

Parliamentary engagement on human rights: Identifying good practices and new opportunities for action

Seminar for members of parliamentary human rights committees organized by the Inter-Parliamentary Union in collaboration with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

24 – 26 June 2019, Geneva
UN Palais des Nations, Conference Room XXIII

BACKGROUND

In the last 70 years, starting with the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the international community has made great strides in developing new, and fine-tuning existing, international human rights standards. However, this progress has yet to be matched by a similar change on the ground which is why bridging this “implementation gap” has become a priority.

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. Increasingly, United Nations human rights mechanisms, most notably the United Nations Human Rights Council (HRC) and the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), have recognized the potential of parliaments to help ensure better implementation of human rights standards, and have therefore started to include the work of parliaments more systematically in their own deliberations. In turn, parliaments—in particular parliamentary human rights committees—have intensified their efforts to acquire a better understanding of the functioning of UN human rights mechanisms and to contribute directly to their work.

The seminar for members of parliamentary human rights committees aims to take stock of where these efforts have brought us to today and to identify good practices and new courses of action. The event will showcase and build on interesting examples of parliamentary engagement on human rights and parliamentary involvement in the work of UN human rights mechanisms. The seminar aims to identify additional ways to strengthen the contribution of parliament to the promotion and protection of human rights and to enhance synergies between parliaments and UN human rights mechanisms. The meeting will also examine inspiring examples of cooperation between parliaments, national human rights institutions and civil society, and the action parliaments can take to create an environment in which national human rights stakeholders can do their work freely and effectively. The seminar will address the steps that parliaments can take to implement a holistic agenda that incorporates both the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and human rights obligations. The seminar will also provide an opportunity to discuss and review the draft international principles in support of the work of parliamentary human rights committees as well as the building blocks of a human rights self-assessment toolkit for parliaments.

The seminar is open to members of dedicated parliamentary human rights committees. The speakers will be members of parliamentary human rights committees, IPU and UN representatives, members of national human rights institutions and civil society. The seminar will take place at the UN Palais des Nations at a time when the UN Human Rights Council is in session so that participants can also briefly attend the Council’s deliberations.

The seminar will draw, *inter alia*, on the IPU/OHCHR handbook on human rights for parliamentarians, the OHCHR report (HRC38/25) of May 2018 entitled “Contribution of parliaments to the work of the Human Rights Council and its universal periodic review”, the report of the second session of the UN Forum on Human Rights, Democracy and the Rule of Law “Parliaments as promoters of human rights, democracy and the rule of law”, the recommendations and conclusions from previous IPU/OHCHR parliamentary capacity-building seminars, the IPU handbook on freedom of expression (2018) and the work of the IPU Committee on the Human Rights of Parliamentarians.



PROVISIONAL PROGRAMME

Monday, 24 June 2019

9.30 a.m.

Registration

10 a.m.

Opening Ceremony

- Mr. Martin Chungong, Secretary General of the Inter-Parliamentary Union
- Ms. Michelle Bachelet, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (video message)
- President of the UN Human Rights Council, Ambassador Coly Seck (Senegal)

10.30 a.m.

Session I: How do parliaments fit into the work of the UN Human Rights Council and UN treaty bodies and what contribution can they make?

Without parliamentary action—whether passing laws or overseeing government action—very few UN human rights recommendations would actually be implemented. Parliaments can discuss the draft national reports to the UN Human Rights Council under its Universal Periodic Review (UPR) and the reports to the UN treaty bodies, take part in the official presentation of the reports to these UN mechanisms and help ensure implementation of their recommendations.

This session aims to look at ways in which parliaments can become involved in the different stages of the reporting procedures of the UN Human Rights Council and the UN treaty bodies. It will touch on the major efforts made in recent years by the UN Human Rights Council and the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) to include the work of parliaments more systematically in their own deliberations. The session should also draw some lessons from these efforts and discuss additional ways for these UN mechanisms to engage with parliaments and involve them directly in their work.

- Mr. Emilio Rafael Izquierdo Miño, Ambassador, Permanent Representative of Ecuador to the Office of the United Nations and other International Organizations in Geneva
- Ms. Nicole Ameline, CEDAW Vice-President, Chair of the CEDAW-IPU Working Group and former member of the National Assembly of France

Discussion

12.30 p.m.

Lunch

2 p.m.

Session II: National case studies on parliamentary involvement in the Universal Periodic Review and in the work of the UN treaty bodies

The executive—often together with national human rights institutions—is in the driver's seat in preparing and presenting the national reports to UN human rights mechanisms and ensuring implementation of their recommendations. Parliaments are often largely unaware of this process, although this is slowly changing.

This session will look at three interesting national case studies of parliamentary involvement in the UPR and/or UN treaty body reporting procedures, including by examining the interaction between parliament and other national human rights stakeholders, in particular the executive, national human rights institutions and civil society. It will look at the work of national mechanisms for reporting and follow-up, which are increasingly being set up across the world, and their ideal relationship with parliaments. This session should also help to identify and address challenges to further parliamentary involvement. At the end of the session, each participant will be asked, in writing, to identify three occasions in which (s)he was involved or intends to be involved in the work of the UN human rights reporting mechanisms.

