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**Seminar for Chairpersons and Members of Parliamentary Human Rights Bodies on  
Freedom of Expression, Parliament and the Promotion of Tolerant Societies**

*Geneva, IPU Headquarters  
25 to 27 May 2005*

Geneva, 15 March 2005

Dear Mr. President,

As you know, the IPU has consistently invited Member Parliaments to establish human rights bodies within their institutions as an important way to ensure that human rights permeate all parliamentary activity. As part of these efforts, the IPU has started to place increasing attention on the functioning and work of these committees.

It is in this context that in March 2004, the IPU, together with its United Nations partners, organised the first-ever international seminar for members of parliamentary human rights bodies. Participants greatly valued this initiative and suggested that similar meetings be held to address specific human rights concerns and themes with which they were confronted in their day-to-day work.

I am therefore pleased to inform you that the first such event has been scheduled to take place from **25 to 27 May 2005**, at IPU Headquarters in Geneva. It will focus on the right to freedom of expression, parliament and the promotion of tolerant societies.

Freedom of expression has been hailed as the touchstone of human rights and democracy. Its exercise, however, poses many problems, particularly as regards the necessary protection that members of parliament must enjoy when exercising this right, as well as the limits they must respect.

The seminar will aim to improve the understanding of the legal framework for what is after all parliamentarians' most important tool. It will address both the question of adequate protection of freedom of speech of

members of parliament and the restrictions placed thereupon, such as respect for the rights and reputation of others. You will find enclosed a provisional programme for the three-day event. A final version will be sent to you in due course.

The seminar, which is being organised together with Article 19, an expert organisation in the field of freedom of expression, is open to all members of parliamentary human rights bodies. The topics on the agenda will be introduced by members of parliament and representatives of international, regional or national mechanisms which deal with freedom of expression. The emphasis will be on discussion, and everything will be done to leave ample time for a free exchange of views. English, French, Spanish and Arabic interpretation will be provided.

Enclosed you will find an IPU registration form, which I invite you kindly to return to our Secretariat no later than 30 April 2005. In this regard, I should inform you that the conference room at IPU Headquarters has only limited seating capacity, which is why I kindly request you to limit any delegation from your parliament to a maximum of three persons (including advisers and secretaries).

Lastly, I would like to point out that all matters relating to visas, hotel accommodation and transportation of participants should be taken care of by the participants. To facilitate hotel bookings, I am enclosing a reservation form which participants may wish to use. Please note that both forms, along with the provisional programme of the seminar and other relevant documents, will be available on the IPU web site at <http://www.ipu.org/Splz-e/foe.htm> as from mid-March 2005.

Looking forward to the participation of your parliament at the Seminar, I remain,

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Anders B. Johnsson', with a stylized flourish extending to the right.

Anders B. Johnsson  
Secretary General

Annex: Provisional programme  
Registration form  
Hotel reservation form