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**CONSOLIDATION OF THE REFORM OF THE INTER-PARLIAMENTARY UNION**

**A COMMITTEE ON UNITED NATIONS AFFAIRS**

*This document sets out a proposal of the Executive Committee to establish an IPU Committee on United Nations Affairs. It should be read in conjunction with document CL/180/9-P.1 which outlines a proposed timetable for the second Assembly of the year.*

**Background**

1. The greater part of the work done in the Inter-Parliamentary Union relates to the activities of the United Nations. The IPU Assembly and Standing Committees debate issues that are high on the UN agenda, as do other IPU conferences. Moreover, almost every IPU programme and project is carried out in conjunction with different bodies within the UN system.
2. Underpinning all these activities is the constantly evolving relationship that the IPU enjoys with the United Nations. In recent years, this relationship has built upon the Millennium Declaration, the IPU accession to observer status in 2002, and the 2005 World Summit Outcome. The two Conferences of Speakers of Parliament have lent the highest possible parliamentary authority to defining the substance of the relationship.
3. The United Nations relations with the IPU are in a period of change, both because interest in a bolder parliamentary dimension to UN activities is growing, and because the UN itself is going through a time of reform. Two of its new institutions, the Peacebuilding Commission and the Democracy Fund, have begun collaborative work with the IPU. The organization also begins the year 2007 under the leadership of a new Secretary-General.
4. Despite this commendable record, Members of the IPU are clearly not satisfied with the current situation. The President's Working Group on Reform has suggested that there is a need for a more substantive and equitable working relationship. The latest United Nations General Assembly resolution on UN/IPU cooperation points in the same direction, calling for closer cooperation between the two organizations, strengthened contribution by the IPU to the UN General Assembly, its Economic and Social Council and the newly established bodies such as the Human Rights Council and the Peacebuilding Commission, the further development of the annual parliamentary hearing and similar meetings as joint UN/IPU events, and closer involvement of the IPU in the elaboration of United Nations system-wide strategies.

5. Against this backdrop, it may seem surprising that there is no IPU statutory body that is specifically tasked with overseeing UN/IPU relations. The proposal to establish an IPU Committee on United Nations Affairs seeks to remedy this situation.

### **Composition**

6. There is considerable interest in the establishment of a Committee on United Nations Affairs and reactions to the proposal both from within and outside the organization have been overwhelmingly supportive. It is therefore suggested that all IPU Members be invited to participate in the work of the Committee.

7. It is essential for the IPU's relationship with the United Nations that those members of parliament who deal with United Nations matters in their daily work in their parliaments also represent them on the new Committee. Only in this manner will this new structure serve to strengthen cooperation between the United Nations and national parliaments as envisaged by the heads of State and government in 2000 and 2005.

8. In order to ensure that the wide variety of political views in parliament is also reflected in the work of the Committee, it is proposed that all IPU Member Parliaments be represented on the Committee with at least two delegates, representing the majority and the opposition in parliament.

### **Mandate**

9. It is important to state at the outset that the new Committee should not duplicate work already being performed by other IPU bodies. In other words, its brief would not include the wide range of substantive and topical issues that would normally appear on the agendas of the three Standing Committees. Its mandate would focus on the policy areas outlined below.

10. The United Nations Summits of 2000 and 2005 both called for strengthened cooperation between the United Nations and national parliaments. Both looked to the IPU as the driving force behind this objective. The two Conferences of Speakers of Parliament made specific proposals on this subject. The Committee on United Nations Affairs would therefore become the primary body responsible for monitoring the compliance with these recommendations, seeing how they are being fulfilled in practice, and making proposals on how to realise them more successfully. In so doing, the Committee would both submit recommendations for the consideration of the United Nations and keep the IPU's own relationship with the United Nations under review, making recommendations to the Union's governing bodies for its improvement.

11. The 2006 United Nations General Assembly resolution on UN/IPU cooperation also put forward some challenging proposals. One of them refers to the preparation of system-wide strategies for consideration by the United Nations "with a view to ensuring greater and more coherent support by parliaments to the work of the United Nations". Obviously, the new Committee would become the deliberative centre for forging these new strategies with the United Nations.

12. It is also suggested that the Committee examine and make suggestions for better structured cooperation with the United Nations by official regional parliamentary organizations and assemblies.

13. Meanwhile, recent UN General Assembly resolutions have called attention to the need for parliamentary input in the areas of the revitalization of the United Nations General Assembly and the new functions of the Economic and Social Council. Both matters should be on the agenda of the Committee.

14. Of equal importance to the foregoing duties, the Committee would also be called upon to take a close look at the overall working of the United Nations system, examining its functioning from the parliamentary standpoint. The kind of enlightened criticism that parliaments are uniquely equipped to offer should be seen as a valuable contribution to the reform thrust that is under way at the United Nations. There have been a number of proposals to reform the United Nations over recent years, the most recent being the report by the High Level Panel on System-wide Coherence, which has submitted a number of recommendations on how to improve United Nations system-wide coherence across the various development and humanitarian-related agencies. If acted upon, the recommendations, would bring considerable benefits to the United Nations and its Member States.

15. By the same token, the Committee should also address financial issues relevant to the functioning of the UN System. This does not only mean examining the funding of the United Nations but also scrutinizing the use the Organization makes of the funds, a task for which parliaments have undisputed legitimacy. Alternatively, the former aspect could be conceived more broadly as development cooperation (or financing for development) in order to place the issue in its proper context.

### **Working methods**

16. The Executive Committee suggests that the Committee be set up by the IPU Governing Council and that it report to the Council.

17. The Committee would need to draft its rules of procedure on the basis of those established for similar bodies. Pending further clarification, it is suggested that the Committee meet initially once a year in plenary session.

18. The Committee will need to have a source of substantive input to inform its discussions. This could be provided by establishing a subsidiary committee or core group, which would report to it, made up of parliamentarians whose expertise in the field would be attested by their membership of foreign relations or other committees that deal with United Nations affairs. The Committee may decide to establish more than one core group, depending on how it decides to organize the work.

19. The members of the core group(s) would need to inform themselves on the issues they will address by visiting United Nations offices and attending meetings in New York and elsewhere, and by seeing UN operations being conducted in different locations. Availability to travel would therefore be essential. Secretarial support would be provided by the IPU Secretariat.

20. The Executive Committee entrusts the President of the IPU with the task of consulting the six geopolitical groups with a view to constituting a core group which would convene to prepare for the first meeting of the plenary Committee on United Nations Affairs.