



Inter-Parliamentary Union
For democracy. For everyone.

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Presentation of Conference Reports

(a) Implementation of major recommendations of previous Speakers' Conferences – the parliamentary dimension to international cooperation

Every five years since 2000, the IPU has convened a World Conference of Speakers of Parliament. The World Conferences have been conceived and held in connection with major United Nations Summits. As such, they have aimed to take stock of and bring a parliamentary perspective to bear on the main challenges facing the international community

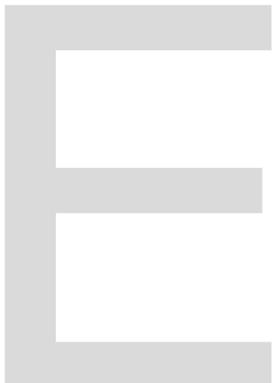
This paper aims to map progress in the implementation of the major recommendations from previous Speakers' Conferences. It also tracks developments in the interaction between the United Nations system, parliaments and the IPU, and examines challenges to and opportunities for bridging the democracy gap in international relations.

Introduction

The first World Conference of Speakers of Parliament was held at United Nations Headquarters in New York on the eve of the Millennium Summit, in September 2000. It concluded with a ground-breaking Declaration entitled *The parliamentary vision for international cooperation at the dawn of the third millennium*. In the Declaration, parliamentary leaders noted the multifaceted challenges facing the world in a host of areas: peace and security, environmental degradation, impact of globalization, poverty and the debt burden, etc. They called for a strong and effective United Nations to meet these challenges, and for meaningful UN reform to this end.

At the highest political level, they underscored the ideals and fundamental principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations and reaffirmed their commitment to the rule of law, in particular international human rights and international humanitarian law. They stressed that changes in international relations and the growing complexity of globalization and interdependence required parliaments and parliamentarians to play a new and active role vis-à-vis the global agenda. They therefore called on all parliaments and their world organization – the IPU – to lend a parliamentary dimension to international cooperation.

This meant that, at the national level, parliaments could influence their respective country's policy on matters dealt with at the United Nations and other international negotiating forums, keeping themselves informed of the progress and outcome of negotiations, providing input for the country's negotiating mandates, deciding on the ratification of international conventions and treaties, and contributing actively to the subsequent implementation process.



At the regional level, parliaments needed to make the best possible use of regional inter-parliamentary organizations and through them seek to influence the corresponding intergovernmental bodies. They undertook to examine closely the work of such organizations in order to heighten their efficiency and avoid duplication, while also exchanging experiences with a view to enhancing coherence.

At the international level, at the same time as it reinforced the political input of national parliaments into the process of inter-State cooperation, the IPU needed to be consolidated as the world organization for inter-parliamentary cooperation and for relaying parliamentary input to the work of the United Nations.

Relations with the United Nations

The parliamentary dimension to international cooperation, especially in the context of the United Nations, has evolved considerably over the past 15 years.

The Millennium Declaration adopted by Heads of State and Government in 2000 acknowledged the need for closer cooperation between the United Nations and national parliaments, working through the IPU as their world organization, in various fields, including peace and security, economic and social development, international law, human rights and democracy, and gender issues. In 2002, the IPU obtained permanent observer status at the United Nations, with the right to address UN sessions and circulate its official documents. This was a first step towards implementing the call issued by the first World Conference of Speakers.

The Second World Conference of Speakers of Parliament, held in September 2005 also at United Nations Headquarters in New York, concluded with a consensus Declaration entitled *Bridging the democracy gap in international relations: A stronger role for parliaments*. The Declaration noted that global governance required effective mechanisms of transparency and accountability, with parliaments playing a greater role, and called for a strategic partnership between the United Nations and the IPU.

At the 2005 Millennium +5 Summit that followed, UN Member States recognized the need for internal reform that would allow greater parliamentary involvement in relation to the global agenda. The new UN bodies set up on that occasion – the Human Rights Council, the UN Peacebuilding Commission and the Development Cooperation Forum of the Economic and Social Council – specifically invited parliamentary involvement.

