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## The IPU political project at the United Nations

### Implementation roadmap

*Endorsed by the IPU Governing Council at its 210th session  
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#### Background

The *Analysis of the IPU's Political Project* at the United Nations ("the Report") takes stock of the IPU's efforts over the last two decades to instil a parliamentary dimension in the work of the United Nations (UN). The idea was to assert parliaments' rightful place in an international arena dominated by governments and international organizations such as the United Nations. Articulated around four key points, the IPU's political project at the UN ranges from seeking to influence UN political outcomes (resolutions, declarations, treaties, etc.) to supporting the implementation of such outcomes by actively engaging parliaments through their legislative, representative and oversight roles.

The Report provides a very useful assessment of how the IPU's relationship with the UN can be further strengthened. Its release coincided with the drafting of the [IPU 2022-2026 Strategy](#) ("the IPU Strategy") which itself includes important guidance with regard to the IPU-UN relationship (see text box).

The following key considerations drawn from the Report and the IPU Strategy inform this note:

1. The IPU's objective to seek to influence UN political outcomes has fallen far behind the objective of helping implement such outcomes through parliamentary action at the national level. Some rebalancing between these two objectives is needed.
2. Opening up UN processes to parliamentary scrutiny and input is best done through the *intervention of national parliaments vis-à-vis their respective governments* (national level intervention) as opposed to the IPU's intervention as the representative of the world's parliamentary community at the UN (global level intervention). The IPU needs to invest more in equipping interested parliaments and parliamentarians with the information and tools they need to scrutinize and influence their own government's positions in UN negotiations and debates.
3. The IPU's political project at the UN should be further mainstreamed throughout all of the IPU's work rather than being pursued as a separate strategic objective, as was the case under the old IPU Strategy. By extension, stronger synergies need to be established between the IPU's political objectives and its programme of work with parliaments.

#### The IPU political project at the UN in the IPU Strategy (Objective 4)

The IPU will work "to further strengthen the parliamentary dimension of multilateralism and global governance including the voice of parliaments at the United Nations and other multilateral organizations; undertake collective advocacy at the global level, including for enhancing governance; and support national parliaments in contributing to the formulation and implementation of global commitments at the national level."

4. In its work at the UN and with parliaments, the IPU must aim more explicitly to achieve results. This requires, among other things, a more rigorous “triage” among current activities and modalities of work to select those that deliver the most to Members and that do so in the most cost-effective way.

## Main directions of the roadmap

The implementation roadmap can be conveniently organized around the three clusters of recommendations presented in the Report.

### 1. Clarity of purpose: Establishing objectives, priorities and targets

- Set out more clearly the purpose of the political project, as well as modalities of work and measurements of progress (Rec. 1)
- Narrow the focus of the IPU’s political work at the UN to three to five policy areas (Rec. 2)
- Make the SDGs and human rights key features of the IPU’s work (Rec. 3)

### 2. Harnessing the IPU’s strengths: Reforming process and structure

- Organize and structure activities more clearly around specific objectives related to the Organization’s policy, implementation or reputational goals (Rec. 4)
- Tighten the focus of the IPU Committee on United Nations Affairs in line with the priorities of the political project (Rec. 5)
- Seek to create new entry points and models of engagement with the UN (Rec. 6)
- Overhaul the way the IPU communicates with MPs so as to target them directly on the issues they care about (Rec. 7)
- Engage IPU group secretariats to play a more active and political role in pursuit of IPU objectives (Rec. 8)

### 3. Measuring impact: Coordination, monitoring and maintaining focus

- Set targets, generate data and allocate responsibility for measuring progress on the IPU’s policy influence and impact (Rec. 9)
- Reflect on how the significance of the political project is conveyed within the Organization, its relationship to the Organization’s [new] strategic priorities and corresponding resources (Rec. 10)

## Achieving clarity of purpose

Over the years, and thanks to the IPU’s strong advocacy, parliaments have gained recognition as stakeholders at the UN. While the IPU’s political project at the UN is very clear to the Organization’s leadership, the Report finds that too many MPs around the world – including those engaged with the IPU – are not fully aware of or do not fully understand the IPU’s mission at the UN. One significant reason for this is that much of the IPU’s political work at the UN is not reaching national parliaments.

The first three recommendations of the Report align well with the IPU Strategy, the main objectives of which articulate the IPU’s work around the **needs of parliaments**.<sup>1</sup> With this perspective in mind, the IPU’s political work at the UN should aim, in the first instance, at **strengthening the capacities of parliaments to hold their governments to account for what they say or do at the UN** as well as at **strengthening the capacities of parliaments to translate global commitments into national legislation**.

