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## Reports on recent IPU specialized meetings

- (I) **Annual Parliamentary Hearing at the United Nations jointly organized by the Inter-Parliamentary Union and the Office of the President of the United Nations General Assembly**

**New York, 21 and 22 February 2019**

*Emerging challenges to multilateralism: A parliamentary response*

### Opening session

The 2019 Annual Parliamentary Hearing served as an opportunity to discuss growing challenges to multilateralism, and share ideas about how to reform the United Nations and strengthen the multilateral system in order to better respond to global challenges.

The President of the seventy-third session of the General Assembly, María Fernanda Espinosa Garcés, paid tribute to women parliamentarians. She said the United Nations had been born after World War II with the understanding that multilateralism was the only way to achieve peace. The Organization had seen many successes in peace and security, development and human rights; but to solve increasingly complex global challenges, it must be revitalized. Isolationist forces and extreme nationalism threatened the rules-based international order, but problems such as terrorism, organized crime, nuclear threats, pandemics, migratory crisis and climate change could not be solved by any country alone.

The President of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), Gabriela Cuevas Barron, argued that there was no real contradiction between sovereign rights and multilateral solutions because the national interest was always best served by participating in global processes that brought all countries together. She stressed that parliaments were the forums where international policies were translated into national frameworks. Parliamentarians played a key role because they represented people, and could ensure global ambitions applied to local realities. They could hold their governments accountable by following up on commitments made at the United Nations, monitoring their implementation, passing relevant national legislation and approving budgets.

## **I. Multilateralism, emerging challenges, and the role of parliamentarians**

### ***Successes of multilateralism***

The United Nations system has many accomplishments, including in areas such as assistance to migrants and refugees; peacekeeping; global security; economic and social development; dispute resolution; finance; and research and data collection. It has helped defeat smallpox; restore the ozone layer; secure vital freedoms for women; establish rules for air safety, international shipping and mail; create internet domain names; vaccinate record numbers of babies; save millions of lives; and prevent nuclear powers from going to war. It has also led to key societal changes. For example, most companies today understand the importance of going green.

At the same time, the multilateral system of the United Nations should not be romanticized. As a former UN Secretary-General famously put it, the United Nations was not created to bring us to heaven but to save us from hell. The Organization is nothing more than an expression of the collective will of Member States. They own the Organization and so must empower it with the necessary resources and institutional tools.

### ***Challenges***

Participants said nationalism and populism were increasingly threatening multilateralism, as were growing isolationism and political polarization. Disconnect between voters and mainstream politics had led some to support more extreme parties. Some citizens felt accountability and control had been given over to supranational bodies, which they did not identify with. Globalization had increased prosperity for many but had created hardship and uncertainty for others.

Participants stressed that multilateralism was good for state interests – including national security and prosperity – but it could be perceived to conflict with sovereignty. And while extreme, aggressive or chauvinistic nationalism was harmful, nationalism as patriotism could be a positive force.

In some quarters, there is a crisis of trust in multilateral institutions, and democratic values and the rule of law are under attack. Some people do not trust their own governments and, by extension, the inter-governmental organizations to which they belong. Paradoxically, the distance between these global institutions and the people has grown instead of narrowing, despite the need for the United Nations to be more forceful in tackling global challenges. Opponents of multilateralism are using disinformation and social media to spread false arguments and undercut the work of the United Nations and other international institutions. Limited resources for multilateral work and a growing funding gap at the United Nations also pose a concern.

As some great powers retreat from multilateralism, power dynamics are less clear and the world is more unstable. With some States deciding to modernize their weapons and leave longtime non-proliferation treaties, the threat of a nuclear arms race is growing.

### ***Strengthening multilateralism***

While multilateralism is greatly needed in a world facing more complex cross-border challenges, the United Nations and others must adapt to become more relevant, transparent and responsive. In this regard, the debate highlighted the following points:

- (a) The fundamentals of the international system must be strengthened to help States manage competition productively and peacefully.
- (b) It is important to have rules, but they should be good rules that work for everyone and allow the benefits of global processes to be equally shared.
- (c) The United Nations and other institutions should embrace new forms of communication and technology, and work outside traditional structures. The international community must be open to new models and be willing to commit to deep change.
- (d) There should be recognition that multilateralism is not for everything and that some issues are best handled domestically. However, it is worth exploring whether multilateral processes should be broadened to deal with issues such as health, education, and personal data protection.
- (e) Whenever there is political willingness to move forward, multilateral institutions should strive to go beyond bureaucratic approaches in order to implement the changes needed at the practical level.