Today, joint sessions are regularly held at the United Nations, examples being the annual parliamentary hearing at the United Nations or the parliamentary meeting on the occasion of the annual session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women, the outcomes of which are designed to inform the UN decision-making process. The UN General Assembly has encouraged a parliamentary component to major UN processes and conferences, which the IPU is now providing in multiple areas (climate change, financing for development, post-2015 sustainable development goals, gender equality, nuclear disarmament, etc.). Member States are encouraged to include parliamentarians in national delegations to major global conferences, and parliaments are given the opportunity to be directly involved in monitoring the implementation of international commitments (mechanisms are in place in particular vis-à-vis the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women and the Human Rights Council Universal Periodic Review mechanism).

To help guide this work, in 2007 the IPU set up its own Standing Committee on United Nations Affairs. One of its first achievements was a policy paper on the nature of the relationship between the United Nations and the world of parliaments, which was endorsed by the IPU's governing bodies, presented at the 2010 World Conference of Speakers of Parliament, and circulated at the UN General Assembly (www.ipu.org/un-e/un-cmt.htm). In keeping with the vision outlined at the First World Conference in 2000, much of the work relating to the United Nations needed to be done by parliaments at the national level. The IPU was called upon to play a supporting role: serving as a facilitator and catalyst, helping to share good parliamentary practices and encourage action by parliaments and parliamentarians, facilitating interaction with the UN world and, more generally, helping to ensure that the views of the parliamentary community are heard at the United Nations.

Since then, the Committee on United Nations Affairs has been providing a space where legislators can interact with senior UN officials, debate and draft parliamentary input for major UN processes, and review parliamentary action for the implementation of international commitments. The Committee's Advisory Group (now Bureau) has conducted a series of field missions (United Republic of Tanzania, Viet Nam, Ghana and Sierra Leone, Albania and Montenegro, Côte d'Ivoire and Haiti), in an effort to

examine the impact of UN reform and of UN operations at the national level, and to encourage greater parliamentary involvement therein. This also responds to the call made by the second World Conference of Speakers for greater parliamentary vigilance vis-à-vis UN activities. This point was clearly made during the 2014 mission to Haiti, a country with a massive UN peacekeeping operation whose parliament was finding it difficult to obtain relevant information and exercise its oversight role in connection with a foreign military presence on its territory.

There has been a gradual shift in how the United Nations system approaches cooperation with parliaments at the national level. Although much remains to be done, UN Country Teams are paying more attention to their relationship with the national parliament, while also seeking greater coordination with other development partners. In so doing, the Teams are responding to the need for a more structured and integrated manner of working with national parliaments, in particular by engaging with parliaments as partners (not just recipients of technical assistance) and involving them in consultations on critical national strategies (which was not the case before). The launch in 2014 and subsequent endorsement by dozens of parliaments and development partners of the IPU-led Common Principles for Support to Parliament is a concrete and implementable step in this direction.

In 2005, parliamentary leaders also called on the United Nations to integrate human rights, good governance and the rule of law more fully into its work. Parliaments and the IPU play a crucial role here, enhancing both national ownership and implementation of key commitments, while bringing a parliamentary perspective to these crucial issues. By working with the UN treaty bodies, for example, the IPU has helped parliaments increase their leverage in the national review of international human rights commitments. In the case of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the IPU works with the parliaments of the countries under review so that they can become an integral part of the process, i.e. provide input for the national report, attend the relevant Committee sessions, and receive the UN findings for consideration and action. In recent years, the IPU has likewise focused on enhancing synergies between parliaments and the UN Human Rights Council in particular, so as to ensure that the results of the latter's Universal Periodic Review (UPR) mechanism are translated into concrete action at the national level. The regional seminars convened by the IPU over the past few years on this issue have been very successful, mobilizing parliamentary interest and involvement in helping to meet critical human rights commitments.

Another, more recent example resides in the steadfast efforts made by both the IPU and national parliaments to integrate democratic governance as a pillar of the post-2015 development agenda. While the recommendations set forth in the 2013 Quito Communiqué (endorsed by the IPU Member Parliaments) were integrated into the initial UN working documents, such as the Report of the UN High-level Panel of Experts on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the current intergovernmental negotiating process has yet to determine the final outcome on the SDGs. The recently adopted *Hanoi Declaration on the SDGs: Turning Words into Action* provides another major parliamentary contribution to the UN process. (For more information on this point, see the document submitted under item 2(b) of the agenda, *Parliamentary involvement in the shaping and implementation of the SDGs*).

