

Parliamentary Involvement in International Affairs

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PARLIAMENTARY INVOLVEMENT IN INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

Foreword

When Speakers of parliaments met for the first time in a world conference of its kind in September 2000, they adopted a solemn declaration¹ that called for greater involvement of parliaments in international affairs. Gone were they days, they stated, when politics was a purely domestic business, if ever it had been. Whether they wanted to or not, legislatures everywhere were under mounting pressure to debate an ever more transnational agenda. Parliaments simply had no choice but to engage in multilateral negotiations, if only because the responsibility fell squarely on their shoulders when it came to enacting the results into domestic law.

If their place in international affairs was no longer open to dispute, the procedures whereby parliaments brought their influence to bear in the international arena continued to vary widely. The Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), the convenor of the 2000 Conference, was keen to discover whether behind the intricate strands there was a single pattern. In 2004, the organization put a number of questions to Speakers of parliaments throughout the world in order to find out to what extent and in what manner their parliaments had become involved in international affairs, in keeping with the millennium pledge.²

The report that follows is a compilation of the responses. The survey has shown that almost all parliaments - in developed and developing countries alike - have unique experiences to share in respect of their involvement in international affairs. Apart from the question of access to modern information technology, there are no obvious North-South divides. Parliaments have reached different stages in moulding their procedures to the globalized agenda of the twenty-first century. But throughout the world, almost all are grappling with this question.

Executive Summary

In general terms, a good many parliaments have begun to adapt their modus operandi in order to position themselves more advantageously to tackle the international agenda. In some institutions, the changes are already operational, while in others they are still being debated.

There is apparently a myriad variety of institutional activities under way in the world's legislatures, the purpose of which is for them to manoeuvre closer to the multilateral arena. With only a few

¹ A copy of the declaration of 2000 is annexed to this report.

² At 25 April 2005, responses from the following parliaments had been received and are reflected in this preliminary report: Algeria, Andorra, Angola, Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Belarus, Belgium, Bhutan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cameroon, Canada, Cape Verde, Chile, China, Comoros, Costa Rica, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Ethiopia (2), Finland, France (2), Germany (2), Greece, Guatemala, Guyana, Hungary, Iceland, Indonesia, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Ireland, Israel, Italy, Jamaica, Japan (2), Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kuwait, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Mali, Malta, Mexico, Moldova, Morocco, Namibia, Netherlands, Norway, Pakistan, Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Republic of Korea, Romania (2), Russian Federation, Rwanda, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Slovakia, Slovenia, Solomon Islands, South Africa, Spain, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Sweden, Switzerland, Tajikistan, Thailand, The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Tunisia, Turkey, Tuvalu, United Kingdom, Uruguay, Yemen, Zambia and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe.

exceptions, parliaments have an important constitutional role in relation to the ratification of international agreements. Interestingly, however, the responses to the questionnaire show that parliaments exert only limited influence on the ratification process. For example, they rarely take action to accelerate ratification. On the other hand, once an international agreement has been ratified, they have a major role in enforcing implementation.

There are clear signs of a digital divide separating the parliaments of the North from those of the South. While in the North most parliaments make extensive use of the Web both for research and relations with other institutions, and every parliamentarian has his or her own laptop computer, this is generally not the case for countries in the South. This is one area which would merit considerable investment by the international community in terms of time and resources.

Referring more broadly to information gathering, most respondents drew attention to traditional ways for parliaments to obtain information, for example through the work of their committees and information services. They conveyed only limited interest in obtaining information from non-traditional sources. Meanwhile, almost every parliament reported on action taken to increase citizens' awareness of and involvement in parliamentary work, and the responses are rich in examples. More systematic use is being made of outreach by delegations, committee hearings, video conferencing, evidence taking, submissions, petitions in all forms (increasingly in electronic form) and campaigns to solicit input from the public.

In regional terms, it appears that national parliaments in the European Union (including those in the newer member countries) have an edge over others when it comes to parliamentary oversight of international negotiating processes. European decision-making in Brussels has obliged these parliaments to monitor such negotiations closely and seek to influence them. Once again, there is no single model that has been adopted to achieve this purpose; each parliament appears to have chosen a mechanism that best suits its own political and parliamentary traditions.

It may be interesting to learn more about some of these practices, as they could well serve as models for parliaments elsewhere that are anxious to monitor decision-making in other regional integration blocks, or indeed in global negotiating processes. There is scope for more streamlining among the regional parliamentary organizations: responses reveal scant attempts to avoid duplication and overlap. This subject will doubtless merit further attention.

In sectoral terms, it should be said that multilateral trade negotiations are in a class of their own: they receive almost universal attention from parliaments. In developed and developing countries alike, whether or not they are members of the World Trade Organization (WTO), parliaments make strenuous efforts to follow and influence trade negotiations. The trade programme developed by the IPU over the last six years has evidently been of significant use to parliaments.

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) underpin - if not explicitly, at least indirectly - much of the work carried out in parliaments. Many parliaments in developed countries have included the MDGs on their agendas and have adopted development strategies and policies that relate to them, which they monitor closely. Some very innovative examples are provided. The goals are also addressed in the developing countries, where the parliaments have been involved to varying degrees in setting national development strategies. They have worked to meet some of the goals, those relating to HIV/AIDS and gender being the most frequently quoted. However, direct interaction with the international organizations concerned seems to be sporadic.

Looking to the future, the responses indicate that most parliaments do not believe that the World Conference of Speakers of Parliaments should be made into a formal institution. Instead, they

suggest that it should continue to take place on a more or less regular basis, preferably in association with major intergovernmental summits. Among respondents who expressed a view on the regularity of future meetings, the majority is split between those who favour holding a conference every five years and those suggesting that one be held every two years.

In conclusion, it may be too early to seek to identify patterns and models in the ways in which parliaments are adapting to the challenges of an ever more globalized agenda. Nobody, however, can deny that a huge amount of energy is being devoted to the issue, or that some particularly innovative mechanisms and arrangements are emerging.

Basis of discussion: List of examples

The report provides a vast array of examples of how parliaments can organize and perform their work in respect of international affairs. In this section, some of these examples are listed with the aim of providing a basis for a continuous discussion on how such parliamentary work can be consolidated and developed.

This list in no way involves any valuation of such examples. Rather, the idea is to show the full spectrum of measures used by today's parliaments. Some measures might be well suited for parliaments within a specific context, whereas they would be less suitable for parliaments in others. For example, measures that might work well in countries with a strong parliamentary system, a well-established party structure and broad citizens' access to modern information technology might not work as well in countries with a presidential system, a weak party structure and only limited public access to modern information technology. Also, the level of available resources may differ greatly between parliaments, and some measures might be difficult to put into practice because of the high costs involved. Despite this, the examples put forward below should serve as a basis for an inter-parliamentary discussion on how to improve the work of parliaments.

The examples are structured into 11 themes emanating from the questions addressed in the study, as follows: (1) the parliamentary contribution to intergovernmental negotiations; (2) monitoring government activities in international affairs; (3) following up on international agreements; (4) information gathering on international issues and organizations; (5) dissemination of information on international issues and organizations; (6) citizens' involvement in parliamentary decision-making; (7) activities of parliamentary diplomacy; (8) coordination of relations with inter-parliamentary organizations; (9) strengthening links with the IPU; (10) actions taken in support of the MDGs; and (11) examination of development programmes. In the list, the examples are mentioned only briefly. For more extensive descriptions of each example, the reader is referred to the subsequent section of the report.

Parliamentary contribution to intergovernmental negotiations

- Traditional parliamentary activities intended to influence government (oral and written questions, interpellations, plenary debates);
- Plenary debates on proposed agreements before they are finalised and signed by the executive, perhaps culminating in resolutions offering guidance to government negotiators;
- Negotiation of mandates or consultative recommendations (by the relevant committee, in some cases also debated in the chamber);

- Consultation between committees and governments on important and/or sensitive matters relating to foreign affairs or trade policy, etc., before negotiations take place;
- Special legislative - executive advisory councils;
- Inclusion of representatives of parliament in governmental delegations at ministerial or summit meetings;
- Parliamentary delegations attending intergovernmental meetings.

Monitoring government activities in international affairs

- Traditional parliamentary activities intended to oversee the government's ongoing activities (oral and written questions, interpellations, plenary debates);
- Mandatory ratification by parliaments of treaties and conventions;
- Monthly/regular meetings between committees (on foreign affairs) and ministries (of foreign affairs);
- Entitlement for committees to request information (including confidential information) from the government on foreign policy;
- Committee hearings with government representatives;
- Establishment of special committees, joint committees or subcommittees tasked to monitor a specific international matter or the work of a particular international organisation;
- Parliamentary study groups/working groups on specific international matters, assisted by parliamentary staff as well as academics;
- Submission by the government of reports/white papers to parliament once a year with a forecast of coming activities on certain international issues, followed by a progress report six months later, or alternatively, quarterly progress reports from the government on treaties, agreements and conventions signed by it.

Following up on international agreements

- Traditional parliamentary activities intended to oversee the government's implementation of parliamentary decisions (oral and written questions, interpellations, plenary debates);
- Committee oversight and hearings with ministers;
- Examination by committees of treaties within their areas of responsibility, resulting in (annual) committee reports on the matters in question;
- Mixed committees composed of representatives of both parliament and government, set up to monitor implementation;
- Regular progress reports (every three months) from the government on treaties, agreements and conventions signed by it and on the procedure that must be followed to bring them into effect;

- Inclusion of clauses in legislation authorising government ratification of treaties and requiring the executive to report regularly to parliament on their implementation;
- Report issued by the competent parliamentary committee on the implementation of a ratification agreement six months after the instrument has entered into force, if necessary followed by a decision issued by the committee obliging the government to take action;
- Budget offices, research and library services supporting the committees.

Information gathering on international issues and organisations

- Work of committees, for example in gathering information on international events and issues, and in undertaking studies that involve background research, hearings and preparation of reports, that are subsequently submitted for discussion in parliament;
- Budget offices and research and library services supporting the committees and the members;
- Obligation for the government to submit written reports on the activities of international organisations, such as the United Nations, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the WTO;
- Officials from ministries of foreign affairs attached to parliaments to prepare briefing papers and other documentation on international issues;
- Parliamentary officers employed by government departments to act as liaisons between the respective departments and the parliament;
- Government resource centres and libraries specifically dedicated to the use of members of parliament;
- Establishment of liaison offices abroad;
- Inter-parliamentary electronic information-sharing system on the Web;
- Information provided by the IPU (electronic links, newsletters, faxes, etc.).

Dissemination of information on international issues and organisations

- Parliamentary information-sharing sessions;
- Workshops for parliamentarians to discuss a specific international matter;
- Summaries of major reports of international organisations, which are circulated to heads of political parties and parliamentary committees;
- Parliamentary information service departments providing professional services to all members and committees;
- Weekly bulletin informing members on the status of international negotiations;
- Intranet site containing useful information, including electronic links to international organisations;

- Guides for parliamentarians on how to access information via the Internet.

