

UNION INTERPARLEMENTAIRE



INTER-PARLIAMENTARY UNION

INTERNATIONAL DAY OF DEMOCRACY

15 SEPTEMBER 2011

“What do citizens expect of their parliaments?”

CONCEPT NOTES FOR PARLIAMENTARY ACTIVITIES

13 July 2011

Since 2008, more than one hundred and fifty parliamentary activities have been organized to mark the International Day of Democracy. The five concept notes in this document draw on good practices in parliament on this occasion in previous years. They are intended to assist parliaments in organizing activities, and contain ideas that can be adapted to different contexts and political systems. The simple idea that underlines all the proposals is that the International Day of Democracy is an opportunity to encourage dialogue with citizens on the meaning and functioning of democracy, and in particular its core institution, parliament.

International Day of Democracy - Concept #1

Concept #1	Mediated television debate involving politicians, prominent national personalities and the public
<i>Summary</i>	Live televised debate on a subject related to the year’s theme, with: A panel of 4 to 6 persons representing a wide spectrum of views and comprising a mix of government ministers, prominent parliamentarians and other relevant commentators; a studio audience (also vetted to represent a range of views) that puts questions to the panel for discussion; and a facility for outside viewers to send in questions and comments electronically before and during the programme. Questions are vetted in advance, and a selection of questions submitted during the programme can also be chosen. The panel to be chaired by an active, skilled and confident host who, while maintaining a fair balance of views, ensures discussions are to the point and cuts short long-windedness and irrelevance, thus ensuring valuable and entertaining public debate on the issue under discussion.
<i>Objective</i>	To use an effective, live and entertaining medium to promote national debate about the strengths, weaknesses and challenges of the national democratic system.
<i>Target audience</i>	The body politic as a whole. This includes those among the youth who, even when they do not yet fully understand the issues, are intrigued and drawn in by watching senior leaders being “put on the spot” in answering tough questions from the audience.
<i>Format</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A live televised debate on a subject related to the theme for the year (see “Content” below), involving the following features: • A panel of four to six prominent public figures comprising government ministers, parliamentarians, academics, journalists and other relevant commentators chosen (1) to represent a wide spectrum of views (2) for their strong views on the subject of the debate and (3) for their capacity to be articulate and entertaining. • A studio audience vetted to ensure that it reflects a broad spectrum of views on the subject of debate. This is done by asking potential audience members to fill in a form which includes questions on their political views. • Questions to particular panel members can be submitted both before and during the programme; these questions are vetted (but not to protect panel members from difficult questions). • A TV host/chair/mediator, whose skills are crucial to the success of the programme - this could be a well-known TV journalist. He or she must have the authority and confidence to cut through irrelevance by any panel member, and politely but relentlessly bring members of the panel back to the real issues. While maintaining an atmosphere of good humour and tolerance, the chair must ensure that panel members are not allowed to evade relevant questions. • A fully equipped TV studio for the above, with the necessary staff,

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	<p>cameras and roving microphone capable of homing in on members of the studio audience who ask questions.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A facility for outside viewers to send in questions and comments electronically before and during the programme, and for these to be vetted and shown onscreen during the show. Vetting is important as one of the mechanisms to ensure that discussions continue to be relevant to the topic. Vetting must not be used to give any panel member an “easy ride”. (This facility is not central to the show’s success and will depend on availability of the necessary technical resources.) • A backroom staff to carry out the advance planning and preparation as well as the vetting of audience and questions. During the broadcast, the staff process incoming questions and comments and support the host with strategic management of the show. • The programme may last one to one and a half hours. In view of the intensity of debate that may develop and the high level of focus and concentration demanded of the host, panel and backroom staff, a one-hour time slot may be optimal.
<p><i>Contents</i></p>	<p>The subject of debate will be chosen by the parliament, and should be related to this year’s theme, namely “What do citizens expect of their parliament?” Possible examples are: “Is Parliament responsive to society’s needs, or is it more concerned with political infighting?” “Does Parliament know and respond to what citizens expect of it, or is it a remote and irrelevant talkshop?” “How could the rules be changed to make Parliament more effective and responsive to citizens?”</p>
<p><i>Requirements</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Substantial advance publicity to ensure an adequate audience. Since this would necessarily involve television time, considerable resources may be required. To offset this, every effort should be made to maximise unpaid publicity via the resources at parliament’s disposal. Where electronic social media (such as Twitter and Facebook) are available, effective use may be made of these. • An agency with the resources to organise a live nationally televised debate of this kind. This could be the national broadcaster, a private media company, or a well-equipped parliamentary media division, using parliamentary facilities. (However, few parliamentary media divisions could present a show of this nature without outside assistance.) Resources should not exceed those required by a standard TV talk show and would not include the need for extensive research, in view of the “live” nature of the programme and the fact that questions are without notice and need vetting. A small backroom staff would be required. • A talk show host with sufficient authority, assurance and flexibility to keep control of a show that is broadcast live, to think on his or her feet and to ensure that real, relevant discussion takes place, rather than a recital by panel members of previously prepared positions. • The format requires the studio audience to be vetted in advance

