Flavia Pansieri</b>, Deputy High Commissioner, United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) (video message)</li><li>- <b>Mr. Mian Raza Rabbani</b>, Member of the Senate (Pakistan) Member of the Executive Committee of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU)</li><li>- <b>Mr. Franklin M. Drilon</b>, President of the Senate (Philippines)</li></ul>
9.45 a.m.	<i>Coffee Break</i>
10 a.m.	<b>Session I: Introductory remarks on the international and regional situation of human rights: mechanisms of the promotion and the protection of human rights</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- <b>Ms. Shahrzad Tadjbakhsh</b>, Chief, UPR Branch, United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR - Geneva)</li></ul>
10.45 a.m.	<b>Session II: Introduction to the Universal Periodic Review and a parliamentary contribution to its work</b> <p><i>Without parliamentary action – be it passing laws or overseeing government action – very few UPR recommendations would actually be implemented. Parliaments can play a critical role in the implementation phase and beyond. They can also discuss the draft national report of the UPR process before it is presented to the Council, and take part in its official presentation to the Council.</i></p> <p>This session aims to present the work and objectives of the Council and its UPR and how it relates to other United Nations human rights mechanisms, in particular the UN treaty body and special procedures. The session will also look at some lessons to be learned from the first and second UPR cycles.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- <b>Ms. Myriam Tebourbi</b>, UPR Branch (OHCHR - Geneva)</li><li>- <b>Mr. Mizanar Rahman</b>, Chairperson, National Human Rights Commission (Bangladesh)</li><li>▶ <i>Moderator:</i> <b>Mr. Pelzang Wangchuk</b>, Member of the National Assembly, Chairperson of the Human Rights Committee (Bhutan)</li></ul> <p>Discussion</p>
12.30 p.m.	<i>Lunch</i>
2 p.m.	<b>Session III: National case studies on involvement in the UPR</b> <p><i>The executive – often together with national human rights institutions – is in the driver's seat in preparing the UPR reporting cycle and ensuring implementation of its recommendations. Parliaments are often largely unaware of this process, although this is slowly changing.</i></p> <p>This session will look at three or four interesting national case studies of how the UPR report was prepared and how UPR recommendations have been implemented. It will examine in particular the involvement of parliament in the process and its interaction with other human rights stakeholders</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- <b>Mr. Jonathan Mark Naylor</b>, Member of Parliament (New Zealand)</li><li>- <b>Datuk Dr. Khaw Lake Tee</b>, Vice Chairperson, Human Rights Commission – SUHAKAM (Malaysia)</li><li>- <b>Ms. Leila de Lima</b>, Secretary of Justice (Philippines)</li><li>▶ <i>Moderator:</i> <b>Mr. Agafili Patisela</b>, Deputy Speaker of the Legislative Assembly (Samoa) <b>Ms. Cynthia Veliko</b>, Human Rights Adviser, Manila (Philippines)</li></ul> <p>Discussion</p>
4 p.m.	<i>Coffee break</i>

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4.15 p.m.

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#### Session IV: Common challenges regarding the human rights situation in Asia-Pacific

*Although the Council adopts specific recommendations for each country, some human rights issues appear to be more frequently mentioned than others in the Universal Periodic Review recommendations for Asia-Pacific countries.*

This session will examine how States in the region, with the help of parliaments, have been able to address some of these issues, notably:

- Ensuring the proper administration of justice
- Climate change, environment and global warming/Climate Justice
- **Ms. Karen Gomez Dumpit**, Member of the Philippine Working Group for an ASEAN Human Rights Mechanism (Philippines)
- **Mr. Mian Raza Rabbani**, Member of the Senate (Pakistan)
- **Mr. Aquilino “Koko” Pimentel III**, Member of the Senate (Philippines)
- ▶ *Moderator:* **Ms. Jiko Luveni**, Speaker of the Parliament (Fiji)  
**Mr. Mika Kanervavuori**, United Nations Human Rights Adviser in Bangladesh

Discussion

6 p.m.

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Wrap-up session

7 p.m.