- (f) The parliamentary pillar at the United Nations should be strengthened and parliaments should have a greater role in the conduct of foreign affairs. This can be done, for example, through the IPU's Standing Committee on United Nations Affairs, by creating similar committees within national parliaments, or by fostering interaction between parliamentary foreign affairs committees and the United Nations. The Fifth World Conference of Speakers of Parliaments in 2020 would provide a good opportunity to further consolidate the partnership between the United Nations, parliaments and the IPU.
- (g) In addition to parliamentarians, new and diverse actors and constituencies must be actively engaged. This includes young people, women, mayors, business and labour leaders, academia and civil society representatives. There should be acknowledgment that, in areas such as technology, the private sector often has more power than most governments.

### **Engaging young people**

Surveys show that youth believe in diversity, inclusion and tolerance more than other demographic groups. Here are some suggestions for better engaging young people:

- (a) United Nations associations, which have many young members, could be better linked with parliaments. Partnerships could also be established with national youth associations and other groups comprised of young people.
- (b) Traditional societal structures must find ways to interact with youth. This could include social media and virtual interactions.
- (c) Parliamentarians, United Nations officials and others should listen to young people and implement their ideas. For example, some of the proposals raised in the Youth Assembly could be tested every year.

Initiatives such as UNA-USA's Global Engagement Summit, the Model UN and Model UN Parliament should continue to serve as opportunities to get young people excited about the work of the United Nations and multilateralism.

### ***Role of parliamentarians in promoting global goals and fostering multilateralism***

Parliamentarians can champion multilateral work in a variety of ways, such as:

- (a) Bringing the voices of people, including women and marginalized groups, to the table; making sure their perspectives are reflected in policies.
- (b) Aligning global priorities with the national agenda. In France, for example, a Senate committee has established indicators on the Sustainable Development Goals to ensure local and regional budgets are in step. Pakistan formed centres to monitor implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.
- (c) Ensuring accountability through oversight of resolutions and treaties. Techniques such as a parliamentary inquiry can be used to question a government ministry's interaction with a multilateral institution. This could involve public hearings and reports, which may generate publicity and exert pressure to comply.
- (d) Building trust in the international system and multilateralism by communicating the relevance of the United Nations to ordinary people and driving political dialogue to include discussions about the local impact of global challenges. Sharing success stories and informing constituents about the tangible benefits of such work. Informing tax payers on what the United Nations is doing and ensuring them that this organization is a worthwhile investment.
- (e) Helping to engage citizens in good governance. This may involve opening committee systems to virtual interaction, and allowing people to participate in government in ways that do not require in-person meetings. Representatives should make themselves available in creative ways and help inform citizens about the impact of their participation.
- (f) Distributing evidence-based public information and fostering political dialogue to engage all constituents and strengthen a culture of democracy.

### **Remarks by United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres**

Mr. Guterres, a former parliamentarian and prime minister, emphasized the need for "networked multilateralism" which would include close UN cooperation with organizations such as the World Bank, the IMF, regional development banks, the World Trade Organization and regional bodies. He also called for "inclusive multilateralism" which would involve not only the executive branches, but also the business community, civil society, academia, and of course, parliaments.

Global problems can no longer be addressed through fragmented responses. Mr. Guterres said it was important to demonstrate that multilateralism could deliver, and show the added value of the United Nations, such as its role in recent ceasefires, humanitarian aid and adopting agreements, including the Global Compact for Migration and the Paris Agreement on climate change. He discussed reforms under way at the United Nations in areas such as gender parity, management, and peace and security, and how these will make the Organization more transparent and responsive to the needs of Member States.

## **II. Increasing women's political participation**

Women represent about 23 per cent of parliamentarians globally. Only 19 countries have women in the highest position, and just 18 per cent of the world's ministers are women. Excluding women from decision-making leads to polarization and insecurity. Furthermore, women are often the hardest hit by austerity measures when budgets get cut.