Cooperation with regional parliamentary assemblies

At their World Conferences, parliamentary leaders have called on the IPU to cooperate more closely with regional and parliamentary assemblies and organizations, with a view to enhancing coherence and efficiency in global and interregional parliamentary cooperation. To this end, the IPU has endeavoured to maintain a regular flow of information with other parliamentary organizations that goes beyond preparations for the regular IPU Assemblies, in which they participate as IPU Associate Members or Permanent Observers. During the 127th IPU Assembly (Quebec City, October 2012), a joint session was held with some 30 parliamentary organizations to examine the parliamentary contribution to UN peacebuilding operations. The very productive discussions led to a series of recommendations submitted to the United Nations.

On the occasion of IPU Assemblies, parliamentary networks with a thematic focus – nuclear disarmament (Parliamentarians for Nuclear Non-proliferation and Disarmament), small arms and light weapons (SALW Parliamentary Forum), the fight against corruption (Global Organization of Parliamentarians Against Corruption) – have been convening various side events attended by the broader parliamentary community, and contributing their expertise to the work of the IPU Standing Committees (in particular in the process leading up to the adoption of resolutions).

In an effort to coordinate efforts and avoid duplication, the IPU has also been reaching out to other organizations, such as the Global Legislators Organization for a Balanced Environment (issues relating to the environment and climate change) and the Parliamentary Network of the World Bank (role of parliaments in scrutinizing loan agreements). Needless to say, there is scope to further enhance this work, but it would require an additional allocation of time and resources by the IPU.

Parliaments and democracy

At their World Conferences, parliamentary leaders emphasized the importance of the *Universal Declaration on Democracy*, adopted by IPU Member Parliaments on 15 September 1997. In 2005, they encouraged every parliament to organize, at around the same time each year, an “International Day of Parliaments”, so as to engage and reaffirm their commitment to democracy at the national and international levels. As part of its work to lend a parliamentary dimension to the International Conference on New or Restored Democracies, the IPU promoted the adoption of an International Day of Democracy on 15 September. The UN General Assembly, acknowledging the resilience and universality of the fundamental principles of democracy, formally endorsed this proposal in 2007. Since then, the IPU has encouraged all parliaments to mark the International Day and, as evidenced on the dedicated IPU webpage, hundreds of events have taken place in over one hundred countries. The theme of this year’s International Day, agreed with the United Nations, was *Engaging youth on democracy*.

The Third World Conference of Speakers of Parliaments, held at the United Nations Office at Geneva in July 2010, concluded with a Declaration entitled *Securing global democratic accountability for the common good*. Building on developments since 2000, parliamentary leaders pledged to support one another, relying on the collective experience and wisdom of members, to make their parliaments more representative, transparent, accessible, accountable and effective.

Speakers in 2010 also reaffirmed their support to IPU’s institutional capacity-building programme, which aims to strengthen national parliaments by providing tailored guidance and technical assistance projects. In conducting this work, the IPU has been focusing on parliaments in countries emerging from conflict or in transition to democracy, as well as on parliaments from the least developed countries. Generally, IPU support looks at institutional development, professional development/awareness-raising, legislative content development and infrastructure development. The collective experience of IPU Members is a rich source of parliamentary expertise (MPs and parliamentary officials) and vital to IPU’s capacity-building work.

Recent years have witnessed an exceptional increase in the demand for IPU capacity-building assistance with an unprecedented number of activities being conducted. Since the last Speakers’ Conference, some 150 capacity-building activities were implemented in more than 40 countries. In keeping with the First Standing Committee resolution adopted by the 126th IPU Assembly on the Arab spring which urges the IPU to lend support to the democratization process under way in the region, the IPU accompanied transition processes in Tunisia, Libya and Egypt. Countries in transition have a unique opportunity to address challenges of the past and build stronger and more sustainable institutions. The IPU has therefore paid specific attention to developing medium- and long-term capacity-building projects in such situations: Myanmar and Egypt are two prominent cases in point.

In its capacity-building work the IPU is guided by universally recognized criteria for democratic parliaments as set out in *Parliament and democracy in the 21st century: A guide to good practice*. The majority of the capacity-building work is carried out in close partnership with the United Nations, and in particular UNDP. To facilitate better coordination and more effective delivery of support to parliaments, the IPU also developed *Common Principles for parliamentary support* based on lessons learned over more than four decades of parliamentary assistance. These principles were adopted at the 131st IPU Assembly and have since been endorsed by several organizations and parliaments.

