



## Parliamentary Hearing at the United Nations

Room 1, North Lawn Building  
28-29 November, 2011  
New York



### *Strengthening Political Accountability for a More Peaceful and Prosperous World*

**MONDAY, 28 NOVEMBER**

**10 a.m. - 10.30 a.m.      Opening session**

Statements by:

- H.E. Mr. Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser, President of the UN General Assembly
- H.E. Dr. Asha-Rose Migiro, Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations
- Hon. A. Alonso Díaz-Caneja, Vice-President of the Inter-Parliamentary Union

**10.30 a.m. – 1 p.m.    Session I**  
**The role of the UN General Assembly in strengthening global accountability**

As emphasized in the outcome Declaration of the 2010 World Conference of Speakers of Parliament, political accountability is the basis for achieving peace, prosperity and the common good. Political accountability creates a trust-based relationship between political leaders and the citizens, through transparent and accessible decision-making. Political accountability, therefore, requires a broad and inclusive approach which ensures that different view points are taken into consideration. It is these features that increase the chances that the political, social, and economic expectations that people have of democratic institutions are actually fulfilled.

The United Nations General Assembly provides legitimacy to the global efforts to maintain peace and security, enhance sustainable development, and protect human rights. It is the most representative body of the United Nations, and thus the body that should ensure broad and inclusive decision-making. The Assembly does this principally in the form of Resolutions adopted by UN Member States, which aim to generate action and response by national authorities. A most recent example is a groundbreaking resolution, adopted for the first time this year, on strengthening the role of mediation in the peaceful settlement of dispute, conflict prevention and resolution.

The reality, however, is that the Assembly has little muscle to enforce its own decisions, and implementation remains largely the responsibility of the Member States, if there is the necessary political will. Since General Assembly resolutions are non-binding and rarely come with fixed timelines, the Assembly has no mechanisms in place to hold its Member States accountable if they fail to implement such resolutions. It is this weakness of the Assembly that, in turn, raises the question of who the Assembly is accountable to whenever it fails to deliver on its promises. Undoubtedly, the Assembly's accountability will depend on a strong political will to go through with its own resolutions and decisions.

Leading questions:

- Can the General Assembly strengthen global accountability without strengthening its own accountability?
- What role can parliaments and parliamentarians play in strengthening the accountability of the General Assembly?
- Looking at the example of this year's General Assembly resolution on mediation: Who will be accountable for its implementation and possible failures?

Discussants:

- Hon. Mélégué Traoré, former President of the National Assembly of Burkina Faso, Acting President of the IPU Committee on United Nations Affairs;
- Mr. Oscar Fernández-Taranco, United Nations Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs;
- Ambassador Camillo Gonsalves, Permanent Representative of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines to the United Nations and Co-Chair of the Ad Hoc Working Group on the Revitalization of the General Assembly;
- Ms. Cora Weiss, President, Hague Appeal for Peace.

Moderator:

- Ms. Barbara Crossette, former foreign correspondent and Bureau Chief of the *New York Times*.

**3 p.m. – 6 p.m.**

**Session II**

**Youth participation in the democratic process – challenges and opportunities**

Youth is high on the agenda of both the Inter-Parliamentary Union and the United Nations. In 2010, the IPU passed a resolution on youth participation in the democratic process. The 2011 United Nations High-Level Meeting on Youth illustrated both opportunities and challenges of the changing global demographics. Almost half of the world's population is under 25 years old, with the majority of the young people concentrated in developing countries. Most developed countries face the reverse situation as the population percentage of the young is becoming increasingly smaller. Young people are an important human resource for political, social, economic, and technological development. However, the opportunities that can come with youth participation have not been realized yet. Young people around the world, especially young women, are excluded from the supposed benefits of globalization and are more likely to be negatively affected by economic crisis and political instability. Unemployment among the youth is consistently higher than that of the general population in both developed and developing countries.

While the global population is becoming younger, young people become less involved in democratic decision-making. Largely disenchanted with the opportunities for effective political participation on the national level, the youth are less and less involved in the traditional forms of public participation, such as voting and political party membership. Non-traditional participation, aided by the use of ICTs, is on the rise among the young. The consequence of these developments is a generation that has lost trust in the ability to influence decisions that affect them, which in itself weakens democratic structures.

In order to offset the negative consequences of globalization on the young, the Outcome Document of the 2011 UN High-Level Meeting on Youth urges stakeholders to adopt a global strategy that incorporates national and regional solutions focusing on employment generation. At the same time, the Outcome Document acknowledges that young people can no longer be regarded simply as the passive recipients of resources. In order to effectively address the challenges, the young have to be incorporated into the decision-making processes as active contributors. This will be a particular challenge on the national level to which the young seem to have turned their backs.

Leading questions:

- What measures can countries take to enhance the participation of youth in both decision-making and the democratic process in general?
- Is the solution getting more young representatives into national institutions? If so, what can be done to increase the number of young Members of Parliament?
- What lessons can parliaments draw from the United Nations experience in making the youth more active contributors on the international level?

Discussants:

- Hon. Farroq Hamid Naek, Chairman of the Senate, Pakistan;
- Hon. Faisal Kundi, Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly of Pakistan, and patron of the Youth Parliamentary Forum;
- Ms. Daniela Bas, Director of the UN Division for Social Policy and Development;
- Ambassador Jean-Francis Zinsou, Permanent Mission of Benin to the United Nations;
- Ms. Sena Hussein, Online Community Manager, Global Youth Action Network/ TakingItGlobal.

Moderator:

- Abderrahim Foukara, Bureau Chief, Al Jazeera.

