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Committee on UN Affairs
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INTERACTION BETWEEN NATIONAL PARLIAMENTS AND UN COUNTRY TEAMS

7 October 2013 (9 - 11 a.m.)
Room A, CCV Annexe, CICG)

Concept note

Ever since the Committee on United Nations Affairs was established in 2007, an important part of its mandate has been to examine how parliaments organize their work vis-à-vis the United Nations and help encourage greater interaction between parliaments and the United Nations at the national level.

A Report¹ produced by the Committee on United Nations Affairs and presented on the occasion of the 3rd World Conference of Speakers of Parliament in July 2010 underscored that, by and large, only a sprinkling of parliaments (just over 10% at the time) had regular and systematic interaction with UN country offices. Moreover, there was little evidence of systematic parliamentary involvement in the preparation and follow-up of major UN meetings that adopted new international commitments.

As a result of these findings, the Advisory Group of the Committee on United Nations Affairs undertook a number of field missions to examine more closely interaction between national parliaments and UN country teams. Field missions to Tanzania (2008), Viet Nam (2009), Sierra Leone and Ghana (2011) and Albania and Montenegro (2012) assessed progress in the implementation of One UN reform in these countries, in particular in terms of greater coherence and effectiveness of UN interventions. A field mission to Côte d'Ivoire in June 2013 sought to assess the interaction between the Parliament and the United Nations in support of peacebuilding and national reconciliation efforts

The reports of these missions are available on the IPU website (<http://www.ipu.org/un-e/un-cmt.htm>). They include a number of recommendations for both parliaments and the United Nations aimed at enhancing the effectiveness of and political buy-in for major national development and peacebuilding strategies as follows:

- Parliaments can play a major role in ensuring coherent and accountable mechanisms of cooperation among national authorities, the United Nations and other development partners;
- In many instances, and especially in parliaments benefiting from UN technical assistance, it is useful for a focal point for UN affairs to be established within the parliament;
- The relevant parliamentary committees can and should take a more proactive role in following negotiations and monitoring implementation of international commitments;
- Parliaments should encourage their national representatives on the governing bodies of various UN agencies to pursue a more coherent approach along the lines of the One UN principles and call for reform both at UN Headquarters and in field operations;
- Parliaments should also play a more proactive role in monitoring UN operations in their respective countries;

¹ See <http://www.ipu.org/splz-e/speakers10/2r1.pdf>

- Development partners should provide sustainable, predictable and un-earmarked funding for UN reform to succeed. They should also be more willing to use national systems when implementing various programmes and projects;
- The United Nations as a system should also be prepared to provide clearer guidelines as to how UN country teams can best engage with national parliaments on various policy issues;
- The UN country teams should seek to engage in a more structured and substantive way with the parliamentary leadership and select committees and explore opportunities to develop projects with and in support of parliament.

The findings of the Advisory Group field missions have been reflected in major UN documents. The 2012 Report of the United Nations Secretary-General on Interaction between the United Nations, national parliaments and the IPU (A/66/770)², underscores that “of particular importance is the engagement of national parliaments in the elaboration of national development strategies. The emerging good practice of some United Nations country teams, which have reached out in a more substantive manner to the parliamentary leadership and the select committees in an attempt to include parliament in national consultation, evaluation and validation mechanisms, provides an encouraging example that should be followed elsewhere”.

In turn, General Assembly resolution 66/261³, adopted by consensus in May 2012, specifically:

- Encourages the Inter-Parliamentary Union to further assist in developing closer cooperation between the United Nations and parliaments at the national level, including in terms of strengthening parliamentary capacities, reinforcing the rule of law and helping to align national legislation with international commitments; and
- Calls upon United Nations country teams to develop a more structured and integrated manner of working with national parliaments, inter alia, by involving parliaments in consultations on national development strategies and on development aid effectiveness.

As the IPU seeks to assess the impact of these decisions and recommendations at the national level, Member Parliaments are invited to reflect on these findings and share their perspectives and experiences during this interactive debate. MPs from parliaments to which the UN Advisory Group has travelled in recent years will also be invited to provide their unique insight.

² See <http://www.ipu.org/Un-e/a-66-770.pdf>

³ See <http://www.ipu.org/Un-e/a-66-261.pdf>