



Inter-Parliamentary Union

For democracy. For everyone.



COVID-19 pandemic recovery through a human rights lens: What contribution from parliaments?

Virtual global workshop for parliamentarians organized by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)

**Two half-days spread over two days, Tuesday, 29 and Wednesday, 30 June 2021
2 - 5 p.m. (CEST - Geneva Time)**

BACKGROUND

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a tremendous impact on the enjoyment of human rights and has accentuated structural inequalities and vulnerabilities in terms of access to education, health, housing, employment, and information among others.

The response to the pandemic should therefore not only focus on halting the spread of the virus and on vaccinating the population. Recovery should also tackle the underlying factors of marginalization which, because they have been so negatively impacted by the pandemic, have worsened the situation of significant parts of society.

Parliaments play a key role in helping ensure that COVID-19 recovery includes the strengthening of state institutions and policies so that they truly serve everyone, starting with those most in need, and are fully grounded in existing human rights standards.

Indeed, as guardians of human rights and platforms of national representation where decisions affecting the whole of society are taken, parliaments should be at the forefront of developing, based on lessons learned from the pandemic, a consolidated recovery strategy.

In this regard, parliaments, in particular their human rights committees, have a critical role to play in the promotion and protection of human rights by turning international human rights obligations into meaningful action at the national level. Through its powers, parliament has the constitutional means to transpose international standards into national law and can seek to collaborate with international bodies, notably the Universal Periodic Review (UPR), entrusted with ensuring respect for these standards.

The United Nations Human Rights Council (HRC) recognized the importance of parliaments' contribution in its resolution 35/29 (adopted in 2017) in which it encouraged States, in accordance with their national legal frameworks, to promote the participation of parliaments as stakeholders in all stages of the Universal Periodic Review. The HRC tasked the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) with producing an analytical report on parliaments' contribution to the work of the HRC. This report (A/HRC/38/25) was prepared with the assistance of the IPU and submitted and discussed by the HRC in June 2018. The report included numerous examples of parliamentary engagement on human rights, in particular at committee-level.

Against the backdrop of the global mobilization to defeat the pandemic and the different constraints that may exist in this regard at the national level, the IPU-OHCHR workshop aims at:

- Sharing best national practices in terms of legislation and other parliamentary activities to promote human rights while fighting the pandemic.
- Identifying appropriate measures, drawn from international human rights principles, to fight the pandemic.
- Exploring robust human rights-based strategies for post-COVID-19 recovery, including avenues to strengthen the contribution of parliaments to the work of the UN Human Rights Council through the implementations of its UPR recommendations.



PROVISIONAL PROGRAMME

Tuesday, 29 June 2021

-
- 2 p.m.
- Inaugural session
 - Mr. Martin Chungong, Secretary General of the Inter-Parliamentary Union
 - Ms. Michelle Bachelet, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights
 - Ambassador Nazhat Shameem Khan, President of the UN Human Rights Council
-

2.15 p.m. **Session I: What have the pandemic and government responses to it taught us about respect for human rights in today's world?**

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, many countries took sweeping steps to stop the spread of the virus and protect their populations. Most of these steps have had important consequences for human rights. The question arises as to whether these measures have been guided by human rights. Moreover, the pandemic itself underscored and appeared to exacerbate existing inequalities and discrimination affecting already marginalized communities. What data do we have to shed light on these developments? To what extent have States sought to tackle the adverse new and old human rights dimensions laid bare by the pandemic?

- Ms. Peggy Hicks, Director of the Thematic Engagement, Special Procedures and Right to Development Division
- Moderator (TBD)

Discussion

3.30 p.m. Break

3.45 p.m. **Session II: The role of dedicated parliamentary human rights committees in helping insert a human rights-based approach into government responses to the COVID-19 pandemic**

A number of parliaments, in particular through their human rights committees, have carried out dedicated oversight to help ensure that the promotion and protection of human rights is a central pillar in official policies to tackle the pandemic. How did this oversight come about and what shape did it take? Is it effective in bringing about better human rights compliance?

- Ms. Dieh Mandiaye Ba, Member of Parliament, Chairwoman, Committee on laws, decentralization, labour and human rights, Senegal
- Dr. Sibongiseni Dhlomo, Member of the National Assembly, South Africa
- Moderator (TBD)

Discussion

5 p.m. **End of day one ■**

Wednesday, 30 June 2021

2 p.m. **Session III: Building back better: successful human rights-based COVID-19 recovery measures to address inequalities and structural discrimination, and to leverage the HRC UPR in line with the HRC 38/25 report**

The pandemic has been as a wake-up call to parliaments to take more forceful action to make parliamentary policy responses more inclusive and more beneficial to those most in need. As several countries are slowly starting to turn the page on COVID-19, they have had the opportunity to seize this moment to address structural underlying obstacles to the full enjoyment of human rights by everyone, in particular the marginalized communities. What has been done in this regard thus far? Which States have used the occasion to undertake ambitious human rights reforms in these areas? And what has been the role therein of parliaments?

-
- Ms. Chitralekha Massey, Team Leader Advocacy and Outreach ESCR, SDGs and COVID-19
 - Mr. Sven Spengemann, Member of the House of Commons, Canada
 - Ms. Millie Odhiambo, Member of the National Assembly, Kenya
 - Moderator (TBD)

Discussion

Break

3.45 p.m.

Session IV: Using COVID-19 recovery to better connect parliaments and international human rights mechanisms, also taking into account tools produced by OHCHR and the IPU to facilitate engagement with the UN Human Rights Council and its UPR

More robust cooperation and interaction between parliaments and international human rights mechanisms can go a long way in facilitating stronger human rights implementation at the national level during this critical recovery phase. What opportunities do parliaments have to engage with these mechanisms? Which parliaments have best been able to seize these opportunities and what lessons does this bring to other parliaments?

- Mr. Jorge Taiana, Member of the Senate, Argentina
- Mr. Rogier Huizena, Manager, IPU Human Rights Programme
- Mr. Gianni Magazzeni, Chief, UPR Branch, OHCHR
- Moderator (TBD)

Discussion

5 p.m.

Conclusion of the virtual workshop ■