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	(through application forms that ask general questions about political affiliation) to ensure a balance of views.
<i>Examples</i>	<p>While there are many variations of the political talk show format, two examples of successful televised debates of this kind are <i>Q&A</i>, a programme presented by the Australian Broadcasting Corporation, and <i>Question Time</i>, presented by the British Broadcasting Corporation. The Australian <i>Q&A</i> format has been used as the basis for these notes.</p> <p>Bhutan, Croatia, Ethiopia, Mexico and India have commemorated the International Day of Democracy with televised debates in various formats.</p>
<i>Expected outcomes</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Making citizens conscious of the features, problems and possibilities of their democratic system and promoting a national debate on the subject by presenting articulate and entertaining debate on the issues, with live audience input. • Encouraging young viewers to think about and take an interest in the political system. • Promoting a sense of community discussion about shared problems and issues.
<i>Other remarks</i>	In many developing countries radio, rather than television, is the appropriate medium to reach a large proportion of the population. In such instances the programme could be broadcast on radio as well as, or instead of, TV. While some impact would be lost, the programme should still be effective.

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Concept #2	Multiple regional meetings with multi-party panel and independent chair
<i>Summary</i>	<p>Arrange public meetings in several centres on or close to the International Day of Democracy. Meetings would include a chairperson/host; a panel consisting of Members of Parliament (who may be government ministers) from different parties; and prominent local figures such as academics and journalists.</p> <p>The subject of discussion is the parliamentary system itself from the point of view of the citizen: Benefits, difficulties and problems, and ideas for improvement. The format will be a mix of panel discussions and questions from the floor.</p> <p>This is somewhat similar to the “television talk show” format, but with the difference that it would involve a number of regional meetings, thus enabling the personal involvement and attendance of a larger number and spread of citizens. Television and/or radio broadcasting of the meetings would be an advantage.</p> <p>In most instances, substantial pre-publicity would be important to the success of the project.</p>
<i>Objective</i>	<p>To enable a large number of citizens to be personally involved in discussions about the political system, its strengths and weaknesses, successes and frustrations, and how it could be made more responsive.</p> <p>To provide a mechanism whereby a report of these discussions can be fed into the official consideration of improvements to the political system.</p>
<i>Target audience</i>	<p>Inhabitants of the country generally – not necessarily confined to the electorate. The target is both participants and audience. This format has the potential of involving those who are disaffected and frustrated by the national political system. Comments by such persons may throw up useful information and complainants may be challenged to come up with ideas to improve the system.</p>
<i>Format</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public meetings on or close to 15 September, publicised in advance, open to all, in several regional centres. • A panel chosen to reflect a balanced cross-section of views (this may require an agreement among political parties) and appointed in advance for each venue, probably consisting of not more than 6 to 8 persons. Appointees may be local MPs and Government Ministers, academics, civil society representatives, journalists and prominent local personages. These should reflect a diversity of views. • The most effective format for the debate may depend on the national culture. The aim is to promote vigorous and meaningful discussion. One format has different panel members being given a set time to give a presentation, after which discussion ensues and the panel responds to questions from the audience. Alternatively, discussions may from the outset be driven by questions from the audience; or else discussions may be guided by the chairperson/presenter. • The chairperson should allow exchanges to be lively while ensuring relevance to the topic and limiting political disputation. • Whether or not it is broadcast, the meeting should have a rapporteur who