For its part, the United Nations is showing the way forward with a policy that has brought gender parity to the Organization's leadership. Furthermore, gender equality principles pervade nearly all dimensions of the Organization. A more gender-equal United Nations will help the Organization think and act more inclusively and therefore more effectively.

Many obstacles keep women from ascending to leadership positions, including patriarchal structures, lack of socioeconomic means, the multiple roles they play (as workers, caregivers, mothers etc.), low education levels, and confinement to the domestic sphere. Female politicians face more risks, including online harassment and sexual violence, causing some to leave politics and deterring others from participating in the first place.

When women are represented, there are anti-discrimination laws, gender-sensitive budgets, sustainable development policies and positive changes in societal behaviours and cultures. Gender diversity produces new perspectives and solutions, leads to more resources and greater cooperation, and ensures that all relevant issues are heard. It improves policy implementation and creates institutions that better represent the population. Tools and strategies to improve gender equality in politics include:

1. Quotas
  - (a) Reserved seats. Many countries have reserved a certain number of seats for women. In Kenya, for example, a 20-year sunset clause in the constitution says that no more than two-thirds of the National Assembly can be of one gender. By reserving 47 seats for women, their participation increased from about 7 to 30 per cent in nine years.
  - (b) Voluntary party quotas. Parties can commit to nominating a certain percentage of women candidates to their electoral lists.
  - (c) Candidate quotas. Country laws can require that a certain number of candidate positions be reserved for female candidates.
2. Electoral system reform. Electoral systems determine who gains power, how it is shared, and the nature of representation; so reforms can increase women's participation.
3. Political party reforms. Most parties are owned by men, who decide who gets which seat, when and why. Changing these structures can lead to better inclusion of women.
4. Building local women's networks and mentorship programmes. These may include targeted training for women keen to take on leadership positions, as well as partnerships with successful female politicians and other mentors.

5. Changing social norms and structures.
  - (a) Eliminating rigid roles. Research shows that when we hold on to rigid roles about what men and women should and should not do, gender inequality increases, including risky behaviour such as violence against women and sexual harassment. Changing these attitudes helps drive gender equality.
  - (b) Public and private domains must work together. Policies such as parental leave should involve both men and women, and social expectations about domestic work and care-giving must be equally distributed.
  - (c) Changing men's attitudes. Greater accountability is needed for harms caused by gender inequality over generations. Men need to listen to women, trust them, and call out men who resist gender equality. More men need to take up household work and care-giving so that the women in their lives can thrive in the public domain.
  - (d) Amending laws that hinder women's political participation. In some countries, women cannot inherit property, for example, which negatively impacts their economic power. Because running for office is often expensive, such laws inhibit women from competing against men. Laws focusing on cyber-bullying, sexual violence, and other risky behaviour can also help remove obstacles.
  - (e) Drive conversation and action on gender equality. Representatives can promote gender equality in their parliaments. It should be taken up on the highest levels. People notice when leaders take issues seriously, such as sexual harassment, violence against women and care-giving. It is also important to insist on specific strategies and to push for the inclusion of benchmarks and indicators.

### **III. Revitalizing the United Nations**

The Secretary-General has made United Nations reform one of his key issues, and Member States were encouraged to support these changes. The United Nations' 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2020 is an opportunity to reflect and push for modernization. A panellist said that the rift between members of the developing world and wealthy nations must be resolved in order for deep-seated reforms to take place.

#### ***Revitalization of the General Assembly***

As the world's only body in which nearly all States are represented on an equal footing, constituting a "parliament of humanity", the General Assembly deals with a range of critical issues that affect people's lives everywhere. However, it must become more transparent, effective and relevant, avoid political polarization, and promote inclusiveness of all stakeholders, including parliamentarians, academia, civil society and private sector representatives, youth, and women. It must tap into the power of 21<sup>st</sup> century communications techniques and non-traditional approaches to share its work. Revitalization of the General Assembly may include:

- (a) Enhancing its role and authority;
- (b) Improving its working methods;
- (c) Aligning its annual agenda with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development;
- (d) Improving its role in the election of the United Nations Secretary-General;
- (e) Strengthening the selection process for the President of the General Assembly and ensuring better continuity between Presidents;
- (f) Extending the one-year term of the President of the General Assembly;
- (g) Improving the accountability, transparency and institutional memory of the Office of the President of the General Assembly.

