



Inter-Parliamentary Union
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131st IPU ASSEMBLY AND RELATED MEETINGS

Geneva, 12 - 16.10.2014

Standing Committee on
United Nations Affairs

C-IV/131/A.1
9 June 2014

Draft agenda

- 1. Adoption of the agenda**
- 2. Approval of the summary records of the Committee's session held on the occasion of the 130th IPU Assembly in Geneva (March 2014)**
- 3. Elections to the Standing Committee Bureau**
- 4. Interactive debate with Professor Alfred de Zayas, UN Independent Expert on the promotion of a democratic and equitable international order**

In September 2011, the UN Human Rights Council decided to establish a new special procedures mandate of an independent expert on the promotion of a democratic and equitable international order. As part of the mandate, the Independent Expert would be called upon to identify best practices as well as possible obstacles to the promotion and protection of a democratic and equitable international order, and submit proposals and/or recommendations on possible actions in that regard. The Committee will hear a presentation on the most recent Report of the Independent Expert to the UN General Assembly (see http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/68/284), and engage in an interactive debate on its main findings.

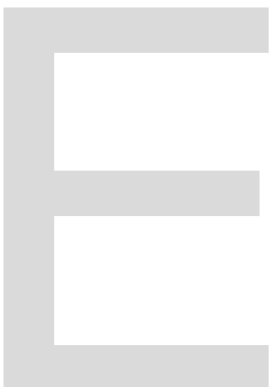
- 5. Panel discussion on the role of corporations in UN decision-making**

As recent independent reports have shown, the United Nations may be at risk of “corporate capture”. Under the general umbrella of the “private sector”, one of the key UN stakeholders, corporations have gained a foothold in key UN decision-making processes. It is not clear, however, what accountability mechanisms are in place to protect the integrity of UN action as the world’s premier public-interest organization. Representatives of the private sector, civil society and UN officials will engage with the Committee on this very topical issue (see [Annex 1](#)).

- 6. Discussion on International cooperation towards an integrated strategy to counter the global drug problem**

In 2016, the UN General Assembly will be convening a Special Session on Drugs to address what is becoming an increasingly problematic global phenomenon requiring an integrated and comprehensive response. During the 130th IPU Assembly in March 2014, the delegations of Mexico and Sweden submitted a joint proposal for the Committee on UN Affairs to consider modalities for a formal parliamentary contribution to the preparatory process for the Special Session ([Annex 2](#)). The Committee will hold a preliminary discussion on this issue, based on a background paper prepared by the delegations of Mexico and Sweden, and circulated in advance of the meeting.

- 7. Any other business**



PROPOSAL: DEBATE ON THE ROLE OF CORPORATIONS IN UN DECISION-MAKING

Note submitted by the IPU Secretariat

As recent independent reports have shown, the United Nations may be at risk of corporate capture.¹ Under the general umbrella of the “private sector”, one of several civil society constituencies that are recognized by the United Nations, corporations have gained a foothold in key decision-making processes and in the UN Secretariat. But how much influence should corporations be allowed at the United Nations and what rules should govern their partnership with the United Nations as the world’s premier public-interest organization?

These questions are not new and have been raised by civil society and a few governments in the past. They have returned to the fore, however, as it becomes increasingly clear that the close relationship that the United Nations enjoys with the corporate world may be having an impact on UN decisions. A case in point may be last year’s UN-led consultation process on the post-2015 development agenda. Almost all major reports coming out of that process very clearly reflected the corporate perspective, which sees economic growth and the accumulation of material wealth as the sine qua non of development, ignoring the voices of other civil society groups, even the IPU, that place greater emphasis on development as human well-being in all its dimensions.

While corporations are undoubtedly important players in any modern economy, fulfilling the needs and aspirations of millions of people, they are also in many cases very powerful players endowed with the means to influence decision-making in ways that are often disproportionate to those of other civil society actors and of citizens at large.

When it comes to development in particular, the profit-making logic that drives the corporate world is not always compatible with the real interests of people and of communities. For example, whereas a large company may regard developing countries as “market opportunities”, the people of those same countries may see themselves more as citizens equally entitled to fundamental human rights. Reconciling these two perspectives within a given decision-making process is not always easy. At a minimum, it requires that the process be neutral and not subject to undue interference from the outside.

