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REPORTS ON RECENT IPU SPECIALIZED CONFERENCES AND MEETINGS

(a) REGIONAL CONFERENCE ON "THE ROLE OF PARLIAMENTS IN CONFLICT PREVENTION AND MANAGEMENT IN WEST AFRICA"

For several years, conflicts and other socio-political crises have plunged West Africa into a profound instability, ruining efforts to consolidate the rule of law and socioeconomic integration in the region. While a number of initiatives have now led to a reconciliation process, with the promise of re-establishing a lasting peace, parliaments have not been involved in the efforts to mobilize support for the process. And yet, given their prerogatives as representatives of the people, they could contribute significantly to those efforts.

In seeking to fill this gap, the Inter-Parliamentary Union and the National Assembly of Côte d'Ivoire jointly organized a regional parliamentary conference on the role of parliament in conflict prevention and management in West Africa. The aim of the conference was to enable the regions parliamentarians to identify how and in what ways they can help to end this persistent socio-political instability and bring the lasting social peace needed for democracy to take root.

The conference was held in the chambers of the National Assembly of Côte D'Ivoire from 28 to 30 October 2013. It brought together some 100 parliamentarians from Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Gambia, Ghana, Mauritania, Senegal and Togo, as well as the Inter-Parliamentary Committee of the West African Economic and Monetary Union (WAEMU), the Parliament of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the East African Legislative Assembly (EALA).

The discussions were organized around three major themes: "crises and conflicts: causes and types"; "parliament at the heart of conflict prevention"; and "from conflict management to peacebuilding: towards effective parliamentary action".

After considering the role played by parliaments in State governance generally, the participants concluded that parliaments need to establish an active presence in the field of preventing and managing conflicts and restoring and consolidating peace.

In terms of prevention, the participants considered it important for parliaments to:

- exercise heightened vigilance as to the rule of law, as part of their government oversight mission;
- ensure that human rights legislation is in place, up-to-date with prevailing international norms, effectively enforced and disseminated to constituents;
- ensure accountability and transparency, for parliaments themselves as well as other institutions, to reduce the risk of corruption; and
- ensure democratic alternation by establishing a transparent electoral system and reordering political party culture to accommodate increased participation by women, youth and minorities, with mechanisms to facilitate regular elections.

They also recommended economic measures, including the allocation of adequate budgetary resources to meet the needs of our populations.

Participants identified various actions parliaments can take to contribute to conflict management and peacebuilding, including:

- establishing a representative and inclusive legislative institution faithfully reflecting all segments of society; and
- carrying out the reforms necessary to rebuild society and establish lasting peace, including:
 - § a new approach to security to meet new needs, encouraging a transition from traditional security arrangements to a more humane approach;
 - § accession to the principal instruments established to promote the rights of refugees and facilitate their return and reintegration into society; and
 - § greater participation by women in decision-making processes.

During the course of the discussions, participants made recommendations to the following institutions:

- ECOWAS
 - § Strengthen conflict prevention mechanisms and improve their responsiveness.
 - § Promote support for good governance.
 - § Get the regional community more involved in national electoral processes, from start to finish.
- ECOWAS Parliament
 - § Oversee the proper functioning of the ECOWAS Early Warning System (Ecowarn).
 - § Ensure that national parliaments implement conflict prevention measures.
- National parliaments
 - § Strengthen parliamentary capacity to promote better governance.
 - § Synchronize national laws with relevant protocols, conventions, frameworks and decisions pertaining to security and conflict prevention, in the timeliest fashion possible.
- Governments
 - § Put in place national systems and mechanisms to eliminate or reduce all forms of discrimination.
- Civil society
 - § Provide support to Parliament at all stages of the conflict prevention and management process through such measures as raising public awareness about peacebuilding efforts, promoting and ensuring respect for human rights and disseminating the texts adopted.