Citizens' involvement in parliamentary decision-making

- Road shows and regional workshops, etc., aimed at taking parliament to the people and informing them on how they can influence policy;
- Visitors centre/information centre at the parliament;
- Broadcasting as well as publications/brochures aimed at educating and informing the public about ways to influence the parliament;
- Information and/or consultation efforts aimed at particular groups in society, including women, people in rural areas, disabled people, young people, in some cases performed by assigned teams of parliamentarians;
- Video conferences to allow parliamentary committees to receive testimony from across the country (or the world);
- Contacts between parliament on the one hand and local administrations, working collectives and the public in the country and in towns on the other;
- Accessible presentation and summaries of parliamentary documents;
- Information about parliament and parliamentary/committee documents available on parliamentary/committee web sites;
- Interactive communication/discussion groups on parliamentary web sites;
- Computers at regional offices allowing people to have access to the parliamentary web site;
- Telephone "hotlines" to receive complaints from the public;
- Parliamentary and committee sessions open to the public and the press;
- Broadcasting of parliamentary and committee debates on television, radio and the Web;
- Sessions where members of parliament can have a direct dialogue with communities to elicit input from the public on matters that are before parliament;
- Public hearings with citizens, civil society organisations and academics, etc., also in cities in the country's regions;
- Civil society offices facilitating communication and interaction with civil society groups;
- Petitions/submissions/written statements on legislation and other matters from legal and physical persons as well as from local assemblies, for example directed to petition committees or officials appointed to receive and examine complaints and suggestions;
- Holding of referenda;
- Ability to call for a referendum, to submit a bill to parliament or to call for a revision or amendment of the constitution by popular initiative;
- Decentralisation of government.

Activities of parliamentary diplomacy

- Bilateral friendship groups;
- Bilateral cooperation agreements between parliaments, establishing bilateral inter-parliamentary bodies to promote relations between the countries in question in various fields;
- Institutionalised and regular encounters between parliamentarians from a subregion, for example three times a year;
- Receiving and sending parliamentary delegations, for example headed by the Speaker or undertaken at the committee level, allowing for encounters between a broader political representation than government visits;
- Hosting meetings of inter-parliamentary organisations;
- Subregional conferences with parliamentary committees from neighbouring countries concerning a concrete and joint project, for example devoted to infrastructure;
- Conflict resolution through the use of bilateral meetings or meetings of inter-parliamentary organisations, for example to ensure talks between parliamentarians from countries engaged in or otherwise affected by a conflict;
- Organisation of international colloquiums and other confidence-building measures in order to promote common understanding in conflict situations;
- Work carried out by individual parliamentarians such as envoys to peace processes, those who take part in ad hoc working groups on a specific conflict, and electoral observers;
- “Parliamentarians-protect-parliamentarians” project, in which members of parliamentarians in one country intervene on behalf of those in other countries whose parliamentary or human rights may be under threat;
- Meetings between parliamentarians and accredited ambassadors;
- Technical cooperation (exchange of know-how) between parliaments;
- Ad hoc committees to examine regional conflicts within the country, and members joining government delegations involved in seeking settlements to such conflicts;
- Establishment of political ombudsmen's offices mandated to investigate inter alia actions taken by a political party that are likely to constitute a breach of an agreement between political parties.

Coordination of relations with inter-parliamentary organisations

- Centralisation with the President or Speaker of parliament of decisions concerning participation in international activities, in order to improve coordination;
- Review, for example performed by the Speaker, of the international engagement of the parliament, with guidelines in order to avoid duplication;
- Annual report from foreign affairs committees containing evaluations of past inter-parliamentary activities and setting forth the priorities for the year to come;

- Regular meetings between the chairs of “parliamentary associations” within a parliament to discuss common issues and concerns;
- Workshop for members serving on delegations;
- Parliamentary staff providing service to and coordination of international delegations.

Strengthening links with the IPU

- Permanent IPU delegation for a term of office, elected by the parliament in plenary;
- IPU membership for all parliamentarians;
- Parliamentary round tables, including participation by members with experience in the IPU, promoting IPU activities;
- Involvement by Presidents or Speakers of parliament in IPU activities, for example as leaders of delegations to IPU events and as principal advisers on IPU matters;
- Representation of parliamentarians specialised in specific subjects at IPU meetings where such subjects are discussed;
- Meetings with ministers for foreign affairs and/or permanent representatives to the United Nations to ensure national support for proposals to strengthen the IPU;
- Annual reports from IPU delegations/IPU boards submitted to the parliament;
- Reports from IPU delegations/IPU boards to the committee on foreign affairs;
- Translation of IPU documents into the national language(s);
- Forwarding of IPU resolutions to the respective committees, presidents, prime ministers, foreign affairs and other government ministers, and to the organisations concerned;
- Newsletter issued by IPU groups presenting the IPU and the main activities of parliamentarians related to the Union;
- Officers trained specifically in IPU rules and procedures assisting the delegations.

Actions taken to achieve the MDGs

- Plenary and committee discussions on the MDGs;
- Approval by parliaments of policies for global development based on the MDGs;
- Passing of laws relating to the MDGs, for example on women’s rights, women’s representation, human rights, education, health, poverty, illiteracy and the environment;
- Constitutional amendments, for example to strengthen gender equality;
- Adequate allocation of budgetary resources for the implementation of the MDGs;
- Laws obliging governments to submit regular reports to parliament outlining the steps taken to achieve the MDGs, specifying activities undertaken by representatives, for example at the IMF;

- Annual checks and reports by the respective committees concerning progress made in achieving the MDGs;
- Establishment of committees, joint committees or subcommittees which monitor relations with developing countries (in the fields of development, cooperation and debt);
- International meetings between representatives of international development committees to encourage them to work together to achieve the MDGs;
- Parliamentary representation in delegations sent to the United Nations General Assembly;
- Endorsement of the creation of an international solidarity fund;
- Training programmes for parliamentarians about the MDGs;
- Regional and national workshops on specific MDGs, in cooperation with various United Nations agencies;
- Distribution of the parliamentary handbook produced jointly by the United Nations and the IPU on the Convention to Eliminate All Forms of Discrimination Against Women.

Examination of development programmes

- Traditional parliamentary techniques to supervise government activities (oral and written questions, interpellations, plenary debates, budget);
- Adoption of policies establishing terms and guidelines for development assistance programmes;
- Discussions with government regarding development priorities and development assistance programmes, and the establishment of joint legislative - executive debt coordination councils to help governments institute reforms;
- Regular reports from government for example on the work of the World Bank;
- Committees tasked to follow up on development programmes and which submit reports to parliament;
- Committee meetings/hearings with responsible ministers, for example after the autumn meetings held by the World Bank and the IMF, and with the participation of NGOs;
- Establishment of committees or subcommittees tasked with drafting visions for the medium- and long-term development of the country (seeking input from public institutions, the scientific community and civil society);
- Field visits (domestic or abroad) carried out by relevant committees;
- Meetings with representatives of the World Bank and the IMF.

Report

1. *The international agenda: reviewing parliamentary procedures*

It is clear that parliamentary work is influenced quite substantially by international affairs. The responses to the questionnaire offer some interesting insights in this respect. In France, for example, intergovernmental negotiations are increasingly on the parliamentary agenda. In the upper house of the French parliament, 105 laws on this subject were adopted in 2003, 52 dealing with the ratification of treaties and international conventions and 53 containing corresponding implementing provisions. In Yemen, 23 international conventions were submitted to the parliament for approval between 2000 and 2004. In Kazakhstan during the same period, the parliament ratified more than 400 international treaties and agreements. In the United Kingdom, members of the House of Lords have raised 425 questions in the last three years on treaties, consultations and intergovernmental conferences, and a further 49 questions on the subject of trade agreements. Only a few parliaments - such as those in Cameroon and Senegal - indicate that there is little parliamentary activity in relation to intergovernmental negotiations. The Comoros only recently appointed its first democratically elected parliament since 1999, and thus has not yet much to report on parliamentary activity in this field.

Yet the overwhelming majority of responses to the questionnaire indicates that no review of parliamentary procedures has been undertaken as a result of the 2000 Conference. Only one parliament (the Russian Duma) states that it undertook this review specifically in relation to parliament's role in intergovernmental negotiations, although no details are provided on its outcome. The Republic of Croatia changed its constitutional order in late 2000 and moved from a semi-presidential system to a parliamentary system, which greatly enhanced parliament's role and responsibilities.

The parliament of Namibia has overhauled its committee system and given the standing committees greater oversight powers. The parliament of Costa Rica has strengthened the Standing Committee on International Relations, added international trade and parliamentary diplomacy to its mandate and given it additional means to carry out its tasks. The Swiss Federal Assembly reported on the outcome of a constitutional review which affects parliament's role in relation to intergovernmental negotiations. In Japan, a reorganisation of the Japanese government ministries and agencies in 2001, with senior Vice-Ministers and Parliamentary Secretaries being placed under the Ministers, has opened the way for Diet members to contribute more to intergovernmental negotiations. In the Czech Republic, a governmental directive on international agreements adopted in 2004 gives members of parliament an opportunity to debate proposed agreements requiring subsequent ratification before such agreements are finalised and signed by the executive.

The parliaments of Israel and Mexico stated that a review was currently being undertaken, whereas the parliament of Indonesia reported that it had agreed to undertake a review during the next parliamentary term. The Estonian parliament reported that a new foreign relations act, which will specify in detail the competence of the parliament in Estonian foreign policy, was currently being processed in parliament.

Seven parliaments (those of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cape Verde, China, Sri Lanka, Tunisia, Tuvalu and Zambia) reported that general reviews of parliamentary procedure, not limited to the

international sphere, were currently being carried out. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, this has already led to parliamentary delegations being more directly associated with intergovernmental negotiations, and in Tunisia this has reportedly resulted in a strengthened overall role of the parliamentary institution vis-à-vis the executive. In Cape Verde, China, Sri Lanka and Zambia the reviews have not yet been completed. The parliament of Tuvalu reported that it was not aware of the 2000 Declaration. However, according to its current rules of procedure, parliamentary procedures must be reviewed by the Rules Committee at least once during each term of office. The last review, though, had no specific reference to procedures for intergovernmental negotiations.

Without claiming to have undertaken a review of parliamentary procedures, most parliaments report on the extensive role they already play in regard to intergovernmental negotiations. Although the negotiations themselves fall within the exclusive purview of the executive branch of government, these parliaments underline that they play a considerable role in the negotiating process. Parliamentary standing or select committees (particularly committees on foreign affairs or their equivalents) regularly seek and obtain information from government ministers, engage them in debates regarding negotiation mandates, and are informed of the outcomes. The responses also highlight the important role most parliaments play in ratifying international agreements and in implementing them through legislation and budget allocations.

The responses demonstrate that parliaments frequently have recourse to the full gamut of parliamentary techniques to ensure their full involvement in intergovernmental negotiations. The responses from France's two chambers illustrate this point by referring specifically to the frequent use of various methods that they employ. Among the tools that are reportedly used by the various legislatures are study groups, written and oral questions, missions and information reports, hearings of ministers, experts and others conducted by committees and delegations, IPU parliamentary forums organised to coincide with major intergovernmental events, seminars, thematic meetings, training courses, and participation in ministerial delegations, which is considered particularly useful by several parliaments, including Jordan's.

In some parliaments, there have been committee discussions on how best to participate in and influence international negotiations, and there have been several instances (for example in Canada) where private member bills and motions have been introduced regarding parliamentary approval of specific international treaties or parliamentary input to such instruments. In Canada, there have also been plenary debates on the desirability of allowing parliament to make a greater contribution to intergovernmental negotiations. In Italy, steps have been taken to accelerate parliamentary approval of bills relating to international treaties.

Several parliaments provide specific examples of the roles they play. In the Republic of Moldova, the Government has to inform the parliament of any international negotiations to which it is a party, and must give the Committee on Foreign Affairs time to prepare consultative recommendations. During the period from 2001 to 2003, the parliament issued more than 80 such recommendations. In the Philippines, a Legislative Executive Development Advisory Council has been established, in which the parliament is represented. Through this mechanism, the views and concerns of Congress on intergovernmental negotiations are channelled to the executive. In the countries that are members of the European Union (EU), parliaments often have established specific structures to deal with matters concerning the EU.

