



29-31 July 2025 Geneva, Switzerland

World Conference of Speakers of Parliament



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United Nations

#6WCSP

Conference report

Enhancing the role of parliaments for a more effective and networked United Nations

The [Pact for the Future](#), adopted by the United Nations (UN) General Assembly in 2024, injected new life into the long-held idea of a networked UN that would be more open to the views of external actors and better able to mobilize their energies in carrying forward the agenda for peace, development and human rights.

In Action 55 of the Pact, UN Member States agreed to “ensure that relevant stakeholders can meaningfully participate [...] in relevant United Nations processes and that Member States have access to the views and expertise of those partners”. In particular, Member States are to “deepen United Nations engagement with national parliaments in United Nations intergovernmental bodies and processes, in accordance with national legislation, including through building on the efforts of the United Nations and the Inter-Parliamentary Union to engage parliamentarians to maintain support for the implementation of relevant UN agreements and resolutions.”

This note reflects on how the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) has supported the establishment of a networked UN by developing a parliamentary dimension to the UN, as well as on related challenges and opportunities.

The idea of a networked UN, as proposed in recent years by UN Secretary-General António Guterres, can be traced back to the 2000 Millennium Declaration and its acknowledgement that, in a globalized world in which power is dispersed and no longer exclusively held by governments alone, the UN needs to interact more closely with stakeholders such as parliaments, civil society, the business sector and the academic community.

The IPU was the first parliamentary organization to argue that, in the face of mounting global challenges, the UN-led multilateral system could only deliver for the people if it included parliaments and parliamentarians in its decision-making and implementation processes.

Objectives of the parliamentary dimension to the UN

The IPU’s vision of providing a parliamentary dimension to the UN can be articulated in the following four objectives:

1. Bring the views of parliaments and parliamentarians to bear on UN decision-making processes, adding critical elements or validating decisions already made.
2. Help parliaments hold governments accountable for their UN commitments, as in the case of UN treaties, resolutions and declarations.
3. Build political support among the world’s citizens for a strong, effective and reformed UN as the leading institution of global governance.
4. Facilitate the implementation of UN agreements through enabling legislation and budgetary allocations.

Strategically, the IPU pursues these objectives along two parallel, mutually reinforcing “tracks”, one national and the other global:¹

- (a) The national track consists in providing parliaments with the information they need to influence their governments’ policy positions at the UN and to oversee domestic implementation of UN commitments: treaties, conventions, resolutions and other legally-binding instruments. In countries where the UN has a field presence (i.e. a UN Country Team led by a Resident Coordinator), parliaments have an opportunity to contribute to the formulation and oversight of the government-approved UN country plan

This track ensures that each parliament has a say at the UN, in full respect of their country’s division of powers between the legislative and executive branches. Its effectiveness depends on the actual oversight authority and capacities of individual parliaments, as well as on the strength of their institutional set-up to facilitate the exchange of information both internally and with outside actors such as representatives of civil society and the business community.

- (b) The global track consists essentially in the IPU exercising its role as an observer at the United Nations and contributing directly to UN deliberations, informing UN decision-making processes from a parliamentary perspective.

Here, the IPU speaks with a single voice on behalf of its Member Parliaments at the UN to advance agreed positions drawn from IPU resolutions, declarations and other formal outcomes. The effectiveness of this track depends on the IPU having the resources required to participate in UN meetings and share information with Member Parliaments in a timely manner.

How the IPU and parliaments engage with the UN

Both tracks of the parliamentary dimension to the UN depend on the IPU playing a central role in sharing information with parliaments about UN decision-making processes and in facilitating the participation of parliamentarians in UN conferences and meetings - nationally, regionally and globally.

Having become a Permanent Observer to the UN in 2002, the IPU enjoys a special position from which it can interact with diplomats and high-level UN officials in New York, Geneva and Vienna. While this status does not grant the IPU a place at the UN negotiating table, it does provide representatives of the Organization with opportunities to influence outcomes by working closely with supportive UN Member States.

The actual modalities of the IPU’s engagement with the UN have been formalized through a series of [UN General Assembly resolutions on interaction between the UN, national parliaments and the IPU](#). These modalities can be summarized as follows:

- Encouraging the inclusion of parliamentarians in national delegations to UN meetings and conferences
- Organizing parliamentary meetings in conjunction with major UN conferences and processes
- Holding an annual Parliamentary Hearing in conjunction with a major UN process
- Engaging parliaments (through surveys and information exchanges) in key reporting exercises of the UN
- Encouraging UN Country Teams to engage parliaments in national development plans and related processes
- Highlighting UN debates and processes in IPU Assemblies, workshops and briefings

¹ The national and global tracks of the parliamentary dimension to the UN were clearly set out in the declaration of the first World Conference of Speakers of Parliament in 2000, which states that “the parliamentary dimension must be provided by parliaments themselves first of all at the national level in four distinct but interconnected ways,” the first of which involves “influencing their respective countries’ policy on matters dealt with in the United Nations and other international negotiating forums”. At the global level, the declaration calls for the IPU to be “consolidated as a world organization for inter-parliamentary cooperation and for relaying the vision and will of its members to intergovernmental organizations”.

- Producing information and capacity-building materials and tools (guidance notes, handbooks, etc.) for parliaments on global issues of mutual concern for the IPU and UN (e.g. climate change, the Sustainable Development Goals and disarmament)
- Engaging Member Parliaments on questions of UN reforms, particularly through the [IPU Standing Committee on United Nations Affairs](#)

Challenges and opportunities for stronger parliamentary engagement with the UN

There are no provisions for parliamentary engagement with the UN under the UN Charter: the only allowance made for stakeholder contributions to the work of the UN applies to non-governmental organizations, in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council (Art. 71).

Despite the many overtures made to parliaments over the years, UN Member States are keen to maintain the intergovernmental nature of the organization. It is highly improbable that the UN Charter will be amended to create a special status for parliaments and the IPU at the UN. The modalities by which the IPU and parliaments are able to engage with the UN, as described above, are therefore likely to remain the same for many years to come.

With this in mind, there are opportunities for parliaments and the IPU to become more effective in providing a parliamentary dimension to the work of the UN. This can be achieved by strengthening their own institutional capacities in order to capitalize on the existing modalities of interaction. More specifically, parliaments could seek to strengthen engagement with the UN as follows:

- Ensure that parliamentarians participate in UN meetings as part of national delegations more consistently across all subject areas (peace, development, human rights, etc.) and that greater attention is paid to gender equality and youth representation.
- Hold parliamentary hearings in view of each major UN high-level meeting in order to better understand government negotiating positions and provide the government with a parliamentary perspective on the various issues on the agenda.
- Greatly improve the circulation of information and documents from the IPU to all parliamentarians so that communications are not confined within each national IPU group.
- Establish a focal point for the UN, such as a dedicated committee or subcommittee, within each parliament, and entrust that body with coordinating the oversight of UN reforms and key processes, such as government reports on the implementation of UN agreements.
- Hold regular hearings with UN Resident Coordinators in each country where the UN has a field presence.
- Hold regular meetings or hearings with the Permanent Representative to the UN with regard to ongoing negotiations and debates at the UN.
- Take concerted action on UN institutional reforms pursuant to the recommendations of the IPU Standing Committee on United Nations Affairs.