#### ***Strengthening General Assembly resolutions***

Each year, the General Assembly passes some 300 resolutions. While they are not legally binding and are often based on the lowest common denominator, they carry symbolic and political weight, and influence international law. Implementation and follow-up rests with the Member States.

Parliamentarians can ratify treaties, pass laws that make resolutions legally binding and monitor the implementation of decisions to ensure they reach the most vulnerable populations. A suggestion was made to form ad-hoc committees within the IPU to monitor the implementation of international agreements.

## **Security Council reform**

### *Membership*

Participants raised concerns about the Security Council's inability to stop conflicts and the paralysis that stems from its five permanent members exercising veto powers. They said the body needed to be more inclusive and transparent, more fairly represent different regions of the world, and better reflect today's power dynamics. It was pointed out, however, that permanent membership and the accompanying veto powers had been in place since the beginning, as reflected in the Charter of the United Nations, and that any amendments to the UN Charter would require these members' approval.

The 10 elected members should be bold and united, and work together to put important issues on the agenda. They should think of their two-year terms not as sprints, but relays, so that others could continue what they started.

### *Streamlining the agenda*

The Security Council's agenda is packed; its members spend 56 hours a month in formal meetings, and often move on as soon as a resolution is adopted. A suggestion was raised about parliamentarians filling this gap by providing information on how best to help a country or a particular operation and by sharing in-country expertise.

### **Conflict prevention and preventive diplomacy**

After years of decline, civil wars almost tripled between 2005 and 2015, and deaths directly connected to civil war grew sixfold between 2011 and 2015. The international community must focus on conflict prevention, which saves lives and can save between USD 5 billion to USD 70 billion a year. Every dollar invested in prevention saves 16 dollars down the line. When it comes to health, for example, insufficient funds for prevention lead to more illnesses and diseases, which then require more expensive medical and surgical treatments. The United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel was brought up as an example of efficiency as it operates on a fairly small budget of USD 12 million but has repeatedly prevented conflict and diffused tension.

Parliamentarians can address some of the fear and sensitivity around prevention, such as concerns that it will be used as an intervention tool. Another area for improvement could come from revising the development assistance frameworks – which are key agreements between the United Nations and governments – to make them more risk-informed. Multilateral and cross-pillar approaches are encouraged, so that prevention is not just about peace and security, but also about development and human rights.

### **Peacekeeping**

Since 1948, the United Nations has established more than 70 peacekeeping operations, and over the years, many have expanded in scope and size. Peacekeeping mandates should become more focused, deadlines more realistic, and deep-rooted causes taken into account. One proposal involves two-step mandating, so that an operation starts with a preliminary mandate and is then reviewed to see if it is working, perhaps after six months. The Security Council and the United Nations Secretariat could hold more strategic and analytical discussions earlier in the process, rely on more data-based information, and have more inclusive consultations.

Peacekeepers must be held accountable for crimes committed during missions, and parliaments of the countries involved should hold public hearings and other inquiries in response to allegations of serious misconduct, including sexual exploitation and abuse.

### **The United Nations growing funding gap**

The United Nations 2018/19 regular budget is USD 5.4 billion; half a billion of that was unpaid at the time of the hearing. Of the USD 6.7 billion peacekeeping budget, outstanding contributions made up USD 2.85 billion. Over the last two years, the United States has refused to pay more than 25 per cent of peacekeeping costs and has withheld portions of the regular budget. Only 34 of the 193 Member States paid this year's dues on time (by the end of January).

The ensuing cash shortfall and funding gap are hindering the ability of the United Nations to work and respond in emergencies, and may harm the Secretary-General's reforms. Troop-contributing countries are also not being reimbursed appropriately. While the United Nations produces an "honour roll" of those who pay on time, a parliamentarian suggested using IPU meetings as an opportunity to discuss who has not paid.