The Moldovan parliament reports that mixed committees composed of representatives of both the parliament and the Government have been set up to monitor implementation of bilateral

agreements concluded with a number of countries. Another parliament, that of Slovenia, has adopted specific rules on the conduct of international activities. This parliament is not only informed of government activities in the international field, but also receives and discusses reports from delegations participating in parliamentary meetings.

The parliament of the Republic of Korea notes that the establishment of a National Assembly Budget Office in early 2004 substantially increased parliament's ability to analyse government-led projects and negotiations effectively, and thus to exert more influence. Lastly, several parliaments - including that of Mali - point to the important role that parliaments can and do play at the international level through the exercise of parliamentary diplomacy (see also responses to question 5, below).

2. *Monitoring, ratification and enforcement*

(i) *Making sure that negotiations are monitored in parliament*

Many parliaments claim that this kind of activity takes place as a matter of course. For example, in Norway and Iceland the Ministers for Foreign Affairs regularly keep parliament informed of negotiating processes in which these countries are involved, and those processes are subsequently debated. In Norway, the Government also consults with the parliament's Enlarged Committee on Foreign Affairs on important and/or sensitive matters relating to foreign affairs, trade policy and national policy issues. The proceedings are normally kept secret. Members of parliament frequently make use of questions and interpellations to keep abreast of these issues. In Romania, the Foreign Affairs Committees in the two houses permanently monitor all negotiating processes in which Romania is involved, inter alia through monthly meetings with the Minister for Foreign Affairs.

The parliament in Jamaica has an Internal and External Affairs Committee that is mandated to examine all matters relating to foreign policy, treaties and international agreements and to advise the parliament of their likely impact on the country. The committee played a particularly active role when the parliament examined the agreement to establish the Caribbean Court of Justice.

In Finland, as in other countries (for example Slovakia), the Foreign Affairs Committee is entitled to request information on the country's foreign policy. The Finnish parliament reports that this mechanism can be used to acquire information on any issue pertaining to foreign relations, including negotiations and implementation of treaties. Pursuant to a specific provision of the Constitution, parliamentarians can obtain confidential information, including information regarding government positions in treaty negotiations. Moreover, representatives of the parliament are usually included in the government delegations to ministerial or summit meetings which conduct important international negotiations.

In China, international negotiations are continuously monitored by the National People's Congress (NPC) Standing Committee, which also authorises the conclusion of any international treaty, such as the entry of China into the WTO.

Given the importance of the intergovernmental negotiations that take place in the EU, European parliaments have taken a number of measures, such as establishing liaison offices in Brussels and setting up special parliamentary delegations with the specific task of following these negotiations and examining proposals for community directives and regulations.

The parliament of Slovenia has set up special monitoring procedures within existing parliamentary committees. The parliament of Croatia has established a European Integration Committee. In Spain, the two houses have established a joint committee on the EU which has in turn set up special subcommittees to monitor enlargement and the new European Constitution. Similarly, the two houses in the Romanian parliament have established a joint Standing Committee for European Integration that monitors the implementation of Romania's commitments in the process of accession to the EU. In France, the Government must inform both houses of parliament about certain EU proposals. The parliament can then debate them and adopt resolutions which carry considerable political weight, though they are non-binding.

The parliament of Ireland has enhanced the arrangements for its scrutiny of EU business through the European Union (Scrutiny) Act 2002. According to the provisions of this Act, the Government must forward all legislative proposals to the Sub-Committee on European Scrutiny. The Sub-Committee conducts an examination of the proposals and determines which require further scrutiny. Those proposals which have been identified for further scrutiny are then referred to the relevant committees for consideration in further detail. Also, before each meeting of the Council of Ministers, the respective Minister will, on request, come before the relevant committee to present and discuss the agenda items, and where appropriate, the Government's position on those items.

In the United Kingdom, the House of Commons established two Standing Committees, first on the Convention on the Future of Europe, and subsequently on the Intergovernmental Conference on the Draft Treaty on a Constitution for Europe. Members of the House of Lords also participate in these committees. An elaborate process was subsequently put in place based on a government White Paper. Under this procedure, the British Parliament is able to transmit its view to the Government on the future direction of Europe, and thus exert real influence on the outcome of negotiations. The Government has decided that this form of parliamentary scrutiny should become the norm for the future. It has committed itself to submitting a White Paper to Parliament every January, with a forecast of the EU's legislative and other activities, and to submitting a progress report six months later.

The parliament in Italy too has exercised extensive oversight with respect to the European Convention. An enquiry has been conducted jointly by committees from the two houses involving a number of hearings with government representatives, including delegates to the European Convention, and with Italian members of the European Parliament. In the area of trade, parliamentary standing committees have held extensive hearings with government ministers attending the WTO Ministerial Conferences.

In Switzerland constitutional and legislative amendments were introduced in 2003, which have the effect of strengthening parliament's role in relation to intergovernmental negotiations. The Government is now obliged to consult the External Affairs Standing Committees on the principal orientation and directives for negotiating mandates before such mandates are adopted or modified. In Mexico, an initiative is currently being examined to increase the Senate's involvement in international negotiations.

Another common area of concern relates to international trade negotiations. Several parliaments (such as those in Bahrain, Belarus, Belgium, Canada, France, Luxembourg, Mali, Namibia, Russian Federation, Sudan and Sweden) have taken special measures to follow the negotiations that take place at the WTO. Some of these have established special study groups on international trade negotiations, that hold regular hearings with trade negotiators, foreign dignitaries and civil society

representatives, and that prepare reports on the preparation and follow-up to WTO ministerial conferences. They may hold hearings and organise debates in the presence of the trade negotiators. The parliament of Belgium has followed trade negotiations on a continuous basis and over the years has adopted many resolutions offering guidance to government negotiators and requesting that they consult more closely with parliament and with civil society.

The Parliament of South Africa has assumed an extensive monitoring role of the processes engaged for the formation of the African Union (AU) and the Pan-African Parliament (PAP). Parliament received regular briefings from senior officials involved in negotiating the AU Constitutive Act and the PAP Protocol. It set up a special committee consisting of presiding officers and members specifically to engage in the broader negotiating process. Both the Constitutive Act and the Protocol were debated extensively in Parliament. Subsequently, Parliament established a subcommittee on the AU, which will focus solely on monitoring the development of the AU and the PAP. That body is legally empowered to call for hearings, and if need be to subpoena the Minister and Deputy Ministers for Foreign Affairs and other officials of the Department of Foreign Affairs, as well as to invite diplomats and officials from other nations and organisations to make presentations and answer questions.

The German Bundestag, while noting the predominant role of the executive in relation to intergovernmental negotiations, nevertheless presents several instances in which parliament has exercised considerable influence on the orientation of German foreign policy, on several matters dealt with at the United Nations. The German Bundesrat notes that it only participates in decision-making on international affairs to the extent that the rights of the federal states would be affected by federal legislation ratifying an international treaty.

The parliament of Sweden points to the importance of continuous parliamentary monitoring by the Foreign Affairs Committee of international decision-making, as this can greatly expedite the process when rapid decision-making is required. The parliaments of Sweden and Uruguay also underscore the importance of parliamentary delegations attending intergovernmental meetings, particularly those at the United Nations and the WTO.

In its report, the British Parliament reports on major new initiatives. In 2002, the House of Commons approved the report of the Select Committee on Modernisation of the House of Commons, which set out a list of common objectives for select committees. These include considering major policy initiatives, considering the Government's response to major emerging issues, and examining treaties within a committee's subject area. As a result, select committees have produced a report on trade and development at the WTO, an annual report on human rights and an environmental audit committee's report on the World Summit for Sustainable Development.

(ii) Making sure that agreements are ratified

In many parliaments, it is the Government that sets the agenda and prepares and submits a law to ratify a particular treaty or convention. Parliament's ability to influence the agenda and make sure that ratification is accelerated is limited, and entirely political. The parliament of Luxembourg states in this connection that it can take no special measures, but can only resort to the more traditional parliamentary techniques, such as raising questions in parliament and intervening in debates, as a means of seeking to speed up the process. The parliament of Tuvalu reports that not all signed agreements are promptly debated for possible ratification, but that private members have the opportunity to raise questions during question time, or to raise such issues in motions.

The parliament of France notes that despite private members' initiatives and numerous questions in parliament, it took the country two years to ratify the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court and four years to ratify the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, notwithstanding the fact that there was broad political agreement to ratify both instruments. In Italy, the current legislature has urged the Government to ratify international legislation on at least 10 occasions.

Ratification of treaties and international conventions can constitute an important activity in parliament. For example, in Romania the parliament ratified 328 international instruments during the last legislature (2001 - 2004). In Turkey, 362 proposals to ratify treaties were enacted during the 21st and 22nd legislatures. Moreover, while the President of the Republic has constitutional authority to ratify many treaties, a large number of treaties are now being ratified by the Grand National Assembly of Turkey as part of an integration process with the European Union. The Estonian parliament reports that all agreements that have to be ratified by the parliament must be debated both in the leading committees and in the plenary. In Bahrain, all treaties and conventions must be referred to the parliament for ratification. A similar situation exists in the Philippines, where all treaties and international agreements must be ratified by at least two thirds of the Senate. In the Czech Republic, there are three types of international agreements - presidential, governmental and departmental - of which one - presidential - must be ratified by the parliament. In Japan, the government must seek the approval of the Diet either before or after the conclusion of an international agreement. Similarly, the parliament of Namibia reports that agreements are debated either before or after they are signed or ratified.

The volume of work relating to ratification may be less in other countries, such as Morocco and Tajikistan. Nevertheless, in these countries parliament examines the proposed treaty and holds hearings with ministers and others before proceeding to ratify any particular instrument. In China, strict procedures have been formulated to allow the National People's Congress Standing Committee to examine all signed agreements and take timely decisions. During this process, the ministers concerned are present to respond to questions.

There are of course countries where parliament plays no role in the ratification process at all. Zambia is a case in point, and the Zambian Parliament has recently requested that it be allowed to take part in the ratification process. This request is currently under consideration in the constitutional review process taking place in that country.

(iii) Making sure that agreements are enforced

Nearly every parliament underscored the important role it plays in ensuring the implementation of international agreements. Quite a few parliaments mention that the monitoring and follow-up of the implementation of international agreements is executed by the use of traditional means of parliamentary control, such as interpellation, as well as through the oversight performed by parliamentary committees. The parliament of Lithuania reports that in order to ensure timely ratification and implementation of signed agreements, the Committee on Foreign Affairs receives quarterly progress reports from the Government. The reports contain information on treaties, agreements and conventions that the Government has signed and on the procedures that must be followed to bring them into effect.

The Swiss Federal Assembly reports that it can, when approving an international agreement, introduce constitutional and legislative changes that may be required to ensure the implementation of that agreement. In the Republic of Moldova, the competent parliamentary committee normally

issues a report on the implementation of a ratification agreement six months after the instrument has come into force. If it then finds that the respective government departments have not implemented the convention, it issues a decision obliging the Government to take action. The parliament of Bahrain also points to its monitoring role as a means of ensuring implementation. The parliament of Latvia points to similar examples, whereby select committees hold hearings with ministers and senior government officials, who report to the committees on any problems that need to be addressed to ensure implementation of international agreements.

The Italian parliament points out that the legislation authorising government ratification of certain treaties (such as the Kyoto Protocol) includes a clause requiring the executive to report regularly to parliament on its implementation. The parliament of Algeria can require the government to submit such a report every year. In China, the National People's Congress Standing Committee not only takes legislative measures to transform international agreements into national law, but also seeks to strengthen the implementation of these laws.