- Ms. Kim Pate, member of the Standing Committee on Human Rights, member of the Senate of Canada
- Ms. NAM In-Soon, member of the Committee on Health and Welfare, member of the National Assembly of the Republic of Korea
- Mr. Jurmi Wangchuk, Chairperson of the Human Rights and Foreign Relations Committee, member of the National Assembly of Bhutan

Discussion

3.45 p.m.

Coffee break

4 p.m.

Continuation of Session II

5.15 p.m.	Wrap-up for the day
5.30 p.m.	Cocktail for the opening of the exhibition on the 130th anniversary of the IPU (Palais des Nations, Salle des pas perdus)

Tuesday, 25 June 2019

9.30 a.m.	Exchange between the organisers, the OHCHR and IPU representatives, Mr. Gianni Magazzeni, Mr. Rogier Huizenga and the parliamentarians
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10.15 a.m.	Session III: The protection of human rights at the national level: Strategies for enhanced parliamentary contribution
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Parliamentary prerogative in the areas of adopting legislation, overseeing government action, adopting the national budget, approving the ratification of international treaties and calling into question existing reservations, as well as public outreach and engagement with citizens, is critical in promoting human rights. Several parliaments have set up specific committees devoted to human rights in order to do this effectively.

This session will look at best practices in promoting parliamentary oversight, including those identified by the 2018 IPU/UNDP Global Parliamentary Report. It will offer a human-rights-based review of legislation and budget, of strong parliamentary human rights committees and of the proactive stance of parliaments on ratifications of international treaties and the withdrawal of reservations. The session will also look at parliamentary involvement in the development of national human rights action plans. Participants will be asked at the end of the session to provide in writing three concrete examples of their work in recent years that has helped to improve the enjoyment of human rights in their countries.

- Ms. Meg Munn, former member (2001 – 2015) of the House of Commons (UK), involved in drafting and using the IPU / UNDP Global Parliamentary Report on parliamentary oversight
- Ms. Janepher Nantume Egonyu, Chairperson of the Human Rights Committee, member of the National Assembly of Uganda
- Professor Akmal Saidov, member of the Oliy Majlis of Uzbekistan, Chairman of the Committee on Democratic institutions

Discussion

12.30 p.m.	<i>Lunch</i>
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2 p.m.	Session IV: Developing tools to help parliaments, in particular their human rights committees, to become more effective in promoting and protecting human rights
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Parliaments, in particular their human rights committees, have a critical role to play in the promotion and protection of human rights.

The session will draw on the UN report (HRC38/25). Through a group exercise, participants will discuss and review the “Draft Principles and Guidelines on the Role of Parliaments in the Protection and Realisation of the Rule of Law and Human Rights” and help to identify the building blocks for a human rights self-assessment toolkit for parliaments. The session will also feature a presentation of the IPU online database on parliamentary human rights committees.

- Mr. Gianni Magazzeni, Chief, UPR Branch, Human Rights Council and Treaty Mechanisms Division, OHCHR
- Mr. Rogier Huizenga, Manager of the IPU Human Rights Programme

Discussion

4.30 p.m.	Attendance of the session of the UN Human Rights Council (two floors up from the meeting room)
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Wednesday, 26 June 2019

9.30 a.m.

Session V: Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and human rights: Going beyond the rhetoric of recognizing their strong convergence

Most of the SDG targets are grounded in international human rights law. As a result, achieving progress in the realization of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development will be impossible without strong implementation of States' human rights obligations and commitments. The reverse is true as well: by implementing international human rights standards, States automatically make strides towards realizing the SDGs.

This session will look at the mutually reinforcing link between the SDGs and human rights. Although this link seems obvious, still too little is done to ensure a comprehensive approach that promotes real synergies in planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. This session will discuss concrete ways, including through good practices, to bring both agendas together at the national and international levels.

- Mr. Rio Hada, Leader of the Economic, Social and Cultural Rights Team, Thematic Engagement, Special Procedures and Right to Development Division, OHCHR
- Mr. Abdoul Kassoum Touré, member of the Sustainable Development Goals Committee, member of the National Assembly of Mali
- Ms. Emily Christie, Senior Advisor on Human Rights and Law, UNAIDS
- Mr. Maxime Koné, Chair of the General and Institutional Affairs, and Human Rights Committee, member of the National Assembly of Burkina Faso

Discussion

12.30 p.m.

Lunch

2 p.m.

Session VI: Creating a conducive space for freedom of expression, dialogue and respect

The free flow of ideas is indispensable for democracy to work. It is therefore crucial that parliamentarians, journalists, civil society, and others wishing to contribute to the public debate, can do so effectively and freely.

This session will look at the right to freedom of expression and the steps that parliaments can take to protect it. Against the backdrop of the increased repression of free speech in some corners, as well as mounting incidents of hate speech and fake news, the session will also examine permissible and impermissible restrictions to freedom of expression under international law. The session will look at ways to build genuine bridges in support of human rights within parliament and between parliament, civil society and the media.

- Ms. Aleksandra Jerkov, Chairperson of the IPU Committee on the Human Rights of Parliamentarians, member of the National Assembly of Serbia
- Mr. James Lawless, Spokesperson for Science, Technology, Research & Development, member of the Dáil Éireann (Parliament) of Ireland
- Mr. Momodou Jallow, member of the Swedish delegation to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE), member of the Swedish Parliament
- Ms. Katharina Rose, Geneva Representative of the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions (GANHRI)

Discussion

5 p.m.

Concluding session ■