Greater transparency about multilateral efforts and their impact could help parliamentarians explain the importance of United Nations funding, as taxpayers want to ensure their funds are used efficiently. Reforms that cut down on micromanaging of the Secretary-General's budget and focus on results could help, as would allowing the Secretary-General to use any savings for other areas of work. While participants discussed different funding mechanisms, several agreed that an international tax would not work, and that voluntary private sector funding of UN operations (as opposed to the regular budget) must be subject to strict accountability criteria.

### ***Role of parliamentarians in strengthening the United Nations conflict-prevention and resolution mandate***

Parliamentarians can:

- (a) Help prevent conflict by allowing societal grievances to be aired in a peaceful and constructive manner. Show political flexibility, with a goal of reaching compromise solutions.
- (b) Work on mediating within and between States to prevent conflict, and broaden partnerships with the private sector, regional and financial institutions, and other stakeholders.
- (c) Help people understand that prevention is a sovereignty-enhancing mechanism, as it prevents foreign troops from conducting in-country operations.
- (d) Learn about the impact of conflict prevention and peacekeeping, and share that knowledge with constituents. For example, members of the U.S. Congress traveled to Côte d'Ivoire and Liberia to see the valuable role that peacekeeping has played there over the last 15 years.
- (e) See to it that United Nations dues are paid in full and on time.
- (f) Invest in prevention by increasing support for activities such as peacekeeping. Incentivize cross-pillar collaboration by funding joint initiatives or tying assistance to an expectation of cooperation across the United Nations.
- (g) Commit to preventive strategies such as implementing the Sustainable Development Goals, and build resilience instead of primarily focusing on crisis situations.
- (h) Acknowledge national experiences with conflict prevention and share success stories.
- (i) Increase interactions between parliamentarians and the General Assembly; between parliamentary foreign affairs committees and United Nations representatives; between the United Nations and the IPU; and between regional and sub-regional organizations.
- (j) Work closely with the United Nations Resident Coordinator, and report back to the UN, through the IPU, on any successes and failures.
- (k) Embrace reform at the United Nations and consider forming a parliamentary committee to discuss these reforms.

### **IV. The multilateral system in today's communications environment**

In the 24/7 media environment, there is more disinformation, oversimplification and inflated rhetoric. The United Nations and others must respond to those who use social media and disinformation to undermine their work. In order to control the narrative, it is important to have positive messages instead of just being on the defensive. Multilateral institutions should avoid vague terms and jargon and find better ways to communicate about their work, such as by using emotional language and stories about impact. They must recognize that individuals are not just consumers of mass communications, but active participants.

Finland was mentioned as an example of a country with good practices for handling complex information warfare, while Ukraine's young activists are responding to online misinformation by issuing corrective messages. The European Union has set up a rapid response unit to handle online information on issues such as security and migration. Education is key for fighting disinformation; oversimplified solutions and inflated language should be treated with scepticism.

Parliamentarians can help the United Nations communicate by sharing success stories about its work, and by clearly distinguishing between the various UN entities and corresponding subjects. Parliamentary commissions could invite United Nations officials to share information, which could then be used for outreach to local communities. Parliaments can also consider laws and policies that can help shut down information that is clearly false.

Open networks, digital apps and commons – which are organized systems with their own rules – have created an environment where everyone can start new movements. International institutions should consider partnering with these groups, which can provide valuable on-the-ground experiences and compensate for some of the inherent limits of a bureaucratic multilateral system. These communities are doing relevant work, such as creating an open-source community for farmers who increased their rice yields by exchanging knowledge, or producing maps with hospital locations in Haiti, which proved helpful after the earthquake there.

***To make UN decision-making processes more impactful, UN officials and parliamentarians should:***

- (a) Go outside traditional structures and means of mass communication to reach out to people.
- (b) Create different ways for people to be heard, such as through listening tours or by allowing them to submit questions.
- (c) Engage with people on the ground to build trust, better understand local issues, and communicate more authentically.
- (d) Include the voices of women, young people and others who are often left out of the conversation.
- (e) Avoid technical, vague and broad language; use emotional and targeted stories.