From this perspective, the debate of the Standing Committee on United Nations Affairs could be designed to inquire into the following points:

1. The “private sector” that is represented at the United Nations is mostly representative of large entities and not small- and medium-sized enterprises. It speaks at UN meetings as a non-profit group because it is represented by non-profit business associations. However, the members of those associations are all for-profit entities whose natural inclination is to regard development first and foremost as a process of material accumulation and resource exploitation. How well the interests of small and micro enterprises are reconciled with those of corporate actors within this heterogeneous group is a matter of debate.
2. The very language of “partnership” with the private sector that is now common in UN debates about development, and that regards the private sector as having a key role to play in the development process, may be problematic. First, it assumes that corporations can only be a force for good, and that their interests are inherently those of society as a whole. Second, it forecloses debate on the negative impact that many corporations have had around the world (environmental, social and at times economic, if one considers the negative impact of corporate-friendly free trade agreements, for example). Third, it ignores the fact that the enormous financial power of corporations creates a very unlevel playing field when it comes to negotiating contracts or other types of agreements with governments and communities around the world.

¹ See: B. Adams and L. Pingeot, *Whose Development, Whose UN? Reclaiming the UN’s Values-based Framework*, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, November 2013; L. Pingeot, *Corporate Influence in the Post-2015 Process*, Misereor, Global Policy Forum and Brot für die Welt, January 2014.

3. The relationship that the United Nations has established with the corporate world through initiatives such as the Global Compact are very limited in scope and lack an overall accountability framework. For example, the concept of “corporate social responsibility” underpinning the Global Compact (through which a growing number of corporations has pledged adherence to basic human rights, labour and environmental standards) does not oblige the same corporations to refrain from demanding unfair subsidies from host country governments or from advocating for market deregulation that may hinder the government’s ability to protect the public interest (a frequent example of this is when corporations sue governments to roll back legislation that hurts their private interests). Another limiting effect of the Global Compact is its reliance on “voluntary” reporting by member corporations as its main accountability mechanism.

4. Corporate funding of the United Nations is not fully transparent, and few rules exist to prevent possible conflicts of interest or to block access to bad corporate players. In contrast to non-governmental organizations, whose engagement with the United Nations is governed by strict guidelines and an intergovernmental accreditation process, governments have no system for vetting the corporate entities with which the United Nations partners. Of the billions of dollars that the United Nations has received from non-governmental actors over the last few years, the amount provided by the private sector is not clearly identified or accounted for in terms of actual outcomes. Several UN agencies maintain a focal point with the private sector. The new UN Partnership Facility being set up in the UN Secretariat has core budget funding of some US\$ 1.2 million and an extra US\$ 12 million from extra-budgetary sources, a good portion of which may come from the private sector.

FORMAL REQUEST FOR A STUDY ON INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION TOWARDS AN INTEGRATED AND BALANCED STRATEGY TO COUNTER THE WORLD DRUG PROBLEM

Proposal submitted by the Mexican and Swedish delegations to the Standing Committee on United Nations Affairs as a formal request for a study to be conducted by the IPU

Explanatory text

The drug problem has become an increasingly problematic global phenomenon. Under current circumstances, the principle that everyone, from the individual right up to the State itself, is accountable to laws that are publicly promulgated, equally enforced and independently adjudicated, can not apply. Establishing respect for the rule of law is fundamental to achieving a durable peace and security, to the effective protection of human rights, and to sustained economic progress and development.

The world drug problem, notwithstanding the progress made, continues to pose a serious threat to the health, safety and well-being of our citizens. Efforts to counter it have had a high price for society and individuals.

The international community must take responsibility and take action. No country can combat drug trafficking on its own. We are all affected as countries of consumers, suppliers and transit and highly dependent on regional, sub-regional and international cooperation in the fight against drugs and organized crime, a priority area for the United Nations. We Parliamentarians have the responsibility for the legal framework – with regard to public safety, but also health, education and other related fields – and it is vital that we as representatives of the people safeguard democracy around the world.

The Mexican and Swedish delegations, according to the Statutes of the Inter-Parliamentary Union, wishes to present the following study request for inclusion in the research and study agenda of the organization based on the following considerations:

Background

The worrisome dimension of the drug consumption and illicit trade problem are self-evident according to recent data of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). There are approximately 315 million people in the world, between the ages of 15 and 64 years old, who consume drugs on a regular basis. Approximately 190 million persons use cannabis, while 20 million take cocaine and 53 million consume methamphetamines. While the use of traditional drugs, such as heroin and cocaine, seems to be declining in some parts of the world, prescription drug abuse and new psychoactive substance abuse is growing. The number of people with severe problems of drug addiction has increased significantly to reach 39 million.