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	subsequently provides a publicly available written report of discussions. This feedback may be relayed to the relevant parliamentary committee or other body concerned with political process.
<i>Contents</i>	<p>The subject of discussion must be the system of parliamentary democracy itself and should reflect the theme of the year. Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perceptions of Parliament. • How can the system be changed to make Parliament more responsive to the community? • How can we improve our political system?
<i>Requirements</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An appropriate multi-party parliamentary body to guide the process. • Administrative support, possibly provided by the parliamentary administration to carry out publicity activities, book venues and negotiate with panel nominees. • Possibly, inter-party agreement on the nonpartisan nature of the activity, with parties recognising that the discussion is not party-political. • Appointment of nonpartisan chairpersons to host the meetings at each venue. Chairing such a meeting may require considerable skill. • Allocation of sufficient financial resources for advance publicity and payment for venues in the relevant centres, broadcast facilities where relevant, and travel and accommodation expenses for panellists if appropriate. • Advance publicity in various centres. Electronic social media such as Facebook and Twitter can be used to good effect. • Reservation of venues for public meetings in the various centres.
<i>Examples</i>	In 2010 the Croatian Parliament held a round table discussion that included MPs, academics, the media, representatives of civil society, the private sector and non-governmental institutions. The parliaments of Bhutan in 2010 and Mexico in 2009 broadcast round table discussions on democratic issues among a wide range of society representatives.
<i>Expected outcomes</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Initiating a national debate on the current democratic system and how it may be improved. • A sense among citizens of personal involvement in discussions on the parliamentary system. • Forming an idea of public views on the system and feeding this into discussions on improvement of the system.
<i>Other remarks</i>	Meetings would need to be well publicised in advance to ensure adequate attendance.

International Day of Democracy - Concept #3

Concept #3	Photographic or art competition reflecting a democratic theme
<i>Summary</i>	A competition, launched or culminating on 15 September and involving educational institutions, to submit artworks (drawings, photographs) representing a democracy-related theme. (See below for remarks on an alternative essay competition along the same lines.) The competition may culminate in an exhibition opening on the International Day of Democracy at Parliament House at which the best entries are displayed and prizes awarded. (This may coincide with an “open-doors day” at the parliament.) A high degree of involvement and assistance of educational institutions and/or the department of education will be required in view of the considerable administrative, logistical and technical demands made by this activity.
<i>Objective</i>	To involve citizens, in particular the youth, in an exercise that requires contemplation of democratic practice and the underlying values. To present to the broader public what may be expected to be a thought-provoking exhibition reflecting ideas on democracy.
<i>Target audience</i>	Participants as well as viewers/audience – in other words, scholars and the general population. Through wider publicity, for example television and radio coverage, the exhibition can reach a national audience.
<i>Format</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A tiered competition for the best artwork/photograph reflecting the theme chosen. While the competition is envisaged as being open to educational institutions, it could also be extended to other sectors and the general public. • Educational institutions (schools, universities, or other) are invited to hold internal competitions. In the case of schools, a particular grade or grades may be involved, and separate competitions held for the different grades. Submissions are judged by the staff of the relevant institution, who send winning entries on to be judged at a regional level. The winning entries at regional level are exhibited at parliament. Finalists are then selected – possibly by a small committee of Members of Parliament and staff, with technical assistance if required. • The exhibition may be opened on the International Day of Democracy by the Speaker, preferably coinciding with an “open-doors day” at the parliament, and awards are presented to the winners. Winning entries may be permanently or semi-permanently displayed.
<i>Contents</i>	The topic for the competition should involve contemplation of democratic values and lend itself to being conveyed in the medium chosen. Possible examples: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perceptions of Parliament. • People and Democracy. • The People and their Parliament.
<i>Requirements</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In most instances, an activity of this kind can only be undertaken with the