**V. Conclusion**

The hearing emphasized the need for multilateralism in a world grappling with more complex cross-border challenges. Nationalism, populism, and isolationism pose a growing threat to the global order. The international system, with the United Nations at its core, must become more relevant, responsive and transparent. It must do a better job of including women and youth, and partner with the private sector, business, labour and civil society, as well as regional and financial institutions. It should embrace innovation, technology and modern communication tools to share its work and engage with the public.

Parliamentarians play a critical role, as they are the bridge between ordinary citizens, local governments and global institutions. In order to build trust in the United Nations and the international system, they must champion multilateralism, support deep reforms and set out a narrative about the importance of global policies for improving livelihoods. By overseeing the implementation of international treaties, agreements and resolutions, they can ensure the global agenda is integrated into national frameworks and reaches local communities.

As a close partner of the United Nations, the IPU must continue to bring parliaments and parliamentarians closer to UN processes, bringing the voices of the people to bear on all major agreements and reforms, and ensuring stronger accountability for their implementation.

## **List of Speakers**

Moderator: Richard Wolffe

### **Day one**

#### **Opening session**

President of the seventy-third session of the General Assembly, María Fernanda Espinosa Garcés

President of the Inter-Parliamentary Union, Gabriela Cuevas Barron

#### **Multilateralism at a crossroads: Overall assessment and emerging challenges**

Member of Parliament, Grand National Assembly of Turkey, Ravza Kavakci Kan

Member of Parliament, German Bundestag, Peter Beyer

Permanent Representative of Ecuador to the United Nations, Luis Gallegos

Deputy CEO, UN Foundation, Elizabeth Cousens

#### **The national dimension of multilateralism: Institutional reforms for better politics**

Member of the Parliament of Norway, Hege Haukeland Liadal

Permanent Representative of Montenegro to the United Nations, Milica Pejanovic-Durisc

Team Leader, Inclusive Political Processes, Governance and Peacebuilding, UNDP, Charles Chauvel

Senior Fellow, Centre for Policy Research, United Nations University, Richard Gowan

#### **Address by United Nations Secretary-General, António Guterres**

#### **Gender equality at the United Nations and beyond**

Member of the Senate of Kenya, and President of the IPU Bureau of Women Parliamentarians, Susan Kihika

Senior Advisor on Policy to the Under Secretary-General at the United Nations, Ana Maria Menéndez

Deputy Executive Director, UN Women, Asa Regner

Senior Research Officer, Promundo, Brian Heilman

#### **Investing in multilateralism: The UN funding gap**

Member of Parliament, Riksdagen of Sweden, Cecilia Widegren

Permanent Representative of Australia to the United Nations and Chair of the Fifth Committee of the General Assembly (Budget), Gillian Bird

Assistant Secretary-General for Europe, Central Asia and the Americas, Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs at the United Nations, Miroslav Jenča

President, Better World Campaign, Peter Yeo

## **Day two**

### **Towards more responsive global governance: The revitalization of the General Assembly**

Member of the Senate of Pakistan, Farooq Hamid Naek

Permanent Representative of Jordan to the United Nations and Co-Chair of the Ad Hoc Working Group on the Revitalization of the Work of the General Assembly, Sima Sami Bahous

Permanent Representative of Slovakia to the United Nations and Co-Chair of the Ad Hoc Working Group on the Revitalization of the Work of the General Assembly, Michal Mlynar

Executive Director, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung New York Office, Luise Rürup

### **Making conflict prevention, conflict resolution and peacekeeping more effective**

Member, Chamber of Deputies of Spain, Jose Ignacio Echaniz

Member, National Assembly of Kuwait, Safa Al-Hashim

Chief, Financing for Peacebuilding, United Nations, Marc-André Franche

Executive Director, Security Council Report, Karin Landgren

Deputy Director, Center on International Cooperation, New York University, Paige Arthur

### **The multilateral system in the public eye: The impact of mass communications**

Speaker, Senate of Australia, Scott Ryan

United Nations Secretary-General Spokesperson, Stephane Dujarric

CEO, Foreign Policy Interrupted and Faculty Member, Bard College, Elmira Bayrasli

Director, Reinventing the Commons Program, Schumacher Center for a New Economics, David Bollier

### **Closing session**

María Fernanda Espinosa Garcés

Gabriela Cuevas Barron