In addition to its more traditional oversight activities, the Iranian Majlis exercises its oversight duties through a parliamentary group of experts that is tasked with adapting regulations, resolutions and by-laws that the Government adopts in relation with legislative enactments.

3. Information

(i) Disseminating information in parliament

Cameroon's parliament is one of the very few bodies that reported that they have taken no steps to ensure dissemination of information relating to international negotiations. Most respondents explain the mechanisms that exist for ensuring that parliament is well informed. The legislatures in many countries, such as for example Angola, Belarus, Canada, France, Germany, South Africa, Turkey and Yemen, rely primarily on the work of their standing committees. They are tasked with gathering information and disseminating it to members of parliament. They undertake major studies that involve background research, hearings and the preparation of reports that are tabled in parliament. They also hold public meetings on current issues and developments. The standing committees are supported by staff from parliamentary library and research departments, and obtain information from non-governmental organisations and government departments. They frequently also have their own research staff. Their reports are invariably published as public documents.

Some parliaments, such as the Algerian parliament, obtain information on international issues by requesting notes with such information from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The parliament of Malta seems to have moved one step further. In Malta an official from the Foreign Ministry has been attached to the parliament to prepare briefing papers and other documentation that is required to address international issues.

The Parliament of South Africa has established an extensive network for the retrieval of relevant information. Each of the Departments of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Industry, and Finance employs a parliamentary officer to act as a link between the respective department and the parliament. In addition, the Department of Trade and Industry has established a resource centre and library that is specifically dedicated to the use of parliamentarians. The parliament also works closely with special research and academic institutes (Africa Institute, South African Institute of International Affairs, Institute for Global Dialogue, Trade Law Centre for Southern Africa and the Trade and Industry Policy Strategies). The parliamentary Information Services Section provides

professional services to all members and committees. Lastly, the parliament also runs regular parliamentary training and information-sharing sessions, for example on the AU and the PAP.

In Costa Rica, information on international negotiations is made available through a Legislative Information System, whereas in Jamaica it is usually disseminated through the presentation of Ministry Papers and statements by the Minister in Parliament. In Morocco, Spain and other countries, the parliaments inform members on the status of international negotiations through weekly bulletins. They also prepare summaries of major reports of international organisations, which are circulated to heads of the political groups and parliamentary committees.

The parliament of Belgium describes an initiative launched soon after the first World Conference of Presiding Officers of Parliaments to ensure better parliamentary oversight on matters relating to globalisation and international trade. Following a parliamentary debate in early 2002, the Chamber of Representatives set up a working group on the subject, which was assisted by a group of academics. The group made recommendations relating to institutional arrangements that would be necessary to regulate international decision-making processes. The following year, the full Chamber approved many of the recommendations, which included proposals to democratise the functioning of international organisations and specifically to ensure effective parliamentary oversight, at the national level, of such organisations. As a result, in 2004 the Chamber set up a Standing Committee on Globalisation, the principal task of which has since been to follow closely international negotiations, specifically on international trade, and to keep all members informed of developments. The functioning of the World Bank and the IMF will also be examined. The Committee on Globalisation holds public meetings with the respective Ministers, and prepares public reports that are widely disseminated.

The Swedish parliament described a recent initiative taken by the parliaments of EU countries to increase cooperation and information-sharing between them in the hope of strengthening cooperation at the level of parliamentary standing committees. The parliament of Namibia has held a workshop with the WTO for parliamentarians to discuss their role in the multilateral trading system.

(ii) Links with international organisations; and

(iii) Relaying information to committees in parliament

Many parliaments describe the mechanisms that are in place to provide information on the activities of international organisations. The parliaments of Azerbaijan and Bhutan use non-electronic means, essentially obtaining information through regular contacts with senior officials of organisations such as the WTO and the international financial institutions. Many other parliaments, including those of Andorra, Croatia, Denmark, France, Indonesia, Italy, Mexico, Morocco and South Africa, maintain electronic links with all major international organisations, which members of parliament can access through the parliamentary Intranet site. A similar service has been introduced in the Norwegian Storting, and the parliament of Luxembourg plans to do the same thing this year. The parliament of Uruguay provides this service through the central information system it established for its members in 2000. Some parliaments - those of Pakistan and Portugal are two - have no such plans.

Most parliaments underscore that the government is obliged to submit written reports on the activities of these organisations, and that these reports are shared with members of parliament. In Bahrain, the Government must respond within two weeks to any parliamentary request for

information, and the response is passed to the relevant committee and shared with all members of parliament.

Moreover, many parliaments have information and research services that can carry out searches and prepare reports for interested legislators. Several of the European parliaments refer to the European Centre for Parliamentary Research and Documentation (ECPRD) as an important source of complementary services.

A great majority of the parliaments indicate that they have upgraded their use of modern information technology. In such legislatures, all members have direct access to such resources, either by remote means such as the World Wide Web or through the use of computer terminals located for example on the premises of the parliament. In Tajikistan, each member of parliament now has a computer with access to the Internet and an e-mail account. The parliament of Croatia has a Committee on Information, Computerisation and the Media that advises parliaments on all matters relating to information and modern information technology. Some parliaments - for example Kazakhstan's - have only recently introduced a web site, and Bhutan's is about to do so. Others have placed a whole array of modern information tools at the disposal of their members to facilitate information gathering. The parliament of Latvia has recently issued a guide for the use of its members on how best to access information via the Internet.

The parliament in Jamaica reported on an initiative known as the Global Legal Information Network of the Americas (GLIN), which is being developed under the auspices of the Inter-American Development Bank, that enables parliaments to receive information directly from international sources.

Most parliaments today have a library and research service, and they make frequent use of other information sources, particularly those made available by international organisations. However, there are also those - such as the ones in Guatemala and Guyana - that have limited resources and have so far developed only very rudimentary mechanisms to obtain information and undertake research.

(iv) Using the information

While all respondents claimed to make good use of the information provided through the IPU, a great many of them highlighted the particular usefulness of the electronic links that the IPU provides to international institutions, and said that they made frequent use of them. Other information regularly put to use by parliaments includes that provided by the IPU on parliamentary institutions, on human rights and on trade matters. While recognising the benefits and advantages of the IPU web site, the parliament of Malta stresses that it is imperative that all sectors of the web site be regularly updated, which had not always been the case.

Several parliaments, including the French parliament, describe mechanisms that have been put in place to make sure that the outcome of the work carried out at the IPU is also disseminated at the level of the national parliament. Conversely, they also describe the efforts that are made to ensure that those members of parliament who specialise in a specific subject - for example trade negotiations - are also represented at IPU meetings that discuss that subject, thus ensuring that the IPU takes account of the work carried out at the national level. In the Irish parliament, IPU reports are forwarded to the relevant committees.

The parliament of Tuvalu reports that it has not established electronic links to receive information from international organisations, but even though it is not yet a member of the IPU, the parliament

is able to receive information provided by the IPU through newsletters, letters and faxes. Such information is passed on by the parliamentary secretariat to interested members.

4. Involving the citizen

The South African Constitution states that parliament must facilitate public involvement in the legislative and other processes of parliament and its committees. A whole set of activities has been developed. First, a public education office has been established which has developed "democracy road shows", aimed at taking parliament to the people and informing them how they can influence and partake in legislative work. So far, 16,000 persons have participated in these events. Similarly, it has set up sessions where members of parliament can dialogue directly with communities, to elicit input from the public on matters that are before parliament.

Perhaps the most ambitious project involves the use of broadcasting. It is aimed at educating and informing the public on what happens in parliament, how laws are passed and how people can influence the outcome of parliament's work through broadcasts on the twelve South African Broadcasting Corporation radio service stations in all the official languages, reaching a national audience of 35 million. An accompanying television programme consisting of ten episodes provided information to 6 million citizens on democracy and the Constitution, the three branches of Government and the functioning of Parliament.

More targeted information campaigns are also carried out on key bills before the parliament. Parliament also targets certain population groups. For example, it has organised civic education workshops for rural women in several provinces. It has organised a conference on enhancing the participation of women in law-making, and another addressing the need to enhance public participation. The parliament is currently developing a civic education programme that targets youth and which hopefully will soon be incorporated in the national school curriculum.

The Parliament of South Africa has also used its web site to reach out to the public, allowing for interactive communications. For example, public submissions can be made on legislation electronically, and voluntary registration services can also be provided electronically. Parliament has issued several publications as well, including a book on women in law-making, a newsletter entitled *In Session*, a bulletin called *NCOP News* and an award-winning comic book written for young readers called *A day in parliament*, which has been distributed in every school in the country.

A great number of steps have been taken by the Belgian parliament, and they are characteristic of the kinds of measures that are in use or being developed elsewhere. The presentation of the verbatim and analytical summary records of parliamentary debates has been revised. Their structure and readability has been improved, and they are now available just a few hours after the close of the debate. Government and private members' bills are published with a summary to make them more accessible to a wider public. They are also published with an unofficial text which shows how proposals for amendments of laws are incorporated into existing texts. Specialised legal publications have also been issued on more complex issues, such as the arbitration court, inviolability and parliamentary immunity. Moreover, in 2003 historians were given the task of writing the history of the Chamber of Representatives.

The Chamber of Representatives has started producing a free-of-charge publication that is directed to the public. Its circulation of 15,000 copies is distributed three times a year in the two main official languages. The publication describes the work of the Chamber in easy-to-read language.

The Chamber has also overhauled its web site to make it more transparent and easier to use. In particular, search functions have been extended, and it is now possible to follow parliamentary debates live in audio or video. Committee debates can be followed in audio.

The Belgian Chamber of Representatives also stepped up its outreach to the media in 2000, and media facilities were improved. Debates can now be broadcast, and regional television plays a more important part in ensuring greater public awareness of parliamentary work. Parliament has also opened a visitors' service, and the Chamber has started a series of public meetings and debates, including with young people. Many other parliaments have also facilitated access to the parliamentary premises. In Zambia this has been made possible thanks to a decision to relax the dress code for visitors.

In Namibia several steps have been taken to bring the Namibian Parliament closer to the people. The Speaker has embarked on a nationwide tour to explain the workings and importance of the parliamentary process and to invite input from citizens. The Parliament has established a web site. It has donated computers to regional offices so that people can communicate electronically with it and it has established a mobile unit that travels to communities to teach people how to operate electronic management systems and interact with it. Parliament has created a studio for live radio broadcasts that also enables people to talk directly to its members. Lastly, it has held a conference on the theme of public participation in the legislative process, and has published pamphlets to explain the workings of its in a variety of local languages.

The Namibian Parliament - like the one in Morocco and many others - uses the mechanism of public hearings to solicit the views of the people. During the two-year period from 2001 to 2003, it held 37 such hearings. The Parliament has also made a specific effort to reach out to children. Since 2002, meetings have been held with children from all regions of the country to discuss children's rights issues, and four future sessions are planned to discuss juvenile justice, the impact of HIV/AIDS on the health system, and a skills programme for children aged 10 to 14, aimed at giving them the knowledge and skills to protect themselves from HIV infection.

Many countries point to the work of committees, which has apparently become more transparent. In Ireland, parliamentary committees generally meet in public sessions, in which members of the public and press can attend in the public gallery. The Danish Folketing reports an increasing tendency of the committee meetings, which used to be closed, to be open to the public, especially in connection with their consultation of cabinet ministers. On the Folketing web site, all the unpublished working documents of the standing committees are available, as well as documents and debates traditionally printed in the official parliamentary journal.

