



Inter-Parliamentary Union
For democracy. For everyone.

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Advancing the agenda of previous World Speakers' Conferences

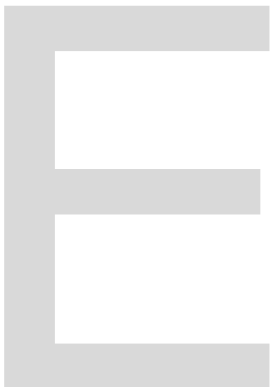
(b) Parliaments, democracy and the rule of law

Work undertaken by the IPU and other organizations to strengthen the representative, legislative and oversight functions of parliaments as key institutions of democracy.

1. Across the world, the core values of democracy are being brought into question. Many countries are sliding toward authoritarian regimes, liberal democracies are becoming less liberal and tolerant, and freedom of expression is increasingly challenged. Citizens are frustrated with the seeming inability of democracies to address the most pressing issues of the day, including conflict, poverty, migration, rising economic and social inequalities, lack of respect for human rights, slow progress in gender equality and the persistence of violence against women and girls, as well as climate change. In 2018, we witnessed the biggest fall of the perception of democracy index since 2010. Various global surveys¹ have indicated that confidence in democracy is on the wane. Citizens are disappointed with the functioning of government, and are losing confidence in political institutions, and ultimately in democracy itself. A majority of people around the world feel like they have no voice in politics and that their governments are not acting in their interest². They have little faith that their government is formed "by the people" and works "for the people".
2. The role of parliaments is crucial in addressing these challenges. Progress on democracy, for everyone, can be achieved only if there are strong, democratic parliaments that represent the will of the people. Parliaments today, however, are also facing many challenges that influence their ability to embody the core values of a democratic parliament—one that is representative, open and transparent, accessible, accountable and effective.
3. The Declaration adopted by the 2015 World Conference of Speakers provides a clear diagnosis of the state of democracy and sets out a way forward. This paper summarizes the activities carried out by the Inter-Parliamentary Union since 2015 to strengthen parliaments and give effect to the Speakers' Declaration.
4. Prepared under the guidance of its Member Parliaments, the IPU Strategy 2017-2021 sets the vision, mission and objectives of the organization. It identifies two overarching goals of building strong, democratic parliaments and mobilizing them around the global development agenda. It also outlines the actions that need to be taken by the parliamentary community to achieve them.

¹ Democracy Index 2018 - The Economist Intelligence Unit Report, World Values Survey (WVS), Eurobarometer, Latinobarometro and Afrobarometer.

² (51% and 58% respectively), The Democracy Perception Index (DPI).



5. The resolution entitled *Sharing our diversity: The 20th anniversary of the Universal Declaration on Democracy* was adopted unanimously by the 137th IPU Assembly, in October 2017. The resolution reaffirms IPU Members' support for the Universal Declaration on Democracy and recognizes its validity as an international standard to guide governments, parliaments and citizens through today's many challenges to democracy.

6. It is important to take every opportunity to promote the concept of democracy, to show what democracy means in practice, and to listen to people's hopes and frustrations. On the occasion of the 2017 *International Day of Democracy*, the IPU launched an international petition in defence of democracy *Get engaged now!* The International Day of Parliamentarism, observed for the first time in 2018 by the IPU and a number of member parliaments, is an opportunity to celebrate parliaments as the cornerstone of democracy, and as institutions designed to improve the lives of the people they represent. The date (30 June) was chosen by the United Nations General Assembly in resolution 72/278 to coincide with the anniversary of the first meeting of the IPU in 1889.

7. On the International Day of Democracy in 2018, the IPU released the New Parline open data platform on national parliaments. New Parline provides reference data on the composition and working methods of parliaments, such as data on changes in the age and sex of parliamentarians around the world over time. New Parline is a unique resource for parliaments, researchers and all those who want to know about parliaments, and supports evidence-informed policy-making by providing a comparative perspective on the world's parliaments.

8. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development recognizes the importance of effective institutions for achieving the entire set of development goals. As part of its action on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the IPU is designing tools to enable parliaments to assess and monitor their progress against SDG 16, particularly its targets 16.6 (Develop effective, accountable and transparent institutions) and 16.7 (Ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels).