Problems related to the abuse of drugs are still strongly associated with several diseases of pandemic proportions such as HIV/AIDS and tuberculosis, among others. Young people and adolescents are particularly vulnerable to drugs, especially in economically depressed areas where there is a general lack of education and work opportunities. These are the primary targets of criminal organizations that take advantage of the illicit drug market.

Drug trafficking is a substantial part of the global illicit trade involving the cultivation, distribution and sale of substances subject to drug prohibition laws. Drug-related violence is one of the most important sources of criminality or instability in several countries and remains a constant concern for the safety and well-being of entire cities and populations. Moreover, it has proved to be an important component of transnational organized crime in terms of providing financial support and facilitating other heinous and fast-growing criminal activities such as human and arms trafficking, kidnapping, extortion, sexual and labour exploitation, and money laundering. As a cornerstone of organized crime networks with transnational dimensions, drug trafficking is not only a regional but also a global problem that needs to be tackled by the international community.

Despite the efforts and progress made by States, increased international cooperation, and the recognition of the principle of common and shared responsibility, unsatisfactory results have triggered the need to find new ways of tackling the problem but also emphasizing the health dimension and protection of the social fabric. In September 2012, the Presidents of Mexico, Colombia and Guatemala called on the United Nations General Assembly to organize a Special Session on Drugs (UNGASS), through a resolution co-sponsored by 95 other countries. It will take place on 2016.

The main focus of that event, apart from launching a high-level political dialogue, will be to scale up the process of reviewing, and eventually adjusting, the 2009 Political Declaration and Plan of Action on International Cooperation towards an Integrated and Balanced Strategy to Counter the World Drug Problem, which are currently under assessment by the United Nations Commission on Narcotic Drugs (CND) in Vienna. States must reaffirm their commitment to international cooperation, while at the same time conducting a broad, transparent, inclusive and scientific evidence-based debate on this important issue.

The context for such a conference to take place cannot be more appropriate. It comes precisely at a time of growing discussion of the current policies on drugs and calls for drug policy reform, particularly but not exclusively in Latin America and the United States. In addition, other leaders, experts, policymakers, parliamentarians and thinkers, both within and outside the realm of international organizations, have engaged in a particularly fruitful dialogue promoting regional and international debate.

This meeting will be held on the eve of important key events due to take place on the road to UNGASS 2016, such as the presentation of the Hemispheric Review of the Organization of American States on the drug policies to be discussed during special sessions of its General Assembly, the presentation of a report on these matters by the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) and, more importantly, the meeting of the High-level Segment of the United Nations Commission on Narcotic Drugs (CND) in Vienna on 13 and 14 March 2014, which has issued a "Joint Ministerial Agreement".

The world drug problem is much more than a demand and supply issue and that it seems necessary to strengthen policies that take into account the social fabric and human rights considerations in order to minimize its impact on modern societies.

The IPU reaffirms the United Nations General Assembly resolution 67/193, in which it decided to convene, in early 2016, a special session of the General Assembly on the world drug problem to review the progress in the implementation of the Political Declaration and Plan of Action on International Cooperation towards an Integrated and Balanced Strategy to Counter the World Drug Problem, including an assessment of the achievements and challenges in countering the world drug problem, within the framework of the three international drug control conventions and other relevant United Nations instruments.

The IPU also reaffirms the United Nations General Assembly resolution 68/197, which requested the Commission on Narcotic Drugs to engage in the preparatory process for UNGASS, including presentation of proposals to be considered by the General Assembly starting at its sixty-ninth session, and supporting its substantive work to start the compilation of regional, national and local relevant experiences in reducing drugs supply and demand and policies curtailing violence and social vulnerabilities. At the same time, the IPU also calls on all relevant actors to remain engaged in this debate, so that it leads to the strongest possible outcome.

Proposal

The Mexican and Swedish delegations formally requests and appeals for the approval of a special research exercise, led by appointed Rapporteurs. A review should be carried out on an enhanced role for the IPU in developing an action plan on international cooperation towards an integrated strategy to give the UN-process a parliamentary dimension to counter the world drug problem. The IPU should consider the important debate ahead and the relevant role that parliaments have in the discussion, reform and implementation of meaningful legislation on the subject. This should be one of the studies to be conducted by the IPU during 2014-2015 under the mandate of the fourth Standing Committee.