Most parliaments report that their parliamentary committees have significantly increased the number of hearings they hold with civil society organisations. In fact, much of the outreach to civil society groups and citizens at large takes place through the standing committees. This is the case in the parliaments of Finland, Iceland, Italy, Jamaica, Lithuania, Mexico, Norway, Romania, the Russian Federation and Turkey.

In the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, a conference was held in order to find ways to enhance cooperation between the parliament and NGOs. Representatives of 35 NGOs, committee chairpersons and parliamentary group coordinators participated. Special measures have also been taken by the parliament to promote the inclusion of handicapped people in the life of the State. The parliament of the Netherlands is increasingly organising public round tables at which members of parliament and civil society representatives discuss matters on an equal footing.

In Yemen, the parliament has organised meetings with civil society organisations on the status of women, employment and trade unions. In Romania, a constitutional forum has been established as an institutionalised structure for dialogue between civil society and parliamentary representatives during the revision of the Constitution. In Latvia, the government ministry concerned is obliged by law to indicate which NGOs have been consulted in the preparation of a particular bill, and the respective parliamentary committee follows up with its own consultations. For one bill that was recently under consideration, the relevant parliamentary committee received submissions, complaints and proposals from 952 physical and legal persons. In Estonia each bill must, in its explanatory notes, include a summary of consultations with relevant stakeholders.

In Belarus the parliament has carried out meetings with representatives of the population. It has also worked very actively to consolidate contacts with local administrative bodies, working collectives of the country's enterprises and organisations, and town and country population groups. Furthermore, it is possible for citizens to send questions, requests and proposals (by post or e-mail) directly to the parliament. In the period from 2000 to 2004 the population addressed the parliament on 7,726 occasions. Out of these, 569 dealt with proposals to amend existing legislation.

An increasing amount of parliamentary information and services are provided on parliamentary web sites. The parliament of the Solomon Islands and that of Cape Verde (the latter with the assistance of the United Nations Development Programme) are currently developing strategies for outreach to citizens. Such strategies include placing information at the disposal of the public through modern information technology, holding hearings with civil society groups and making it possible for citizens to make submissions to parliament. The Jamaican Parliament is developing a web site that will give the public electronic access to parliamentary documents and proceedings. In Romania, the parliament has taken measures to improve its web site. Besides providing information about the parliament and its work, the site also allows citizens to request information and transmit questions and petitions online.

The Canadian Parliament is currently looking into establishing new mechanisms for electronic consultation and assigning specific teams of MPs to consult with young people on democratic reform. Other parliaments (for example those in Algeria, France and Sweden) have started to engage young people more systematically, for instance by organising youth parliaments that meet at least once a year.

The Israeli Knesset is experimenting with using the parliamentary web site to enable the public to participate in committee work. Its Constitution, Law and Justice Committee has introduced a sophisticated interactive system. The parliament of Hungary reports that, besides the parliament's Internet home page, each of its standing committees soon will have their own home pages. The Spanish Senate's Information and Knowledge-based Society Committee maintains an open forum accessible to citizens through the Internet, which receives suggestions and information from the electorate. In Algeria, the parliamentary web site has become both more transparent and more practical. Interactivity is a priority, and the parliament provides a discussion forum on the web site. The Swedish Riksdag has begun to use new information campaigns to enlist citizens' participation and input into committee work, including by making better use of e-mail and the parliamentary web site. The United Kingdom Select Committee on Modernisation of the House of Commons has been conducting online consultations as part of its inquiry into ways of better connecting parliament with the public. In Ireland, the parliament has advanced in developing a

system for the electronic management of the legislative process, from the drafting of bills through the various stages, up to the enactment of bills into law.

Many parliaments broadcast their proceedings. Among these are the parliaments of Canada, Denmark, France, Iceland, Indonesia, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Luxembourg, Malta, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, the United Kingdom, Yemen and Zambia (on a trial basis). The parliaments of Canada and Germany also use video conferencing to allow parliamentary committees to receive testimony from across the country or the world. Similar plans are in preparation in Ethiopia.

The parliament of China reports that it pays special attention to petitions and complaints from the public, and has established telephone hotlines to facilitate the lodging of public complaints, for example regarding law enforcement. It also polls opinion on draft laws among local administrations, people's organisations, universities, colleges and research institutes, and holds seminars and symposia to elicit input from experts and the general public. The House of Representatives of Indonesia has appointed officials to receive and examine complaints and suggestions for new laws from the public and to channel them to the appropriate offices and committees in parliament. The German parliament reported receiving around 20,000 petitions annually. Indeed, most parliaments (including not only those based on the Westminster model, but also the Algerian, Croatian, Japanese, Kuwaiti, Polish, Portuguese, Saudi Arabian, Slovak and many other parliaments) have elaborate petitions and appeals procedures. In Japan it is also possible for local assemblies to contribute to the work of the Diet by submitting written statements and opinions. In Kuwait a standing committee on petitions and complaints receives all kind of complaints from citizens. It contacts concerned ministries or authorities and summons ministers and other officials to meet with the members of the committee to discuss the complaints and to solve the problems. The Shura Council in Saudi Arabia reports that it has a similar system. In Romania there is a committee that deals with petitions and complaints from the public in each of the two houses.

The parliament of Chile has started to organise conferences, seminars and workshops in which experts and representatives of the public are invited to discuss specific issues and make recommendations. The Hungarian parliament has established a civil society office to facilitate communication and interaction with civil society groups. The Israeli Knesset holds an annual citizens' conference with the participation of various outside entities, and the parliament in the Republic of Moldova has held public forums. The Diet in Japan reports that it holds public forums to collect opinions on the Constitution, as well as committee hearings on legislative bills in regional cities with interested persons and entities.

The parliament of Slovenia points to the possibility for one third of its deputies, or the National Council, or 40,000 voters, to call for a referendum, citing this as a measure designed to strengthen public involvement in parliamentary decision-making. In Slovenia, in some instances parliament is not authorised to adopt a law pending the outcome of a referendum, whereas in others a referendum may have the effect of overturning an adopted bill. The public can also participate by submitting a draft bill to parliament (provided it is supported by at least 5,000 voters) and by instituting a constitutional review (if it is supported by at least 30,000 voters). The Swiss system of direct democracy gives citizens extensive possibilities to influence parliamentary work through referendums. In Costa Rica too a mechanism has been established whereby five per cent of the citizens inscribed on the electoral role can call for a referendum. Moreover, in Costa Rica, there is an Office for Popular Initiatives where citizens can present suggestions, initiatives and proposals for

laws. In Romania, a legislative initiative can be taken by 100,000 voters, and 500,000 voters can initiate a revision of the Constitution. In the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, 150,000 citizens can submit a proposal for amendment of the Constitution, 10,000 voters can propose a law and 150,000 voters can ask for a referendum. Furthermore, for complex and extensive laws of wider interest, the parliament may decide to have a public debate on the draft law. In that case, it is published in the newspapers together with an announcement requesting the submission of opinions and proposals.

Other parliaments, such as the one in Cameroon, indicate that interaction between parliament and the public is still limited to the dialogue that individual members of parliament have with the voters in their respective constituencies. The parliament of Bhutan reported that much of the decision-making related to development has now been decentralised to ensure better citizen involvement.

5. *Parliamentary diplomacy*

While one respondent would clearly have preferred not to use the term “parliamentary diplomacy”, all parliaments (including that respondent) gave many examples of how they exercise this function. The growing number of visits and bilateral friendship groups clearly illustrates that this is another area where parliaments are expanding their international activities. In the last two years, the National People's Congress of China has received more than 200 parliamentary delegations from other countries led by Speakers and Deputy Speakers, has sent more than 100 delegations on overseas visits and has established dialogue and exchange mechanisms with several foreign parliaments. In the course of one year, the United Kingdom House of Commons received 78 overseas delegations. In the same year, the British IPU section received a further seven delegations on behalf of the House, and sent delegations to five countries. Many parliaments have established parliamentary friendship groups. Eighty-five such groups have been set up in China, 18 in Algeria, nearly 40 in Chile, 41 in Ireland, 50 in Latvia, 75 in Romania, 49 in the Republic of Moldova and 41 in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia; the Angolan, French, Jordanian, Maltese and Saudi Arabian parliaments too report that they have established some, but they give no numbers. The Kuwait National Assembly reports that in each legislative term it establishes 10 parliamentary friendship groups, and that every such group establishes relations with 15 parliaments of friendly countries.

All parliaments view their participation in global, regional and other inter-parliamentary forums as an essential form of exercising parliamentary diplomacy. Not surprisingly, therefore, almost every parliament also notes that it has at one point or another hosted meetings of inter-parliamentary organisations, and that this is part of the parliamentary version of diplomacy.

As a general rule, parliaments in countries that are affected or involved in conflicts also invariably resort to parliamentary diplomacy to seek to promote a solution to those conflicts. There are many ways of doing so. One involves using the meetings of inter-parliamentary organisations and assemblies to talk with members of parliaments from countries engaged in or otherwise affected by conflict. Several examples were given of the kinds of meetings that take place on the sidelines of events of the Inter-Parliamentary Union and several African, Arab, Asian, European and Latin-American parliamentary groupings.

Several parliaments also pointed to bilateral visits undertaken for example by Speakers of parliaments. In Belgium, as elsewhere, these visits are minutely prepared and provide important

opportunities to learn about and to advance bilateral agendas. These visits allow for encounters between a much broader political representation than government visits usually permit. The Estonian parliament holds that parliamentary diplomacy should compliment the execution of the country's foreign policy, and mentions as an example a visit by the Speaker to Canada, during which the question of visa requirements was discussed both with the executive and the legislative powers. The parliaments of Malta and Algeria also view parliamentary diplomacy as an important compliment to relations at the intergovernmental level. The parliament of Belarus states that it has concluded cooperation agreements with the parliaments of Armenia and Ukraine, which provide for the establishment of bilateral inter-parliamentary commissions to promote relations in various fields. Within these commissions, working groups will be created to engage inter alia in improving national legislation.

Bilateral visits can also be undertaken at the committee level. For example, the parliament of Finland reports that delegations of different committees frequently visit their counterparts in other parliaments. In the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, the Foreign Policy Committee initiated a conference concerning the Corridor 8 infrastructure project (which involves the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Albania and Bulgaria). A joint statement was adopted expressing the countries' common commitment to realising the project.

Parliaments also hold meetings with accredited ambassadors. This form of activity is mentioned by, among others, Angola and Jordan. The parliament of Kazakhstan points to invitations it issues to the United Nations Secretary-General and heads of intergovernmental organisations as further examples of parliamentary diplomacy.

In certain conflict situations, parliamentary involvement can be helpful in establishing a political dialogue. Examples include the following:

- At the invitation of the IPU, the Speakers of the countries neighbouring Iraq met in Amman in May 2004 to discuss how to assist in supporting democracy in Iraq and in bringing stability to the region;
- The National Security and Foreign Policy Committee of the Iranian Majlis has held talks with its counterparts in different parliaments on the crises in Iraq, Afghanistan and Palestine;
- The Speaker of the House of Representatives of Morocco hosted a meeting of the Speakers of parliaments of the Mediterranean countries in the wake of the 2001 terrorist bombings to formulate a parliamentary response;
- The Speakers of the parliaments of Cape Verde and Mozambique undertook a mission to Guinea-Bissau on behalf of the Speakers of the parliaments of the Portuguese-speaking countries, and helped establish a political dialogue there in early 2003;
- The Speakers of the parliaments of the three Caucasian States - Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia - met at the invitation of the President of the French Senate to discuss the conflict in the Nagorno-Karabakh region;
- The parliaments of Mali and Sierra Leone decided to institutionalise encounters between parliamentarians of the subregion (including parliamentarians from Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea); three meetings have taken place so far;
- The parliament of Pakistan notes that exchanges of delegations with the parliament of India have had the beneficial effect of reducing tension between the two countries, and the

parliament of the Sudan credits many of its delegations at meetings abroad with having significantly improved bilateral relations;

- The Speakers of the parliaments of Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon and Mali recently met with the Speaker of the parliament of Côte d'Ivoire - first in Cotonou and later in Abidjan - and helped to establish a political dialogue in that country;
- The Speakers of the parliaments of the member countries of the Southern African Development Community have visited the Democratic Republic of the Congo as part of efforts to promote peace and stability in the region;
- The British-Irish Inter-Parliamentary Body, which in addition to representatives from the parliaments of the United Kingdom and of Ireland consists of representatives from the Scottish Parliament, the National Assembly for Wales, the Northern Ireland Assembly, the Tynwald of the Isle of Man and the assemblies of the States of Guernsey and Jersey, has provided support to the peace process in Northern Ireland;
- The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) has recently developed initiatives addressing the conflicts in Chechnya, Cyprus and Nagorno-Karabakh.