According to the Report, the **Sustainable Development Goals** (SDGs) – the UN-led global agenda for poverty and development, including peace and good governance – should provide the context against which priority issues need to be selected and on which much of the approach to the UN should be centred: “[T]he focus on the SDGs is ... to emphasize the critical role played by parliaments in their implementation ... and to illustrate how the interests of the UN and parliaments (and by extension the IPU) are inextricably intertwined.”

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<sup>1</sup> In its main objectives, the IPU Strategy focuses on the needs of parliament: building effective and empowered parliaments; promoting inclusive and representative parliaments; supporting resilient and innovative parliaments; and catalyzing collective parliamentary actions.

Put differently, the idea is that the **IPU needs to better integrate its political work at the UN with its programme work to support the implementation of international agreements through parliaments**. Being able to demonstrate that parliaments can help deliver on key elements of the international agenda will enhance the political weight of the IPU at the UN, leading to more opportunities to influence UN political outcomes. To better demonstrate how parliaments are following up on UN agreements, **success stories** will be presented more regularly to the relevant UN bodies.

The IPU Strategy identifies **four broad thematic work areas**: climate change; democracy, human rights, gender equality and youth participation; peace and security; and sustainable development for all. Within these areas, a shortlist of key issues for the IPU to focus on at the UN will be defined by the first quarter of 2023, in line with the IPU Strategy implementation workplan.

One way of connecting the IPU's parliamentary strengthening work with its political work at the UN is by **engaging parliaments in key national reports submitted by governments to the UN** (see text box), an activity which the IPU is already engaged in. In all of the reporting exercises referred to in the text box, parliamentary oversight is often lacking, one way or another. The IPU will address this by **supporting parliaments** more systematically throughout the government-led process, from early consultations to implementation, by:

#### Governments' reports to the UN subject to parliamentary input

Voluntary National Review (VNRs) – SDG progress reports to the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF)

Reports on the realization of human rights – Universal Periodic Review (UPR) of the Human Rights Council

Reports on the protection of children, under the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child

Reports on measures to end discrimination against women – Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)

Reports on national military expenditures (UN Office for Disarmament Affairs)

- Organizing briefings (virtually or in-person) for the parliaments concerned at the start of each reporting exercise.
- Proactively assisting a select group of parliaments throughout one or two of these reporting exercises and sharing relevant insights with other parliaments.
- Conducting surveys of parliamentary engagement to track progress over time.<sup>2</sup>

#### Summary of actions to achieve clarity of purpose

1.	Shortlist issues for IPU-UN work (from broad areas of interest in the IPU Strategy)
2.	Present success stories on how parliaments work to implement UN agreements
3.	Support parliaments' oversight of government reports to the UN: advance briefings; direct assistance to a small cohort of parliaments; annual survey of parliamentary engagement (SDGs)

### Harnessing the IPU's strengths: Reforming process and structure

The thrust of the five recommendations under this cluster consists of engaging members of parliament more directly in the IPU's political work at the UN, making better use of the IPU group secretariats as two-way conduits between the Organization and parliaments, reviewing the impact of IPU events at the UN, using multiple entry points to influence UN processes, and overhauling the IPU Standing Committee on United Nations Affairs.

As the Report notes, "[t]he 46,000 members of parliament around the world are the IPU's single biggest resource". Yet too many of these MPs are unaware of the IPU's work on influencing UN political outcomes or assisting with their implementation: "Those MPs will engage with the IPU's political strategy ... if they believe it helps them achieve things domestically."

<sup>2</sup> A survey is already being conducted each year to track parliamentary engagement in national progress reports for the SDGs. For the time being, only this survey of parliamentary engagement will be conducted.

While IPU group secretariats can help reach individual MPs who may be interested in specific UN political outcomes or may be most suited to participate in events at the UN, it is increasingly important to the success of the IPU's political work at the UN that MPs be mobilized directly by the IPU. This will require, among other things, **more targeted outreach to members of parliament to share information about UN deliberations, support their oversight work within parliaments, and identify parliamentary champions who may lead on various issues globally.**

Strengthening parliaments' knowledge of UN political outcomes (for example, negotiations of resolutions, political declarations, treaties) will require **more regular and timely reports to the parliaments themselves as well as to parliamentarians at large.** To this end, and in accordance with the new IPU Communications Strategy, the IPU will maximize the use of new information technologies, as well as new virtual meeting capabilities, in its work with parliaments and parliamentarians, including by:

- Sharing directly with MPs in the IPU's new contacts database (Zoho) **regular dispatches** on a clearly defined cluster of UN issues and processes. Dispatches will include information about key UN events in New York, Geneva and Vienna, important new UN reports, as well as on the negotiation of resolutions or other important political documents.<sup>3</sup> Official communications from the IPU to Member Parliaments (e.g. invitations to IPU meetings at the UN) will continue to be addressed exclusively to IPU group presidents.
- Organizing **virtual briefings for MPs on UN processes** to highlight political underpinnings and practical implications. Regularly scheduled (specific date/time) virtual briefings will be an opportunity for all parliamentarians to engage on these issues. Dedicated sessions of these briefings will be organized for Speakers of Parliament in a bid to secure involvement at the highest parliamentary level.
- Producing a **presentation video** illustrating the IPU's political project at the UN (purpose and modalities) to be distributed to MPs electronically and shown regularly at IPU Assemblies and other meetings.

Bearing in mind the institutional role of the IPU groups as the main link between the Organization and parliamentarians at large, the following two actions will be undertaken:

- **Strengthen the statutory obligation for IPU groups to brief their full parliaments** on the main outcomes of IPU meetings – including those dealing with UN processes (e.g. climate change negotiations), and share the main political conclusions and follow-up vis-à-vis the relevant UN body so that this information can reach deeper into parliament.
- Encourage **Speakers of parliament and/or** IPU group presidents to **organize at least one annual briefing with their respective Permanent Representatives at the UN** as well as, where feasible, with **UN Resident Coordinators** in the field as a way of raising the profile of parliaments in overseeing UN processes.<sup>4</sup>

The IPU's principal modality of political mobilization will be to selectively add one or two events to the list of **parliamentary events held in conjunction with UN sessions** in New York, Geneva and Vienna (see box). In reviewing this list, the Report noted that the impact of the Joint Annual Parliamentary Hearing in New York is diminished by the general nature of the topics it tends to discuss as well as a number of institutional constraints. Going forward, the Hearing will need to be improved through a clear set of guidelines and rules so as to become more closely linked to ongoing UN processes. A proposal in this regard will be prepared for a future meeting of the Executive Committee.

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<sup>3</sup> There are currently some 12,000 contacts in the Zoho database. More MPs will be added to this list over time and efforts will be made to allow for sharper "targeting" of relevant MPs based on their committee membership or selected issues of interest.

<sup>4</sup> Not covered by the Report, and yet very important, is the relationship that the IPU is trying to build between UN Resident Coordinators and parliaments in the approximately 130 countries where UN field missions (Country Teams) are present. While this relationship does not deal with UN political outcomes directly, it helps empower parliaments vis-à-vis their own governments. It also helps build greater awareness of the UN within parliaments.

In addition to organizing its own events at the UN, the IPU will **facilitate the participation of MPs in official UN consultations** as part of the preparatory process for UN high-level meetings. To this end:

- Parliaments will be informed regularly of **major UN meetings in which MPs could usefully participate as part of national delegations.**
- The IPU will work more closely with the UN to ensure the participation of MPs (subject experts) in UN **multi-stakeholder hearings** with parliamentarians and representatives of civil society.<sup>5</sup>
- The IPU will **work proactively to ensure that members of its issue-specific, specialized bodies participate in and contribute to the deliberations of corresponding UN bodies.**<sup>6</sup>

**Regular IPU events at UN and WTO sessions**

Parliamentary Forum at the HLPF in New York

Parliamentary Meeting at the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW)

Parliamentary Meeting at the Conference of the Parties (COP) of the UNFCCC

Parliamentary Conference at the WTO

As the Report notes, all **substantive committees of the IPU** deal with issues high on the UN agenda and UN officials are often invited to participate in committee sessions as expert presenters. This interaction between the IPU's substantive committees and the UN will be strengthened further as it provides an important conduit for parliamentarians to learn of UN processes (negotiations, key events, etc.) that are directly relevant to their work at home. To support this, the Bureaus of the thematic committees of the IPU (Peace and Security; Sustainable Development; Democracy and Human Rights) will be more frequently called upon to follow relevant UN processes in New York, Geneva and Vienna.

With regard to the **IPU Standing Committee on United Nations Affairs**, the Report concludes that this body's focus on the UN *as an institution* needs to be narrowed down to a "rota of key institutional issues" to be reviewed over time, and that the Committee as a whole "should play a more overtly political role in the political strategy." To address this, it is proposed to review the mandate of the Committee to give it more focus and streamline its working methods. To further enhance the profile of the Committee, every two years the Committee will convene a high-level meeting on "the role of parliaments in multilateralism", which will feed into preparations for the World Conference of Speakers of Parliament and inform IPU policy vis-à-vis the United Nations. A comprehensive proposal on the restructuring of the UN Committee and its Bureau will be presented at a future meeting of the Executive Committee.