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	<p>support and co-operation of the department of education or other similar body with the necessary administrative, logistical and technical resources. Since conducting the earlier stages of the competition is beyond the capacity of most parliamentary administrations, the educational institutions themselves and the department of education need to be primarily responsible for this.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financial and other resources and technical expertise are required for the effective presentation of the final exhibition in parliament. • Establishment of a panel of judges, which may include Members and staff, and must include technically competent persons. • Clerical resources and technical expertise are required for the receipt, processing and judging of entries. • Reservation of a venue, preferably at parliament, for the duration of the exhibition. If at parliament, arrangements for the public to view the exhibition (possibly as part of an “open doors day”). • Provision of the necessary expertise and materials for effective display of entries. • Security arrangements to enable the public to view the exhibition. • Publicity for the exhibition, in particular the opening and viewing at the parliament. • Awards for the winning entries, to be presented by the Speaker.
<i>Examples</i>	<p>The Parliament of Georgia has conducted a photographic competition involving university students. The Greek Parliament conducted an essay writing and drawing competition.</p>
<i>Expected outcomes</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To provide students with an opportunity to reflect on democracy and democratic values, in order to represent these in a visual format. • To encourage interest, amongst the youth in particular, in the concept of democracy and how it impacts on citizens. • Where the competition involves educational institutions, the activity is designed to assist in the teaching of democratic values and concepts. • To draw the attention of citizens in an imaginative way to democratic values and the theme of the International Day of Democracy for the year.
<i>Other remarks</i>	<p>These notes have focused on the concept of an art or photographic competition involving schools. Other formats may be chosen, for example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The competition may also, or instead, involve universities or other tertiary institutions. In this case the administration, co-ordination and judging of the earlier stages would be the responsibility of the institutions themselves. • Such a competition could be extended to other sectors and to the general public. • Instead of visuals, the competition could be for the best essay on the

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	<p>subject. The structure of the competition would be similar but instead of an exhibition, the winning essays could be announced by the Speaker, who would present awards to the winners. The essays could also be published in an appropriate format (newspapers, on the web, in a booklet or in other media) and/or broadcast on radio.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• A popular alternative may be a competition for the best video representation of the theme.• Scheduling of this activity to fit in with the commemorative date of 15 September can be problematic, particularly where the academic year coincides with the calendar year. It may be difficult for educational institutions to adapt their programmes to fit in with an extended process that culminates on 15 September, and flexibility may be required – for example launching, instead of ending, the programme on 15 September.
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International Day of Democracy - Concept #4

Concept #4	Inter-party workshop focusing on improvements in the way parliament and its members interact with society, followed by a debate, possibly bicameral, in parliament
<i>Summary</i>	<p>Conduct a workshop or round table discussion at parliament, involving a spectrum of views and including political parties and prominent representatives of society, to examine public perceptions of parliament, and the extent to which parliament succeeds in serving and being responsive to its citizens. The activity should be accessible to the public via television, radio and/or the web. A process for public input into discussions via electronic social media may be considered. The outcome of the discussions to be submitted to parliament.</p> <p>Hold a debate in parliament on the results of the workshop/discussion. To mark the occasion, this could be a joint sitting (for bicameral parliaments). Advance publicity should alert the public to both the workshop/round table discussions and to the debate, and electronic social media may be considered for this purpose.</p>
<i>Objective</i>	<p>For many people, including Members of Parliament, it can be an unusual exercise to consider the actual rules and procedures that regulate political activity, instead of political issues. While each country's system has evolved to suit its particular characteristics, any system can be improved. An examination of problems and difficulties, particularly in relation to parliament's responsiveness to society, may –</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Result in consideration of improvements to the system. • Remind Members of Parliament of the nature of the political system in which they function and the democratic values it enshrines. • Give rise to a more general national debate on democratic values.
<i>Target audience</i>	<p>The target audience comprises participants in the workshop/discussions and Members of Parliament, and – to the extent that the issue is popularised and the debate advertised and broadcast – the public in general.</p>
<i>Format</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Invite a wide range of participants, reflecting a balanced spectrum of views, to take part in a discussion about parliament and its relationship with citizens. • The discussions should be held in a parliamentary venue which allows for public viewing and for television and radio broadcasting. • A report on these discussions to be produced to form the basis of a debate in parliament. • Publicity is needed to inform the public of both the workshop and the parliamentary debate. • A debate in parliament, preferably in both Houses of bicameral parliaments, or a bicameral debate if permitted by the Rules.