The South African and Turkish parliaments have paid particular attention to the Middle East crisis, and have sent multiparty delegations to Israel and Palestine in an effort to gain a better understanding of the conflict, to promote dialogue between the two parties and to make recommendations for political and humanitarian action in support of a possible solution.

Certain parliaments have organised specific events to try to promote common understanding and advance the cause of peace in conflict situations. The French National Assembly organised two international colloquiums on the Balkans in 1999 and 2000, a visit to the Palestinian Territories by the French-Israeli Friendship Group in 2000, a joint reception of the Speakers of the Knesset and the Palestinian Legislative Council in 2002 at an international colloquium, and an information mission conducted in January 2004 by its Foreign Affairs Committee on the European Union's role in achieving peace in the Middle East.

The Japanese Diet reported on the confidence-building measures that have been undertaken since 2002 by delegations of the parliaments of the ASEAN plus three countries attending IPU meetings. At these meetings, each delegation states its understanding of the current situation in the Asia-Pacific region, addressing the various problems facing countries in the region and their possible solutions. Delegations evaluate the activities of existing organisations, such as the ASEAN Regional Forum, that take on confidence-building issues, and try to establish common concepts for confidence-building measures. In 2003 the delegations discussed terrorism issues and in April 2004 they focused on piracy. The Japanese Diet later hosted a special meeting of the group in 2005.

Other parliaments reports on parliamentary diplomacy conducted within institutional processes. The Italian Chamber of Deputies, for example, has made extensive use of Euro-Mediterranean parliamentary cooperation to promote relations between the Israeli Knesset and the Palestinian Legislative Council. The Iranian Majlis points to the role it played in the creation of the Parliamentary Union of OIC Member States, whose Secretariat is located in Tehran.

Individual members of parliament can also make a major contribution to peace and security. This was the case for several of the early leaders of the IPU, who received Nobel Peace Prizes in recognition of their work. They have their counterparts today, and some of the responses point to

the important work such parliamentarians have done. The Canadian Parliament underscores the work carried out by some of its members in support of the International Criminal Court and the Landmines Treaty, as well as by envoys to the peace processes in the Sudan and Sierra Leone. The parliament of Norway cites the work carried out by one of its members as President of the IPU Committee on Middle East Questions, which seeks to promote dialogue between Israeli and Palestinian legislators. The Swedish Riksdag notes that one of its members was the representative of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly on the Nagorno-Karabkh conflict, and two others are actively working in ad hoc working groups on the situation in Abkhazia, the Republic of Moldova and Belarus. One of the members of the Icelandic parliament participated in the work of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe's special working group on Chechnya.

The German parliament has launched a "Parliamentarians-protect-Parliamentarians" project, in which members of the Bundestag intervene on behalf of members of parliaments in other countries, where parliamentary rights or human rights may be under threat. This project is also part of the cooperation which has been developed by the Bundestag's delegations to the IPU and to several regional parliamentary organisations.

Several of the responses highlighted the important work carried out in the context of technical cooperation between parliaments. Helping to strengthen parliamentary institutions in countries emerging from conflict and strife was cited by many as being an important parliamentary activity in support of peace and security. Parliaments such as those of Belgium, France and Latvia gave examples of concrete action to provide such assistance in Africa, Iraq, Georgia and many other places. The parliament of the Republic of Korea has sent representatives to Iraq and neighbouring countries to offer parliamentary support for the reconstruction of Iraq. In Norway, the Speaker of the parliament has established a parliamentary working group for cooperation with parliaments in some countries in the former Yugoslavia, including in the form of study tours and concrete projects. The Swedish parliament has organised a seminar on democracy and government for the parliaments of the Balkan region.

The German Bundestag, the Icelandic Althingi, the Namibian Parliament, the Romanian Senate as well as its Chamber of Deputies, the Swedish Riksdag and the Parliament of South Africa point to participation in electoral observation missions as important examples of parliamentary diplomacy. For its part, the Spanish parliament notes that it has taken part in international monitoring missions to Albania, Guinea, Kosovo, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Mauritania, the Russian Federation, Serbia and Ukraine.

Contrary to the more traditional forms of diplomacy, parliamentary diplomacy is not exclusively an international affair. It can also be practiced at home. The Indonesian House of Representatives states that it has set up ad hoc committees to examine conflicts in Aceh and Maluku. It has also established monitoring teams to negotiate with local authorities and political figures to prevent the escalation of conflict and to start post-conflict reconstruction, and has sent members to join the government delegation that is negotiating with exiled leaders from Aceh.

Lastly, the Jamaican Parliament reports that after the World Conference of Presiding Officers of Parliaments was held in 2000, it established the Office of the Political Ombudsman. The Ombudsman is mandated to investigate any action taken by a political party, its members or supporters that constitutes, or is likely to constitute, a breach of any agreement, code or arrangement between political parties or is likely to prejudice good relations between the supporters of various political parties. Since the office was established, the Ombudsman has been instrumental in solving problems stemming from political differences in Jamaican society.

6. *Relations with other inter-parliamentary organizations*

Some parliaments, such those of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Israel and Luxembourg, acknowledge that duplication and overlapping exist between different regional parliamentary organisations. The parliament of Norway reports that its parliamentary Speaker's Office has reviewed the parliament's international engagements and has developed some guidelines in order to avoid duplication. Judging from the responses received, however, only a few parliaments have taken steps to achieve greater coordination and coherence in their relations with inter-parliamentary organisations. Instead, most parliaments indicate the priority they give to working with certain parliamentary organisations and not to others, often because of their regional location or because they belong to a certain linguistic, cultural or religious community.

Indeed, the responses clearly indicate an intensification of parliamentary participation in regional inter-parliamentary structures. Throughout the world the trend is clearly discernable; more and more parliaments dedicate time and resources to regional parliamentary cooperation. The Mexican parliament focuses much of its attention on inter-parliamentary organisations and assemblies in Latin America, the Moroccan parliament does likewise for the Mediterranean region, and the Parliament of South Africa takes great interest in the development of several African parliamentary structures, notably the SADC Parliamentary Forum and the Pan-African Parliament. The parliament of Yemen reports membership in the Arab Inter-Parliamentary Union as well as in the Parliamentary Union of the OIC Members. Moreover, it works to strengthen cooperation between the Arab Inter-Parliamentary Union and the African Parliamentary Union. The parliament of Angola puts forward the work it has done as part of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD). As pointed out by the Portuguese parliament, the Conference of Community and European Affairs Committees of Parliaments of the European Union (COSAC) allows for cooperation between the parliamentary committees of the member States of the European Union.

The British Parliament gives a clear sense of the intensity of its participation in regional organisations. In just one year (2002-2003), 66 members took part in four European regional parliamentary assemblies: the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE), the Parliamentary Assembly of the Western European Union, the Parliamentary Assembly of the OSCE and the NATO Parliamentary Assembly. They attended a total of 235 committee meetings and 11 plenary sessions!

The French National Assembly also focuses its participation on these four regional assemblies. The Assembly appoints a permanent delegation with a president and a bureau for each of these assemblies. According to the National Assembly, there can be no overlapping or duplication between the four entities because their specific mandates, and having the same structures service its delegations permits them to have greater interaction and awareness of each other's activities.

The Italian parliament sends permanent delegations to these four bodies that focus on European security, and also to the InCE-CEI (Central European Initiative). According to its report, there has been better coordination and less duplication between the European Parliament, the Council of Europe and the OSCE in the area of election monitoring.

The National People's Congress of China has become a member or observer of 12 regional inter-parliamentary organisations and has hosted five conferences of these organisations in the last two years.

As for the avoidance of duplication, the Canadian Parliament reports that participation in inter-parliamentary organisations is organised through official "parliamentary associations", which are open to membership by all MPs and Senators. Recently, the Chairs of these associations began meeting on a regular basis to discuss common issues and concerns, including relationships and funding issues. In the Moroccan parliament, national groups have been established for each of the regional organisations.

In Belarus the Standing Committee for Foreign Affairs and National Security produces an annual report which contains evaluations of past inter-parliamentary activities and sets priorities in this sphere for the year to come. In the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, the President of the Assembly together with the Vice-Presidents takes decisions regarding the invitation and reception of parliamentary delegations and of representatives of other organs and foreign organisations, as well as regarding the dispatch of delegations abroad. The purpose for this centralized structure is to ensure coordination of the international activities of the Assembly.

The Moldovan parliament reports that much of the coordination with regional parliamentary institutions is undertaken by parliamentary staff who service the delegations that attend their events. In Rwanda, the bureaux of the two houses of parliament are given the task of coordinating delegations to different inter-parliamentary structures. In Saudi Arabia, the Shura Council has established an Inter-Parliamentary Relations Unit, with a staff of 16 members, with regulations governing the planning, programming and supervision of the Shura's foreign activities.

The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) reports that in order to maintain its relations with inter-parliamentary organisations as well as other institutions, an inter-parliamentary cooperation unit was set up in 2001 within its secretariat. In September 2004 this unit became a part of the newly formed Interparliamentary and Institutional Relations Directorate of the Assembly's secretariat. Moreover, in order to develop better means of coordination between European regional and subregional parliamentary bodies, the possibility of organising a biannual meeting of presidents of European regional and subregional parliamentary organisations is currently being considered.

The Spanish parliament states that its participation in several conferences, assemblies and meetings of parliamentary Speakers has in fact enhanced its ability to ensure coordination and coherence in its participation in different inter-parliamentary forums. In the United Kingdom, the British IPU section (working closely with its Commonwealth Parliamentary equivalent) also promotes coordination. In Zambia, the parliament held a two-day induction workshop for members serving on delegations to international organisations, to help them be more effective in their international work.

A Swedish parliamentary working group recently submitted several recommendations to improve parliament's participation in inter-parliamentary cooperation. As a basic principle, the working group stated that it was important for the Riksdag to promote good working conditions for international delegations. The Riksdag should also examine in greater depth how it fulfils its obligations in international affairs. The working group analysed the trend towards greater institutionalisation in parliamentary committees, participation in government delegations, Nordic cooperation, the IPU, new forms of parliamentary networks and the development of new

parliamentary assemblies. The group asked for greater clarity regarding reporting by and the election of members of delegations. Lastly, the group confirmed that delegations appointed by parliament or its board cannot represent the Riksdag when it comes to decisions of a political nature.

The Chinese National People's Congress reports some efforts to strengthen parliamentary cooperation in the Asia-Pacific region. It has recommended that parliaments in the region intensify exchanges, compare notes in respect of parliamentary legislation and oversight and step up communications and interaction between young parliamentarians.