At their World Conference in 2010, parliamentary leaders pledged to help promote a climate of tolerance and to safeguard diversity, pluralism and the right to be different, which also implies protecting the rights of persons belonging to minority and indigenous groups. The subsequent international parliamentary conference on *Parliaments, minorities and indigenous peoples: Effective participation in politics* (Chiapas, November 2010) issued an ambitious set of recommendations for parliamentary action. The IPU has worked with the United Nations to further these goals, produced

handbooks and other tools for parliamentarians, engaged in discussions at the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, and helped to influence the outcome of the 2014 World Conference on Indigenous Peoples.

Parliamentary leaders also emphatically called for gender equality and the political empowerment of women, and undertook to combat all forms of discrimination against women. The IPU has continued to provide priority support through its flagship programme on gender partnership. It has proactively engaged in parliamentary campaigns with Members to combat violence against women, and conducted numerous workshops and seminars at the national and regional levels. In 2012, it launched the parliamentary Plan of Action for Gender-sensitive Parliaments, and has since helped parliaments conduct self-assessments of their performance in this area. The subject of the General Debate at the 131st IPU Assembly (Geneva, October 2014) was *Achieving gender equality, ending violence against women*. The IPU also joined UN Women and the Future Policy Council in conferring the 2014 Future Policy Award on some of the best and most effective policies in this area, hosting the award ceremony at the 131st Assembly.

In 2010, parliamentary leaders emphasized the importance of addressing the concerns and aspirations of young people and encouraging their participation in public life. As part of its internal reform in 2012–2013, the IPU established its own Forum of Young Parliamentarians. Member Parliaments were encouraged to include young legislators in their national delegations to IPU Assemblies and to nominate them for IPU offices. The first two Global Conferences of Young Parliamentarians were held in Geneva in October 2014 and in Tokyo in May 2015. Worldwide Support for Development, a Japan-based foundation, has given the IPU a generous grant, enabling it to continue its work on global youth engagement and democracy-building in Asia.

Parliamentary leaders also condemned the usurpation of political power by force and the persecution of elected representatives of the people. The adoption of new methods of work in 2014 formalized a new modus operandi for the IPU Committee on the Human Rights of Parliamentarians in a bid to offer more effective protection and redress to parliamentarians whose human rights have been violated. Through a more personalized and proactive approach, the Committee now conducts more country missions, speaks out consistently and publicly in the face of potential or ongoing violations affecting MPs and involves IPU Member Parliaments more systematically, emphasizing the fundamental principle of parliamentary solidarity, to bring about satisfactory solutions to the hundreds of cases under examination.

Bridging the democracy gap in international cooperation

As in 2000 and 2005, the 2010 World Conference focused on parliamentary engagement on the international stage. Parliamentary leaders deplored the lack of progress made towards finding sustainable solutions to major global issues and warned that the situation would persist unless multilateral institutions were made more democratic and representative and unless more participatory practices were established at the international level. The time had come for an imaginative leap of faith.

For the first time, official reports of the UN Secretary-General on interaction between the United Nations, national parliaments and the IPU called for a strategic partnership between the two organizations that would lend a meaningful parliamentary dimension to UN deliberations and negotiations. Consensus resolutions of the UN General Assembly in both 2012 and 2014 endorsed these recommendations. They also called for the UN-IPU Cooperation Agreement (a very basic agreement signed in 1996) to be revised to reflect progress in the past 18 years and to place the institutional relationship between the two organizations on a stronger footing. In line with the mandate conferred by the IPU governing bodies, the content and terms of the revised Cooperation Agreement are currently being negotiated with the United Nations.

The most recent report of the UN Secretary-General on *Interaction between the United Nations, national parliaments and the IPU* provides a comprehensive overview of this engagement, underscoring its many benefits and pointing to the scope for further development (see <http://www.ipu.org/Un-e/a-68-827.pdf>).

All of these gains will need to be consolidated. In multiple discussions and public statements, the UN Secretary-General has underscored the critical importance of involvement by the IPU and its Members in both the implementation of the post-2015 development agenda and the new sustainable

development goals, and the process leading up to the conclusion of a global climate change pact this year. For the IPU to respond to these challenges, it will need sufficient human and financial resources.

Although progress has been made over the past 15 years on many of the recommendations formulated by parliamentary leaders at their three World Conferences, it is evident that much still remains to be done. The world today is at a critical juncture. Parliaments and parliamentarians are duty-bound to tackle these challenges head-on and lead their nations into a more peaceful and prosperous future.