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Dinner

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### Friday, 27 February 2015

9.30 a.m.

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#### Session V: Promotion of women's rights

- Gender equality and violence against women in the Asia-Pacific
- The IPU contribution to the promotion of gender equality
- A shining example of strong parliamentary involvement in the work of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women

*The UN Committee supervising implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) has a very similar reporting procedure to that of the Council's UPR. For several years now, parliaments and the CEDAW Committee, with the assistance of the IPU, have been cooperating to help ensure that CEDAW is effectively implemented at the national level.*

This session will be divided into three segments. The first will briefly present an overview of the situation on gender equality and violence against women in the Asia-Pacific. The second segment will present the IPU contribution to the promotion of gender equality. The third will look at the lessons to be learned from the CEDAW experience of enhancing parliaments' contribution to the UPR.

- **Ms. Kamala Chandrakirana**, Member of the Working Group on discrimination against women in law and practice (OHCHR)
- **Ambassador Rosario Manalo**, Special Representative of the Philippines to the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights
- **Ms. Marama Fox**, Member of Parliament (New Zealand)
- ▶ *Moderator:* **Ms. Nihayatul Wafiroh**, Member of Parliament (Indonesia)

Discussion

11 a.m.

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Coffee break

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11.30 a.m.

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## Session VI: The place of human rights in development and its impact on disadvantaged groups including minorities and indigenous peoples

*The economic growth and fast pace of development of many Asia-Pacific countries pose special human rights problems for vulnerable groups such as minorities and indigenous peoples. According to the State of the World's Minorities and Indigenous Peoples 2012, they are often victims of discrimination, excluded from political participation and even face eviction from their traditional lands because of development such as mining and logging.*

*Governments generally view development as a positive sign of progress which generates jobs, infrastructure and increased tax revenue. However, minorities and indigenous peoples have a different view of development since their traditional lands that will be developed are an integral part of their lives and culture. Negative impacts of development projects such as loss of land, livelihood, and traditional way of living and environmental issues often far outweigh any positive benefits, such as employment opportunities or new roads.*

This session will examine how the human rights of minorities and indigenous peoples are affected by development (mining, agriculture, logging, urbanization). It will also examine in particular the role of parliament in eliminating the discrimination and exclusion of these groups. It will also examine how investors can practice corporate responsibility and establish a more sustainable relationship with minorities and indigenous peoples.

- **Mr. Peeni Henare**, Member of Parliament (New Zealand)
- ▶ **Moderator: Mr. Noah Kemesong**, Member of the House of Delegates (Palau)

Discussion

12.30 p.m.

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Lunch

2.30 p.m.

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## Session VII: The protection of human rights at the national level: strategies for an enhanced parliamentary contribution

*Parliaments' prerogatives to adopt legislation, oversee government action and adopt the national budget are critical in promoting human rights. Several parliaments have set up specific committees devoted to human rights in order to do this efficiently.*

This session will address the following main questions:

- Do parliaments effectively exercise their legislative, budgetary and oversight functions to promote human rights?
  - What are the experiences/best practices of parliamentary human rights committees?
  - What are the experiences/best practices in terms of aligning national legislation with international human rights standards: analysis of recommendations/observations of international and regional human rights mechanisms?
- **Mr. Aquilino Q. Pimentel, Jr.**, former Senate President (Philippines)
  - **Mr. Shri Cyriac Joseph**, Justice, Member of the National Human Rights Commission (India)
  - ▶ **Moderator: Ms. Shahrzad Tadjbakhsh**, Chief, UPR Branch, United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR - Geneva)

Discussion

4 p.m.

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Coffee break

4.15 p.m.

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## Presentation of the report of the seminar by the Rapporteur

4.45 p.m.

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Closing ceremony ■

- **Ms. Shahrzad Tadjbakhsh**, Chief, UPR Branch, United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR - Geneva)
  - **Mr. Mian Raza Rabbani**, Member of the Senate, Member of the Executive Committee of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) (Pakistan)
  - **Senator Aquilino "Koko" Pimentel III**, Member of the Senate, Conference Chair (Philippines)
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