The Namibian Parliament refers to efforts underway in Africa to strengthen parliamentary cooperation through the establishment of the Pan-African Parliament. The French Senate states that it has launched an initiative to foster cooperation at the global and regional levels between senates around the world. At the same time, together with several other parliaments, it has pointed to the dangers of proliferation, and has stated that it has no intention of participating in the work of all the emerging parliamentary associations and networks. The French parliament has said that while it wishes to see a deeper relationship with the United Nations and the World Bank, it believes this should develop through the IPU and not through the establishment of parallel networks created by such organisations. It therefore insists that contacts with these organisations should be made through the IPU.

In Denmark, the Folketing as a general principle seeks to work within the existing inter-parliamentary structures and to avoid the establishment of new ones. In addition, the Folketing supports participation only in conferences and other activities sponsored by other parliaments or by an inter-parliamentary organisation. The Folketing therefore does not support involvement by Danish parliamentarians in activities and conferences organised by NGOs.

On the other hand, the parliament of Malta expresses a slightly different view on the establishment of new inter-parliamentary organisations. While recognising that it is important for such organisations to be efficient and avoid duplication, the Maltese parliament stresses that such considerations must not suffocate initiatives to set up regional organisations where their presence is necessary.

7. *Supporting the IPU*

Clearly, all parliaments that responded to the questionnaire have also reaffirmed their support for the organisation. Some have reiterated the support they have given to the reform process that took place within the organisation, others have underlined the financial and political support they currently provide. Others have drawn attention to the efforts they make within their parliaments to ensure that knowledge about the IPU is more widely shared. One parliament (that of Tuvalu) reported that it fully supports the work of the IPU, but it has not yet become a Member because of the financial costs involved. Another parliament (that of Jamaica) had to request a voluntary suspension of membership owing to budgetary constraints.

As for concrete measures taken to strengthen the IPU, some parliaments, such as the Kuwait National Assembly, translate IPU documents to the national language. The parliament of Uruguay has established a special service to translate all official IPU documents into Spanish and disseminate them to all the parliaments in Latin America. In the Estonian parliament all resolutions adopted by the IPU are translated into Estonian and sent to the committees involved. They are also sent to the Office of the President of the Republic, the Prime Minister, the Minister for Foreign

Affairs, the Minister of Justice and other appropriate government ministers and organisations. In Namibia, all IPU resolutions are tabled in parliament.

Several parliaments have taken steps to upgrade their participation in the IPU. In Norway, the parliament now elects a permanent delegation to the IPU for a four-year period. It plans, implements and follows up on the parliament's work and activities related to the IPU, and since 2003 has also submitted official annual reports to parliament. These reports are sent to the Committee on Foreign Affairs for follow-up, and are later discussed in plenary by parliament.

In Estonia, as elsewhere, the IPU Group consists of all members of parliament, which demonstrates the importance given to the IPU. In Cape Verde, the Speaker and the parliamentary institution are now much more involved in the work of the Union.

The National People's Congress of China provides many examples of the strong institutional relationship that has been put in place between a parliament and the IPU. Delegations to IPU meetings are led by a senior Vice-President of parliament, and are composed of some permanent members (to ensure continuity) and some who have been chosen for their expertise in the subjects that are on the agenda. All delegations submit a written report for discussion by the parliament's Standing Committee. The delegations are assisted by a team of officers who have been trained specifically in IPU rules and procedures.

The Japanese Diet too has taken steps to strengthen its relationship with the IPU. It has established a "parliamentary round table", made up of members with experience of IPU activities that seeks to promote understanding of IPU activities within the Diet and plays a major role in promoting participation in IPU activities. Furthermore, the Diet involves its two Speakers as principal advisers on IPU matters. The Irish parliament reports that the Irish delegation attending IPU Assemblies is led by the Speaker of either the House or the Senate. In Malta, Algeria and other countries too, the parliamentary delegation is headed by the Speaker.

In Romania, the IPU Group has taken an initiative to edit a newsletter presenting both the IPU and the main activities of the Romanian parliamentarians in relation with the Union. The publication has been widely distributed, for example to all senators and deputies, committees, specialised parliamentary bodies, parliamentary libraries and government ministries.

In the parliament of Mali, one Vice-President has been given the task of reporting on the IPU and proposing measures to strengthen the organisation further. The parliament of Azerbaijan systematically uses its contacts with delegations from parliaments and governments to underline the need to develop inter-parliamentary cooperation through the IPU. The Latvian parliament organises a yearly debate on international issues in which delegations to all inter-parliamentary structures participate. This also facilitates coherence among these institutions within the parliament. Several parliaments, including those of Croatia, France and Italy, have improved their internal reporting procedures on the work of the IPU. In Romania, internal reporting procedures include reports on each specific activity, as well as yearly reports and four-year reports which are submitted for debate to the bureau and to the Foreign Affairs Committee. In Estonia, the board of the IPU Group - together with the other international parliamentary delegations in the parliament - reports annually to the Foreign Affairs Committee, and once a year it reports to the assembly as well. The parliament of Bahrain, a recently affiliated member of the IPU, proposes to work to strengthen the Union's role in the Arab region.

The parliaments of Andorra, Belarus, Belgium, Canada, China, Ethiopia, France, Germany, Guatemala, Japan, Jordan, Russian Federation, Tunisia, Sweden, Switzerland and the United

Kingdom have met with their ministers for foreign affairs and/or permanent representatives to the United Nations to ensure their countries' support for proposals to strengthen the IPU's role vis-à-vis the United Nations.

Though it is not a national parliament, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) reports that it regularly invites the IPU President to address its plenary sittings, and its President regularly attends IPU plenary meetings.

8. *Promoting the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)*

The Committees on Globalisation in the two Belgian chambers have addressed the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), held discussions on them and issued a discussion note (in the Senate). The Chamber of Representatives is currently examining a bill that has been sent to it by the Senate, which would institutionalise a process for the Government and parliament to work on the implementation of the MDGs. Specifically, the law would oblige the Government to submit an annual report to the Senate by 30 June of each year outlining the steps taken to fulfil the MDGs, specifying the activities undertaken by Belgium's representative at the IMF, the World Bank and the UNDP, and analysing progress made by the Government in fulfilling the MDGs.

The MDGs have frequently been debated in the Parliament of the United Kingdom, in both the House of Commons and the House of Lords, and are central to the work of the House International Development Committee. This committee checks annually the progress made towards achieving public service agreements (which themselves are based on the MDGs), and looks at progress in countries receiving development assistance from the United Kingdom. It also interacts regularly with United Nations departments active in development matters.

The members of the parliament of Luxembourg play an active part in a campaign to raise public awareness on development cooperation issues. The Spanish parliament too promotes implementation of the MDGs, specifically through its Committee on International Cooperation for Development. The Swedish parliament has approved a new policy for global development based on the MDGs and has issued a special publication on the subject. It has also brought together representatives of international development committees of the European Parliament to encourage them to work together in pursuit of the MDGs.

The Ethiopian parliament held an MDG sensitisation programme for its members in 2003. The parliament of Cape Verde has introduced the MDGs in its training programme for parliamentarians, and several parliamentary forums have been organised on social economy issues, environment and poverty reduction, as well as a session on parliament's role in development. Parliament has also developed a programme of cooperation with the Ministry of Education and UNICEF; the programme organises youth parliaments to discuss and propose solutions to certain problems, including those related to the environment. Women parliamentarians have established a network which focuses on promoting democracy and development issues.

The Canadian House of Commons Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Trade has examined the MDGs and the role of UNDP. Its Subcommittee on Human Rights and International Development has issued a report on HIV/AIDS in sub-Saharan Africa. In Ireland, the joint Foreign Affairs Committee of the two houses has set up a Subcommittee on Development Cooperation which monitors Ireland's relations with developing countries in the fields of development, cooperation, trade and debt. It also looks at the role of the United Nations in the field of development cooperation. The German parliament has endorsed the MDGs, and

regularly holds policy debates on them, the most recent being devoted to ways of combating HIV/AIDS. At its request, the German Government has submitted a programme of action which sets out Germany's contribution to fulfilling the MDGs. It must be revised and again submitted to parliament every second year. The parliament of the Netherlands too has endorsed the MDGs. Members of the Netherlands parliament are always included in the country's delegation to the United Nations General Assembly, which ensures a direct connection between the parliament and the United Nations.

The National People's Congress of China has given considerable attention to the MDGs and their implementation, and in the process has deliberated on 120 laws, judicial interpretations and decisions on legal issues, checked the enforcement of 22 laws and legal decisions, and heard and deliberated on 40 special work reports submitted by the State Council.

The Iranian Majlis reports that it has passed various laws to provide more opportunities for women, in particular in respect of education, poverty reduction, the provision of public facilities for rural areas, the eradication of illiteracy, the protection of women's rights and the establishment of family courts to protect the family as a pillar of society.

When preparing its reply, the Kuwait National Assembly was processing an amendment to the election law that would allow women to vote and stand in elections. In support of the MDGs, the Republic of Belarus has adopted a national policy of sustainable social and economic development for the period until 2020. The policy sets strategic goals and priorities and establishes Belarus' stages of transition to sustainable development. It is to be revised once every five years. To achieve its goals, the parliament has adopted legislation aimed for example at amending laws on education and the protection of the ozone layer.

The Assembly in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia gives a long list of measures taken with a view to implementing the MDGs, including inter alia steps aimed at poverty reduction, raising education levels and making education accessible for the various groups in society, increasing the representation of women in politics and public life, protecting the environment and ensuring sustainable development.

The Parliament of South Africa has adopted important bills to reduce poverty by enabling people to become economically active and extending the social assistance net. It has also legislated to achieve universal primary education, promote gender equality and the empowerment of women, improve maternal health and combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases. It has conducted public hearings and consulted widely with experts and interested and affected communities as part of such efforts.

The parliament of Guatemala has adopted legislation on HIV/AIDS and human rights protection. The parliaments of Namibia and Zambia too have worked actively on HIV/AIDS issues, and the latter has created a National AIDS Council. The parliament of Mali has raised questions in parliament in relation to education programmes, AIDS and malaria, and has set up networks to work on these issues. The parliament of the Republic of Moldova has focused attention on the need to develop a national plan of action in the human rights field. The parliament of Lithuania has adopted a resolution declaring 2004 the year of Children's Health, and has adopted a revised HIV/AIDS programme. The Romanian parliament has passed several laws relating to guaranteed minimum income, universal primary education, gender equality, maternal health and environmental sustainability. Furthermore, both houses report that they have set up standing committees on equal opportunities for men and women. Parliamentary committees in Rwanda

regularly refer to the MDGs when carrying out sector reviews of development policies and programmes.

The parliament of Turkey has played an active role in promoting gender equality. It passed a constitutional amendment in 2001 which reinforces the concept of gender equality. It has adopted a new Civil Code to implement this amendment, and has used the parliamentary handbook produced jointly by the United Nations and the IPU on the Convention to Eliminate All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) to promote gender equality. It has also established a "parliamentary champions group" which organises meetings, symposiums and colloquiums about the CEDAW Committee's activities.

The parliament of Indonesia has adopted a national development plan and has passed legislation in relation to several of the fields covered by the MDGs, including education, health and the environment. It has also adopted a law on general elections, which contains a recommendation that a minimum of 30 per cent of candidates in municipal, regional and national elections should be women. In the parliament of Croatia, the Gender Equality Committee and the Physical Planning and Environmental Protection Committee prepare legislation and monitor the implementation of the relevant MDGs. In the parliament of Costa Rica, this task is carried out by the Standing Committee on Women.

