



121st ASSEMBLY OF THE INTER-PARLIAMENTARY UNION AND RELATED MEETINGS

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REPORT OF THE IPU COMMITTEE ON UNITED NATIONS AFFAIRS

1. The Committee met from 19 to 21 October with a full agenda before it. It began by taking stock of the responses received to the IPU Questionnaire on how parliaments organize their work vis-à-vis the United Nations. The Survey, mandated by the Committee following its previous session in October 2008, aims to determine the manner in which parliaments relate to the UN system, special meetings and major negotiating processes under way at the United Nations, as well as the UN country offices.
2. To date, some 65 responses have been received, and a preliminary examination had already identified a series of good practices and recommendations that should be shared with the full IPU membership. All IPU Member Parliaments were encouraged to urgently submit their responses so that the review could be finalized and circulated. This evaluation would feed into the preparatory process for the Third World Conference of Speakers of Parliament, scheduled to take place in Geneva from 19 to 21 July 2010.
3. The Committee began a discussion about cooperation between regional parliamentary organizations and the United Nations. It was recalled that in the 2005 Declaration of Speakers of Parliaments, the IPU was invited to cooperate more closely with regional parliamentary associations and organizations with a view to enhancing coherence and efficiency in global and interregional parliamentary cooperation. Although there is a lot of interaction through various activities at the national and regional levels, the Committee expressed the view that there was scope for closer cooperation with both regional and subregional parliamentary organizations at the policy level on the major issues on the global agenda.
4. The Committee heard a presentation on the status of United Nations reform and was presented with the report of the mission undertaken by its Advisory Group to Viet Nam earlier in the year. Several delegations underscored the fact that such IPU missions to pilot countries undertaking One UN reform had made a meaningful contribution on the ground, enhancing the role of parliaments in the development of national strategies and the establishment of more transparent mechanisms of parliamentary engagement in matters relating to international assistance and cooperation.

5. The Committee welcomed the conclusions of the Viet Nam report, which calls on all parliaments to play a more dynamic role in the design, implementation and oversight of national development plans, as well as in the upstream planning of the national budget. The need for a more coherent approach to aid delivery at the national level was once again underscored, which in turn should lead to greater effectiveness, transparency and accountability of UN operations. The Committee urged its Advisory Group to continue with such field missions and to report on progress achieved.
6. The Committee heard a briefing from the Deputy Executive Secretary of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) Secretariat on the stage reached in the negotiations on climate change, which - despite all the difficulties encountered thus far - should lead to a strong international commitment on the occasion of the UN Climate Change Conference (COP15) in Copenhagen in December 2009. The overall message was that "failure is not an option". Parliamentarians expressed their strong support for a successful conclusion of this process, and to this end, pledged to remain seized of the issue, to actively engage with the authorities of their country in overcoming any existing hurdles, and to join their national delegations to the COP15 Conference in December.
7. A parliamentary meeting convened by the IPU and the Danish Folketing in Copenhagen on 16 December will provide members of parliament with an opportunity to obtain first-hand information on the main issues and orientations of COP15, interact with government negotiators, and exchange views on parliamentary follow-up to the UN Conference. After COP15, legislators will need to remain seized of the climate change agenda in their future work, ensuring ratification and effective implementation of the relevant international agreements, monitoring and reporting on progress as part of the process leading up to COP16.
8. The Committee welcomed the Director-General of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations and heard a comprehensive presentation on the current food crisis and preparations for the World Summit on Food Security, scheduled to take place in Rome next month. It was recalled that, in the context of the Rome Summit, the IPU and the Italian Parliament will be holding a parliamentary meeting which members were encouraged to attend (13 November). The Director-General's presentation was followed by a brief but very lively question-and-answer session, which included suggestions for possible action and cooperation by parliaments.
9. The Committee proposed to review the implementation of one of the IPU's most recent resolutions on "Parliamentary oversight of State policies on foreign aid", and to evaluate the IPU's own involvement with the Development Cooperation Forum established by the United Nations Economic and Social Council. The Committee was joined by a senior United Nations official and by the Director of the International Budget Partnership, who presented the results of the recent Study on the role of parliaments in budget transparency and accountability.

10. A series of recommendations were formulated, including: 1) the need for parliaments to ensure that national budgetary accounts are made public and that they follow up on annual audit reports, 2) strategic partnerships should be developed between parliaments, civil society and supreme audit institutions, 3) parliaments should contribute to a gradual change in donor practices, with a view to strengthening reflection of international aid in the regular budgetary exercise, and 4) parliaments should be actively involved in the elaboration of codes of practice for greater budget transparency..
11. The Committee welcomed recent IPU initiatives in the area of aid effectiveness. These include the IPU's association with and contribution to a regional initiative in Asia, called the Capacity Development for Development Effectiveness Facility (CDDE), which aims to build knowledge and capacities for greater development effectiveness (tools include guidance notes, needs assessments, regional workshops and a web portal in the service of interested legislators). An expert study commissioned by the IPU to review the level of parliamentary involvement in development policies and programmes in two African countries, Zambia and United Republic of Tanzania, had also yielded some very promising results.
12. It was suggested that the IPU should prepare a Handbook for Parliamentarians on aid effectiveness, which would include best practices and recommendations on how parliaments could enhance their role in the budgetary process. It was also suggested that additional case studies, representing wider regional representation, would be useful.
13. It was underscored that the IPU should more systematically undertake needs assessments to determine the institutional, administrative and legislative requirements of parliaments and ascertain the capacity building they require in order to better analyse public finances, budgets and development programmes.
14. The Committee remains seized of the main objectives under its mandate, including the review of the status of implementation of major internationally agreed commitments (in particular the Millennium Development Goals and core human rights treaties), as well as the continued monitoring of United Nations reform and system-wide coherence, and proposes to undertake further action in these areas.
15. As the United Nations is approaching its 65th anniversary, the Committee reiterated its strong support for the mission, principles and objectives of the United Nations, in particular the need for all member States to reinforce and ensure full compliance with international law.