9. The United Nations has entrusted the IPU with the custodianship for two SDG indicators, 5.5.1 on the proportion of seats held by women in national parliaments and 16.7.1(a) on the proportion of decision-making positions in national parliaments by age and sex. This acknowledges the role of representative institutions in sustainable development, as well as the IPU's convening role in gathering data from all parliaments.

10. By setting standards for democratic parliaments and providing technical support, the IPU helps parliaments to build their institutional capacity and strengthen their key functions. The 2017 *Global Parliamentary Report* entitled *Parliamentary oversight: Parliament's power to hold government to account* shines the spotlight on one of parliament's critical functions. The report, co-published with UNDP, is based on the contributions of 150 national parliaments. It makes 28 recommendations that amount to a scenario for change in favour of stronger oversight and accountability.

11. The *2017 Global Parliamentary Report* paints a mixed picture of how oversight is practiced by parliaments. In some contexts, asking questions and challenging governmental positions can bring significant risks for parliamentarians, particularly from the opposition, as the number of cases before IPU's Committee on the Human Rights of Parliamentarians can testify. In others, the rules and mandate for parliamentary oversight may be in place, but parliament may lack the capacity or will to make full use of them. The report captures many creative examples of how parliamentarians can carry out oversight in a constructive manner in the interests of all citizens.

12. The protection and promotion of human rights have featured prominently in the work of IPU Assemblies and of the IPU President and Secretary General. IPU Assemblies have looked at thematic challenges as diverse as the protection of right to privacy, the promotion of human rights as an integral part of conflict prevention, and the inclusion of a human rights lens to the implementation of the SDGs. More recently, the IPU has focused on galvanizing parliamentary support for the implementation of the global compacts on migration and refugees.

13. Every year around the world parliamentarians face reprisals for doing their job and raising their voice on behalf of the people who elected them. The number of MPs affected and whose cases have been brought to the attention of the IPU has almost doubled in the last five years. The year 2018 set a sad new record with 564 MPs affected in 43 countries. This is the highest number of cases involving the violation of MPs rights on the IPU's books since the establishment of its Committee on the Human Rights of Parliamentarians over 40 years ago, which spearheads the IPU's work to protect parliamentarians at risk.

14. Parliaments and UN human rights mechanisms stand much to gain from closer cooperation in ensuring better implementation of international human rights standards domestically. Throughout the last five years, the IPU has encouraged parliaments to become involved in the work of the UN Human Rights Council and its Universal Periodic Review and, increasingly as well, of key UN treaty bodies that oversee the implementation of human rights treaties, including the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). The IPU, in collaboration with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), has organized regional capacity-building seminars for parliamentarians around the globe and provided them with the necessary tools to become more engaged in the promotion and protection of human rights.

15. The IPU has also actively promoted stronger action by the UN Human Rights Council to enhance synergies with parliaments and to better integrate the latter's work into its own considerations. Thanks in no small measure to these efforts, in recent years, the UN Human Rights Council has adopted resolutions, produced reports and organized panel discussions in support of a stronger parliamentary contribution and of enhanced cooperation with parliaments.

16. The 2015 Speakers' Declaration called for greater efforts to end all forms of discrimination against women and girls with the view to achieving their empowerment and making gender equality a reality. In 2016 and 2018, the summits of women Speakers of parliament held respectively in the United Arab Emirates and Bolivia called on all parliaments to step up their action to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women and girls in law and practice and all forms of violence against women, including violence in politics. They also called for strong action to be taken to promote parity in politics.

17. The 2016 IPU Resolution *The freedom of women to participate in political processes fully, safely and without interference: Building partnerships between men and women to achieve this objective* strongly urges parliaments to set a deadline by which at least 30 per cent of parliamentarians should be women and to set a further deadline by which that proportion should reach 50 per cent.

18. In 2016 and 2018, the IPU published two studies on sexism, harassment and violence against women in parliament, the 2018 one in partnership with the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE). Based on a series of in-depth interviews, both studies revealed alarming levels of sexual harassment, psychological violence and threats against women parliamentarians. Strong commitments should be made and efficient actions taken by parliaments to eradicate all forms of violence against their women members and staff. Guidelines to support parliaments in such efforts will be issued by the IPU in 2019.