<b>6 p.m. – 8 p.m.</b>	<b><i>Reception in honour of participants Entrance Hall, North Lawn Building</i></b>
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**TUESDAY, 29 NOVEMBER**

<b>10 a.m. – 1:00 p.m.</b>	<b>Session III Accountability in the management of public funds – good practices and model legislation for budget transparency</b>
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The familiar slogan “no taxation without representation” implies that taxes are only acceptable if elected representatives sanction the way public funds are managed. Most parliaments are constitutionally charged with overseeing government finances. This does not limit parliaments to accepting or rejecting governments’ budgets. Ideally, and increasingly so, parliaments are involved in detailed considerations of the proposed budget, as well as in monitoring expenditures and evaluating the impact of policies on beneficiaries.

In many countries though, parliaments’ role of overseeing the executive through budgetary scrutiny and financial control is severely limited. Studies show that the majority of governments in the world provide inadequate or no budgetary information to the parliament and the general public. Supreme audit institutions frequently lack the independence from the executive necessary to provide effective and credible budgetary evaluations. Many parliaments lack the legal authority to make amendments to the budget, leaving them with the choice to either accept or reject the budget. Even where parliaments have the constitutional right to amend budgets, they are regularly not given adequate time to debate the proposed budget, and members of the relevant committees (e.g., Budget and Public Accounts) often lack the necessary expertise to provide constructive input. At the same time, few parliaments hold pre-budget public hearings to consult directly with tax payers. The combination of these factors means that average citizens cannot know how the government spends their money.

Transparency is the cornerstone of accountability. The impact of non-transparent management of public funds on the country's social, political and economic development can be severe. Lack of transparency can lead to wasteful or corrupt spending of public funds, and to the implementation of ineffective and unpopular programs. Without budgetary transparency, it is impossible to monitor progress toward the achievement of international development commitments, such as the United Nations' Millennium Development Goals. With these impacts in mind, it is clear that transparent management of public funds is the foundation for legitimate political processes.

Leading questions:

- What are effective ways to promote public participation in the budgetary process? Do people know enough about how governments spend their money?
- How can parliaments be strengthened in their oversight role of public funds?
- Should global budget transparency standards be established? If so, then by whom, and how should they be monitored?

Discussants:

- Hon. Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu, President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe;
- Hon. Ivonne Passada, former President of the House of Representatives of Uruguay;
- Ambassador Jim McLay, Permanent Representative of New Zealand to the United Nations;
- Ms. Angela Kane, United Nations Under-Secretary General for Management;
- Mr. Vivek Ramkumar, Manager of Open Budget Initiative, International Budget Partnership.

Moderator:

- Peter Rajsingh, Professor at NYU Gallatin and the Stern School of Business and Trustee of the London-based Loomba Foundation.

<p><b>3 p.m. – 5:30 p.m.      Session IV</b> <b>Strengthening the links between national institutions and civil society –toward more open societies</b></p>
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Democracy – and political accountability – can only be achieved if the relationship between those who exercise power and those who delegate it moves beyond elections to continuous communication and interactive exchange. Involvement of civil society in political processes *per se* does not guarantee the equitable representation of society's diverse interests, nor does it necessarily produce a system that leads to greater equality and social justice. What are some of the issues that need to be contemplated in regard to the relationship between parliament and civil society in order to improve democratic outcomes?

The relationship between parliament as an institution, individual Members of Parliament (MPs), and civil society is important for consensus-building, but the opportunity to help shape legislation and exercise oversight is often limited to a few interest groups. Parliaments apply different methods to organize the involvement of civil society at different stages of the legislative process, including through public hearings, assemblies, referenda and citizen initiatives, layman or expert consultations, and open invitations for submissions from all interested individuals and groups (e.g., not-for-profit entities, unions, corporations, etc.). As parliaments become more open to civil society input, parliaments face the challenge of reconciling the very diverse interests and suggestions that are put forward by civil society. Often, the outcome is a focus on a few inputs from a select number of influential groups.

The limited number of civil society representatives with access to parliament can be detrimental to the democratic processes. While an open society requires that all interests can be voiced, in reality the resources of an interest group – including financial resources, access to media, locality, the members' education level, and previously established relationships with MPs – often determine the impact an interest group has on the legislative process and even on electoral outcomes. The participation of only a few groups in shaping legislation, demanding accountability and fighting corruption - for example - is problematic for democratic processes, since most interest groups are not focused on the common good but on local or particular concerns. Of course, the act of choosing which groups' interests will be contemplated is in line with the role of elected officials who are charged with representing the interests of society. However, the potentially negative impact of unequal access to parliament is most pronounced when interest groups seek to influence the political process through financial contributions to political parties or individual MPs.

Leading questions:

- How can political representation be improved to better reflect diversity within societies?
- How can the interaction between parliaments, political leaders and civil society be enhanced?
- What are the lessons of the United Nations' experience of civil society participation in global governance from which parliaments can draw, and what parliamentary experiences can lend themselves to UN practice?

Discussants:

- Hon. Ranko Krivokapic, President of Parliament, Montenegro;
- Ms. Corinne Woods, Director, United Nations Millennium Campaign;
- Ambassador Gyan Chandra Acharya, Permanent Representative of Nepal to the United Nations;
- Mr. Jeffery Huffines, UN Representative of the World Alliance for Citizen Participation (CIVICUS).

Moderator:

- Evelyn Leopold, Independent journalist reporting for the *Huffington Post* from the United Nations and former Bureau Chief for Reuters at the United Nations.

<b>5:30 p.m. – 6 p.m.</b>	<b>Summary of the meeting and closing remarks</b>
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