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PROJECT SUMMARY

HELPING PARLIAMENTS IN POST-CONFLICT SITUATIONS PLAY THEIR ROLE IN ADDRESSING THE WOUNDS OF THE PAST AND IN CREATING VIABLE SOCIETIES

Background

The input of parliaments in the reconciliation processes is vital. A parliament which is fully representative of all components of society and which offers a national platform for a free and open exchange of views is in itself an important sign that reconciliation is underway. It is also an important factor in consolidating the reconciliation process. It is parliament that plays an essential role in securing a national consensus on the need for and form of reconciliation, in monitoring the agreements made to this effect and in adopting the laws and providing the resources needed to ensure their implementation. Yet post-conflict situations, at least in their initial stages, are often characterized by a relatively weak parliament. As a result, parliaments' involvement in the reconciliation process has often been limited, thereby jeopardizing its legitimacy and long-term effects.

At the request of its governing bodies, the IPU organized a regional seminar on reconciliation for African parliaments in Bujumbura, Burundi, in November 2005. Participants at the seminar expressed the need for further tailored IPU action to assist their countries and parliaments in their national reconciliation processes.

The project responds to this wish and aims to strengthen the ability of post-conflict parliaments to establish, monitor, assess, and provide follow-up on the work of transitional justice mechanisms, such as truth and reconciliation commissions, trials, reparation programmes for victims and judicial reforms, and to strengthen inclusive political processes as an essential element of reconciliation.

The project recognizes that while countries may be at different stages of their reconciliation processes or have yet to start them, each of them has experiences to share, discuss and analyse with participants from other countries.

The project targets, in its pilot phase, post-conflict English-speaking African countries, including Ghana, Kenya, Liberia, Rwanda, Sierra Leone and Uganda. Though fighting still continues in Sudan and Somalia, their parliaments are also invited to participate in the project, which should help them prepare for the path to reconciliation.

Project activities

1. June 2007 - Organization of a regional seminar for African countries

In 2007, the IPU will organize a three-day regional seminar to help develop a better understanding of transitional justice reform among participating parliamentarians from all the parliaments in the project, take stock of the extent to which such reforms are foreseen - be they underway or

completed - analyse progress and setbacks, and offer concrete recommendations for action. At the end of the regional seminar, participants should identify areas where their parliament's involvement in the reconciliation process can be strengthened. Moreover, the regional seminar should help identify which of the participating parliaments are well-placed to go ahead with establishing and implementing a concrete action plan for transitional justice reform.

As is customary for such IPU events, the seminar will be hosted by one of the parliaments involved in the project. The other parliaments will be invited to send a delegation to participate in the seminar. The project will cover the costs of participation of three members of each parliament, which in turn will be asked to sponsor the participation of an equal number of other members. Parliamentary delegations should, if possible, be gender-balanced, representative of all political parties and include members from parliamentary committees working specifically on reconciliation issues.

2. Adoption of national action plans and follow-up at the domestic level

Two-day national seminars will follow the regional introductory ones, in countries where the needs and commitment of the parliament to strengthen its involvement in the reconciliation process and to establish a national plan of action have been confirmed during the regional seminar.

The participating parliaments should commit themselves to a thorough examination of the human rights and justice situation in their country, including steps taken so far in the area of transitional justice and the role played by parliament therein. The national seminars will be able to delve deeper into the specific circumstances and challenges of each country and, as a result, adopt action plans with concrete recommendations tailored to its needs. This may imply, depending on the stage the country has reached in its reconciliation process, a focus on implementation - in particular where truth and reconciliation commissions have already made clear recommendations - or on setting the agenda for transitional justice reform, where a reconciliation process has only recently taken off or has yet to start.

Each parliament will be expected to create a focus group consisting of parliamentarians and parliamentary staff. The group will be responsible for relaying the results of the regional seminar to their colleagues and ensuring that parliamentary action is taken to implement the recommendations of the national action plans. Should there be a need for economic or human resources assistance, the IPU - on the basis of a concrete and reasoned request from the focus group - will seek further basic financial support to help it carry out its work.

3. Follow-up visits

During the second and third year of the project, follow-up visits will be carried out to each of the parliaments that has hosted a national seminar. The purpose of the visits will be to take stock of progress, identify possible problems, verify the viability of the action plan elaborated during the national seminar and revise it accordingly with the help of the focus group. Following the conclusion of the project, it is envisaged that a best practices network among participating parliaments be set up to share lessons and stimulate dialogue on the challenges encountered in implementing the action plans.

Geneva, February 2008