19. To fill a gap in quantitative and qualitative information on youth participation, the IPU has served since 2014 as an international observatory on youth participation in parliament. Data and information is published in biennial reports on youth participation in national parliaments. The 2018 report revealed that only 2.2 per cent of the world's MPs are under the age of 30, 15.5 per cent are under the age of 40, and 28.1 per cent are under the age of 45. This is a slight improvement from the situation observed in the 2016 report.

20. Reiterated calls to increase youth participation, by aligning the age of eligibility with the voting age and adopting special measures such as youth quotas, are beginning to produce results. The IPU Forum of Young Parliamentarians has adopted youth targets for all countries to meet and IPU's advocacy has contributed to supporting national efforts to increase youth participation. In Nigeria, for example, bills known as *Not Too Young to Run* were adopted to lower the age of eligibility to political office.

21. Two IPU World e-Parliaments Reports in 2016 and 2018 track how parliaments are using technology to support their core functions, and highlight emerging trends. The 2018 report establishes that use of technology in parliaments is beginning to live up to its potential. Further evidence of how technology supports innovation in parliamentary processes, by acting as a catalyst for modernization, culture change, greater transparency and more effective representation, was visible at the most recent World e-Parliament Conference in December 2018.

22. Social media has changed the way people, parliaments and elected members communicate, share ideas and share data. Social networks amplify citizen's demands, and in particular those of young people. They want their voice to be heard and respected. It is more vital than ever for the rule of law to be upheld and for citizens to be able to participate fully in decision-making processes. Parliamentarians at the most recent World e-Parliament Conference confirmed that social media tools are bringing parliaments and parliamentarians closer to citizens, and helping them inform, engage and listen. Yet the same tools also generate adverse effects, such as disinformation, "fake news" and abusive behaviours, to which parliaments are challenged to find appropriate responses.

23. Good practices in social media is one of the themes being taken up by the Centre for Innovation in Parliament, launched in December 2018 as a partnership between the IPU and parliaments to support parliamentary innovation through improved use of digital tools. This decentralized structure is based around a series of parliamentary hubs and has benefitted from the support of a core group of parliaments in Brazil, Chile, Portugal, Zambia, and the European Parliament.

24. The 2015 Speakers' Declaration commended the Common Principles for Support to Parliaments that the IPU had adopted in October 2014 and recommended that all parliaments and relevant organizations be guided by them as a measure to strengthen parliament and democracy. To date, the Common Principles have been endorsed by 122 parliaments and partner organizations.

25. At the heart of the Common Principles lies an organizational self-development approach, namely, that parliament should be in the lead in any effort to strengthen and transform the institution's capacities: only parliament can take responsibility for its own development. The organizational aspects of parliament are constantly evolving and need to be managed accordingly.

26. To support parliamentary efforts to strengthen their institution, the IPU has produced a series of self-assessment toolkits to help parliaments to evaluate their performance in different areas, including gender equality, the SDGs and the whole institution of parliament. The self-assessment approach has served as a framework for members of parliaments in Georgia, Mali, Zambia, among others, to identify the institution's strengths and weaknesses, as well as priorities for change. Other parliaments may wish to examine how this voluntary self-assessment approach could help them to achieve their development priorities.

27. Members of the Preparatory Committee may wish to address the following questions:

- (a) What are the main challenges to parliament and democracy today? How can parliaments address these challenges? What are parliaments doing to be more representative, and open to public participation in decision making? How can parliaments ensure strong links with citizens?
- (b) How can IPU assist parliaments to effectively exercise their role in line with standards for democratic parliaments?
- (c) What do parliaments need to do to address discriminations against women and girls? How to speed up efforts towards parity in parliament? What recent successes can be identified? What do parliaments need to do to eliminate sexism, harassment and violence against women parliamentarians and staff?
- (d) How best can parliaments address the evolving human rights agenda nationally and internationally? How can they contribute more effectively to UN human rights mechanisms such as the Human Rights Council and its UPR or CEDAW? How can they help ensure that their own members can carry out their work without fear of reprisals, or actual reprisals, and that other stakeholders in the public debate can also speak their voice freely?
- (e) What are parliaments doing to increase youth participation in politics? Have there been recent developments in this regard? What recent good practices are there to advance youth empowerment, including through education and employment?
- (f) How are parliaments taking ownership for their development, and what would help parliaments to strengthen their institution?