The parliament of Morocco has raised public awareness about the MDGs through parliamentary debates and special events, and has organised several regional and national workshops on specific MDGs, in cooperation with various United Nations agencies. It has also legislated in the field of education and has adopted an important new family code which advances gender equality.

The Algerian parliament has paid substantial attention to issues related to the MDGs, including poverty, illiteracy, pollution and the situation of women. It cooperates with the Government on such issues and has passed several laws on sustainable development. It is now preparing to launch a national report on the MDGs. In Angola too the parliament is engaged in the implementation of the MDGs. The process is directed from the Ministry of Planning, and parliamentarians are taking part in seminars on the implementation of the MDG programme. Furthermore, the parliament has decided to overhaul a large number of laws to bring them into line with the MDGs.

The parliament of Italy, taking its cue from the United Nations General Assembly Special Session on Children, held a world conference of women parliamentarians in October 2004 to discuss policies relating to children and young persons. Moreover, in 2001, in preparation for the G8 summit in Genoa, the Italian parliament adopted motions to encourage the executive to support the international agenda aimed at combating poverty and ensuring HIV/AIDS control, debt cancellation and sustainable development. In conjunction with the thirty-first session of the FAO Conference, the Italian Government was also urged to raise its funding of official development assistance to the target level of 0.7 per cent of gross domestic product.

The parliament of Andorra discussed and approved a new budget allocation specifically designed to ensure a sustainable environment. The parliament of Bahrain has also debated and adopted laws for the protection of the environment. In Azerbaijan, the parliamentary committee on regional issues and its department for economic legislation joined government officials in developing a programme to eliminate poverty and ensure economic development in the country, as part of efforts aimed at achieving the MDGs. In Jordan, the parliament has set aside financial resources within the national budget to advance implementation of the MDGs. It has also set up a Standing Committee for the Environment. The Senate in Mexico has taken several steps to

advance implementation of the MDGs, including making sure that the national budget contains a special allocation to fight the HIV/AIDS pandemic.

The parliament of Tunisia reports on its efforts to promote broader acceptance in parliaments of the need to create an international solidarity fund, a proposal that has already been endorsed by the United Nations General Assembly.

Lastly, the parliament of Cameroon points out that in a developing country, trying to meet the MDGs is in fact part of every member of parliament's daily work, and that meeting those goals is the obvious standard by which they are held to account by the people.

9. *Scrutinizing development policy*

(i) *National policy*

Many parliaments point to the use of traditional tools of oversight of the government, such as interpellations, oral questions and plenary debates. In the Zambian parliament in 2003, members raised 646 oral questions, most of which related to their efforts to scrutinise the Government's development policies and programmes. The parliament also considered 26 bills in the field of development (23 were adopted and three were withdrawn).

The new South African Government that took office in 1994 faced many challenges, including how best to address high levels of poverty and inequality. It developed a Reconstruction and Development Programme. The Parliament ensured that when this programme was transformed into a legislative act, public hearings were held and public submissions were channelled into the process. Since those early days, the Parliament has played a prominent role in scrutinising all development policies and ensuring that they are debated in society and that the public has a real opportunity to participate in and influence the outcome of these processes. Moreover, the Parliament also examines the country's relations with the international and regional development finance institutions. It has invited the Finance Minister to make a presentation to it on the subject and to discuss the matter.

The Ethiopian parliament has played an active role throughout the preparation and implementation of the country's poverty reduction strategy programme. It held discussions and hearings during the preparatory stage, and now monitors implementation through field visits carried out by relevant standing committees. The parliaments of Azerbaijan, Bhutan, Namibia, Tajikistan and Yemen have similarly played an active part in setting up development programmes for their countries. The Republic of Korea's parliament too takes the MDGs into account when discussing development strategies. The Assembly established a Women's Affairs Committee in 2002 which strengthens deliberations in parliament on gender and women's rights issues.

The Senegalese and Slovak parliaments point out that every parliament should regularly evaluate the effectiveness of development programmes. The parliaments of Belarus, Croatia, Estonia, Sri Lanka, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Tunisia note that this is done during the annual budget debate. In Mexico, this occurs when the two chambers debate the annual presidential report in early September, whereas in Turkey it takes place when parliament examines and ratifies the development plans prepared by the State Planning Organisation. In France, parliamentary scrutiny on follow-up to the MDGs is principally the responsibility of the rapporteurs who are responsible for the part of the budget that relates to development cooperation. A report for the 2005 budget makes extensive use of the MDGs. In China, the plan for national economic

and social development and the report on its implementation must be examined and approved by the plenary of the National People's Congress. In between sessions, the Standing Committee performs this role. Moreover, the Congress Financial and Economic Committee holds quarterly seminars to analyse the economic situation and make recommendations to the State Council.

The Indonesian parliament considers the supervision of national development policies as one of its most important functions. It carries out this function in committee debates - particularly in the House Budget Committee - and during visits throughout the country to evaluate development projects and programmes on the spot. It also monitors foreign aid from multilateral bodies, such as the World Bank and the IMF, and frequently holds meetings with their senior representatives.

The Latvian parliament has established a subcommittee on the future development of the country. Its main task consists of drafting a vision for medium and long-term development, seeking input from public institutions, scientists and civil society on accelerating Latvia's development, and obtaining scientific and economic information to help members of parliament meet the goals they have set. Parliament also takes part in approving the four-year national strategy for the development of science and technology, as well as a concept for the development of education. Both houses of the British Parliament contributed extensively to the debate on the development policy drawn up in 2001 and 2002 during consideration of the International Development Bill.

The Belgian parliament plays a vanguard role which pre-dates the World Conference of Presiding Officers of Parliaments that was held in 2000. Indeed, the parliament took two initiatives in the late 1990s; one led to the creation of the Belgian Survival Fund (which replaced a similar fund established as a result of a parliamentary initiative in 1983). The Fund's main objective is to help ensure food security for the most vulnerable groups in developing countries. The Fund acts as a laboratory for Belgian development assistance, and is piloted by a working group on which seven seats are held by members of parliament (one of whom presides over the group).

The Belgian parliament also created a committee on follow-up to development problems, whose report to parliament in 1997 led to a complete reform of Belgium's development cooperation. Since then, the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Chamber of Representatives ensures monitoring of Belgium's development cooperation, and regularly discusses evaluations undertaken by independent experts.

In the Irish parliament, the government minister with responsibility for the overseas development aid budget and representatives of NGOs have appeared before the Joint Committee on Foreign Affairs on a number of occasions.

In 2003, the Swedish parliament adopted a new integrated policy for global development, with a common objective for all fields: to contribute to just and sustainable global development. The underlying thought is that Sweden will assist developing countries in their own development processes, inter alia by ensuring that what is done in one context is compatible with what the Swedish Government does in another. Trade, agriculture, the environment, security and migration are examples of areas in which action must be coordinated.

The Swedish Foreign Affairs Committee, when adopting the policy, made several announcements. One stated that the committee of inquiry appointed to review the guidelines for the export of war matériel must also consider a policy of global development. Secondly, the Foreign Affairs Committee directed the Government regularly to provide a written account of its priorities with respect to the World Bank, the IMF and the regional development banks. Thirdly, it requested the Government to clarify who is responsible for coordinating Swedish cooperation with the World

Bank, and to ensure that conflicts regarding objectives be resolved at the political level. The Government will report every year to parliament on the implementation of the policy.

(ii) As a donor country

In Japan, the House of Representative's Committee on Foreign Affairs and Budget has participated in discussions to amend Japan's Official Development Assistance Charter, and members of the House of Councillors are undertaking missions to look at how development assistance is being used by recipient countries. The French parliament has also considered specific reports on the work of the World Bank and the IMF.

The Government of Germany makes a statement in parliament when the annual meetings of the international financial institutions (IFIs) take place. This is subsequently debated in parliament, as is the annual development policy report issued by the Government. The parliament has a committee on economic cooperation and development which plays a leading role in development cooperation issues and ensures that parliament is well informed and able to carry out its work. The committee makes field visits, hears civil society representatives, meets with officials of the IFIs and undertakes evaluations. All motions and draft laws in the German Bundestag are assessed in terms of their development policy relevance.

In the United Kingdom, the Treasury Committee has published a report on the IMF: *A blueprint for parliamentary accountability*, and taken other evidence from both the United Kingdom and the IMF itself. Similarly, the International Development Committee has held annual evidence sessions with the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Secretary of State for International Development following the autumn meetings held by the World Bank and the IMF. The Committee also deals with the issue of conditionality and discusses this during its visits to countries receiving aid.

In Sweden and Norway, the parliamentary foreign affairs committees consider the draft budgets and policies on development aid, and debate whether goals have been met. The Swedish committee also considers an annual report from the Government on the World Bank.

The Czech parliament plays an active part in formulating and monitoring the country's international development aid. In 2003, when as a result of flooding the government had to reduce the international aid that had originally been agreed upon, the matter was raised in parliament, and its Committee on Foreign Affairs asked the relevant government minister to reconsider its decision and restore the level of aid to its original target. This recommendation was subsequently implemented by the parliamentary Budget Committee.

The parliament of Andorra debated the 2004 budget which proposed an increase of 50 per cent for development assistance, thus raising it to 0.5 per cent of the overall budget. MPs in the Canadian Parliament have frequently raised the issue of development assistance during debates on the federal budget and on the Speech from the Throne (the statement of government priorities). Moreover, the Canadian Parliament has several committees that undertake studies and submit reports for discussion relating to Canada's direct and indirect support for development cooperation.

The Belgian parliament's Committee on Globalisation regularly holds hearings with its country's representatives to the international financial and development institutions. The parliament of Luxembourg takes an active part in examining the country's development cooperation programme, and encourages the Government to continue increasing official development assistance (ODA) until it will reach 1 per cent of GDP.

Contributions to international financial institutions and bilateral aid programmes are also discussed in the parliament of Bahrain.

Lastly, the Italian parliament has agreed with the executive branch that the Millennium Declaration will be used as the basic guideline for all development cooperation policy.

(iii) As a recipient country

The parliament of the Philippines has on several occasions discussed development issues, and in the last two years has adopted bills requiring prior congressional approval for all forms of domestic indebtedness, limiting the President's borrowing power and creating a joint legislative-executive debt coordination council to help the Government institute reforms. The parliament has also proposed that the World Bank exempt the 20 most depressed provinces in the country from the requirement of putting up local counterpart funds. The Croatian and other parliaments regularly examine all international assistance agreements of a financial nature, including those concluded with different lending institutions.

Members of parliament in Cape Verde have met with representatives of the international financial institutions to discuss possibilities and conditions for obtaining development assistance. In Jordan and Rwanda, the parliaments play an active part in discussions with the respective Governments regarding development priorities and development aid programmes and their conditionality.

The parliament of Mali has raised questions regarding the earmarking of funds from the international financial institutions to cover poverty reduction programmes. It also meets with representatives of these institutions to engage them in discussions on structural adjustment policies applied in Mali. This has helped adjust these programmes to the country's development needs.

Representatives of the parliaments of Morocco, the Republic of Moldova, Tajikistan and Tunisia occasionally meet with World Bank and IMF officials visiting their countries. In Belarus the parliament and its Standing Committee for National Economy, Budget and Finance hold meetings with representatives of international financial institutions, including the IMF and the World Bank, when they visit the country. In Cameroon and Senegal, though, there is no relationship between the parliaments, their members and the donor community. In Zambia, interaction is scant and mainly consists of trying to enlighten representatives of the donor institutions about people's concerns.

The parliaments of Bhutan, the Solomon Islands and Sri Lanka note that while the executive negotiates donor assistance packages, parliament examines such assistance in the context of its review of the development budget.