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<i>Contents</i>	<p>Possible topics for debate:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parliament and the citizen – improving the links. • How can the political system be made more “user-friendly” for the citizen?
<i>Requirements</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Selection of a wide range of participants representing broader society and reflecting a balanced spectrum of views. Participants may include Members of Parliament belonging to the various parties, academics, journalists, NGO representatives and other leaders of civil society. • Provide a parliamentary venue and facilities for a broad discussion centring on parliament and its relation to the body politic. The venue should allow for outside broadcasting. • Designate a rapporteur to provide a record of discussions. • Where necessary, make provision for payment of subsistence and transport expenses incurred by participants. • Set aside time in the schedule of parliament for a debate by one or both Houses on the workshop/round table discussions. • Provide sufficient publicity before, during and after these activities, to ensure public interest. Electronic social media may be utilised for publicity. Through these media the public may be invited to participate in workshop discussions.
<i>Examples</i>	<p>Among many other examples, Croatia has held round table discussions focusing on political accountability and strengthening links between parliamentarians and citizens. Bhutan held a two-day workshop on democracy and good governance that included representatives from a broad range of national and international interests. Finland held a parliamentary debate on political accountability which the general public was able to follow via the website.</p>
<i>Expected outcomes</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To raise awareness among not only the public but also Members of Parliament of the challenges of political accountability and the need to be aware of and respond to public concerns. • To seek new and creative solutions to such challenges.
<i>Other remarks</i>	<p>A variation on the above format would be to have a multiparty parliamentary committee investigate the topic for the debate, for example: “Public perceptions of Parliament” or “Ways to enhance the responsiveness of Parliament to the public”. The report of such a committee may be the subject of a subsequent plenary debate. A difficulty for 2011 may be the timeframe – the committee would have to expedite its proceedings to produce a report in time to form the basis for a debate on 15 September.</p>

International Day of Democracy - Concept #5

Concept #5	Mobile democracy exhibition travelling to schools, together with development and distribution of “democracy kit” containing guidelines and equipment, to enable lessons on democracy and parliament-type school debates
<i>Summary</i>	In conjunction with the department of education, a museum or other appropriate institution, develop a mobile exhibition aimed at schools, designed to reflect democratic, and particularly parliamentary, history and practice. The exhibition should focus on the relationship between citizen and parliament. Together with the exhibition, materials (a “democracy kit”) could be developed to assist in teaching about parliamentary democracy, and to enable schools to set up “parliamentary” debates. The project may be announced on the International Day of Democracy by the presiding officer/s, possibly in conjunction with a debate in the House/s on democratic values and practice.
<i>Objective</i>	To inform students about the nature of the democratic system and its values; and to assist in the teaching of civic responsibilities and the uses of the democratic system. In particular, to alert students to the values on which the parliamentary system is based and the need for these values to be upheld by all citizens.
<i>Target audience</i>	School-aged children.
<i>Format</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A mobile exhibition featuring presentations on the democratic system and its history in the country. The exhibition may include posters, artefacts and other features. If possible the exhibition should be accompanied by a specialist who is able to make a presentation on the exhibits. • Materials to assist teachers in introducing the subject of parliamentary democracy and to set up mock parliamentary debates. • The exhibition should travel to schools by invitation. Presentations should be incorporated into history and civics lessons. The exhibition may stay at a school for a number of days.
<i>Contents</i>	<p>The exhibition should focus on the nature and history of parliament, and the relationship between parliament and its citizens. The features of the exhibition may be expected to vary considerably from country to country. The exhibition should be designed by the relevant governmental institution, for example the department of education or museums, with input from parliament itself.</p> <p>The design of the “democracy kit” and educational materials should be the responsibility of the department of education or other relevant body. The kit could include photocopiable worksheets, games, and graphic representations of how parliament works.</p>
<i>Requirements</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This should be a joint venture between parliament and an appropriate outside institution, for example the department of education or a museum. The parliament may provide input into the design of the exhibition and teaching materials, as well as financial support, and will launch the activity on the International Day of Democracy.

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The relevant institution may design the exhibition and teaching materials, and provide the administrative basis, the presenting expert and transport for the exhibition. • The financial burden may be shared by the department of education and the parliament. It may be preferable for the exhibition to be free to individual schools, to ensure that poorer areas are not discriminated against.
<i>Examples</i>	Austria has produced a popular and successful exhibition of this kind. The German Bundestag runs a mobile information unit which travels through Germany; and a mobile exhibition to assist Members of Parliament to provide information to the public on parliamentary functioning.
<i>Expected outcomes</i>	Instilling greater awareness among school-age children of the nature, strengths and weaknesses of the political system and the importance of the values that underlie it.
<i>Other remarks</i>	As suggested by the German example above, a mobile exhibition could also be aimed at the broader population. While the exhibition may have to be adapted, it could be made available to local civic institutions and other bodies, or could travel to the various regions and present exhibitions aimed at the general public.