Summary of actions to harness the IPU's strength	
1.	Support more frequent inclusion of MPs in national delegations to high-level UN meetings
2.	Institutionalize the participation of MPs in all relevant multi-stakeholder hearings of the UN
3.	Better match specialized IPU bodies with corresponding UN bodies
4.	Make more systematic use of the Standing Committees' Bureau members or other IPU office holders as participants in relevant UN meetings
5.	Hold regular virtual briefings for MPs on UN affairs/processes
6.	Provide regular dispatches to parliaments and MPs on select UN processes (negotiations, resolutions, reforms, etc.) by electronic means (emails, social media, etc.)
7.	Reform the Standing Committee on United Nations Affairs (new terms of reference and modalities of work to be developed)

<sup>5</sup> This approach of adding MPs to UN multi-stakeholder hearings has already proven highly successful in the lead up to UN high-level meetings on health.

<sup>6</sup> As in the case of the Forum of Young Parliamentarians, whose members participate regularly in the annual Youth Forum of ECOSOC, "matches" will be sought for the IPU Working Group on Science and Technology (i.e. ECOSOC's multi-stakeholder Forum on Science and Technology), the Committee on Middle East Questions (i.e. the UN Committee on the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People and other committees dealing with Middle East issues), as well as for other specialized bodies of the IPU.

8.	Develop rules and guidelines to more closely link the annual Parliamentary Hearing at the UN to major UN processes
9.	Engage IPU groups more actively and promote the practice of parliamentary hearings with Permanent Representatives at the UN and with UN Resident Coordinators in the field
10.	Produce a video presentation of the IPU's political project at the UN for distribution to all Members

### Measuring impact: Coordination, monitoring and maintaining focus

The last two recommendations of the Report call for regular and more rigorous assessments of the IPU's impact at the UN as well as for an in-depth evaluation of resource needs.

Every five years, the IPU will conduct a **global survey** looking at the ways and means by which parliaments manage to influence and then implement UN outcomes. This will be complemented by the statutory annual reporting exercise on follow-up by Members to IPU decisions, as well as by regular questioning of MPs individually.

In addition, a **Secretariat-level meeting** will be held annually with senior UN officials to coordinate activities as needed and to discuss common strategic objectives. Among other things, meetings will help prepare the UN Secretary-General's report on "interaction between the UN, national parliaments and the IPU" as the main background to the General Assembly resolution (of the same title) that is adopted every three years.

As the Report notes, "it is evident that to achieve more, the political project will need more **resources** devoted to it". Indeed, allocations for the IPU's work at the UN have been stagnant for many years. By way of illustration, the budget of the IPU Observer Office in New York has not changed significantly as a share of the IPU core budget (8%) over the decade since 2012. The IPU Office in New York has never grown beyond its original composition of two professionals despite a considerable increase in its workload. The IPU Office in Vienna, opened in 2021, consists of just one professional and was made possible entirely through the generous contribution of the Parliament of Austria for a limited period of four years, after which new funding will need to be identified. Only a small fraction of staff time at IPU headquarters can be devoted to following political developments at the UN Geneva Office.<sup>7</sup>

In the light of the Executive Committee's recent endorsement (in Montevideo) of the proposed annual increases to the core budget of the IPU over the next few years (3% from 2023 to 2026 followed by 2% yearly increments), it is suggested that part of these additional contributions be earmarked for human resources to support the political project of the IPU at the UN.

Summary of actions to measure the IPU's impact	
1.	Conduct an evaluation survey of parliaments (every five years)
2.	Hold annual Secretariat-level coordination meeting with senior UN officials
3.	Earmark a portion of additional contributions to the core budget to the political project at the UN

### Conclusion

As noted, this roadmap will be rolled out in tandem with the new IPU Strategy subject to available resources.

A progress report on the implementation of this plan will be submitted to the Executive Committee with a document to be presented during the second Assembly of the year.

<sup>7</sup> It should be noted that much of the IPU's work to implement UN agreements through parliaments is financed through a combination of core budget (Members' contributions) and extra-budgetary sources from bilateral and multilateral donors. In contrast, the more political work of the IPU at the UN cannot be financed through extra-budgetary sources due to donors' reluctance to support such institutional work.