



Inter-Parliamentary Union
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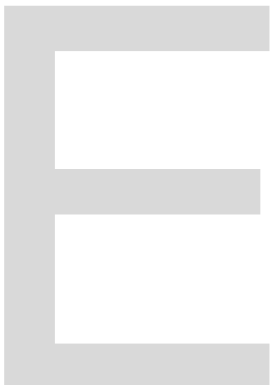
The parliamentary dimension to the work of the United Nations

1. The 2000 Conference of Presiding Officers of Parliaments was the first ever global Summit where parliamentary leaders discussed their role in the international sphere. Seeing the need for more transparent and accountable global governance, the Speakers called for a strong relationship between parliaments and the United Nations. The idea was, and remains, to make the voices of the people heard at the United Nations through their parliamentary representatives. While respecting the division of power between the executive and the legislative branches, the Speakers claimed a more direct role for parliaments at the United Nations, in order to bridge the democracy gap in international relations. In so doing, they resolved to work ever more closely with the IPU, the unique global parliamentary counterpart of the United Nations. This message was echoed in the UN Millennium Declaration adopted by the Heads of State and Government, and reinforced at the subsequent parliamentary Summits in 2005, 2010 and 2015.

2. In keeping with the vision set forth at the first World Conference of Speakers of Parliament in 2000, much of the work relating to the United Nations needs to be done by parliaments at the national level. It is important to make sure the MPs serving on the parliamentary select committees (human rights, health, environment, trade, defence, etc.) are directly involved in the corresponding global processes. The IPU plays a supporting role, and serves as a convener, facilitator and catalyst by:

- informing parliaments and MPs of the main processes under way at the United Nations;
- convening meetings on the principal global issues and accompanying major UN processes by a parliamentary component;
- helping to share good parliamentary practices and encouraging action by parliaments and parliamentarians—in particular in terms of translating international commitments into national realities;
- encouraging the inclusion of MPs on national delegations to the main UN conferences and facilitating interaction between parliamentarians and the UN system;
- helping to ensure that the views of the parliamentary community are heard at the United Nations and that parliamentary perspectives are formally channeled into the UN processes;
- facilitating parliamentary oversight of the United Nations and its operations.

3. To carry forward this vision of a parliamentary dimension to the work of the United Nations, three strategic lines of action have been developed: establishing the institutional links, strengthening parliamentary oversight of UN processes, and channelling parliamentary perspectives into major UN negotiations and processes.



Establishing the institutional links with the UN

4. Further to the first World Conference of Speakers of Parliament, in 2002 the IPU attained permanent observer status with the UN General Assembly. As such, the IPU regularly addresses this global body and its subsidiaries, articulating the political views and policy prescriptions derived from its various resolutions and decisions, as well as from activities conducted together with Member Parliaments. As an observer with a permanent office at UN Headquarters in New York, the IPU can more easily work to have parliamentary perspectives reflected in the outcome of UN deliberations and negotiations. Today, a number of UN documents and international commitments stress the important role and responsibility of national parliaments.

5. Over the past two decades, successive UN General Assembly Resolutions on interaction between the United Nations, national parliaments and the IPU specifically call upon the IPU to facilitate a parliamentary component to major international processes and to help inform global deliberations from a parliamentary perspective. The most recent UNGA Resolution, adopted by consensus in May 2018 (www.ipu.org/sites/default/files/documents/72-278-e.pdf), further strengthens this relationship through a number of measures, including annual UN–IPU coordination meetings at both the political and operational level, as well as the designation of 30 June as the International Day of Parliamentarism.

6. The Standing Committee on United Nations Affairs was established at the IPU in 2007 (now the fourth IPU Standing Committee), with a mandate to provide direction and help shape new policies relating to the parliamentary dimension of the United Nations. Among other things, the Committee developed a policy paper on the nature of the relationship between the United Nations and the world of parliaments, which was endorsed by the IPU's governing bodies (archive.ipu.org/Un-e/3spk.pdf). The Committee has also conducted a number of field missions (Albania, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Haiti, Montenegro, Sierra Leone, Tanzania and Viet Nam) to look at ways in which the institutional relationship between parliaments and the United Nations could be strengthened at the country level, where UN Country Offices work in an advisory role to support governments in the implementation of international commitments.

7. In the context of UN reform, the IPU has sought to strengthen cooperation between UN Country Teams and national parliaments building on the recommendation of UN General Assembly resolutions that called for a more "structured relationship" between these two actors. To help collect more systematic evidence of how this relationship is evolving, the IPU is working with the United Nations to develop specific guidelines for Resident Coordinators.

8. In order to better reflect the growing interaction between the UN system, parliaments and the IPU, the two organizations signed a new Cooperation Agreement in 2016 (www.ipu.org/sites/default/files/documents/2016_cooperation_agreement.pdf). This is accompanied by regular meetings for consultation and coordination at both senior leadership and working levels. These meetings provide an opportunity to discuss issues on the global agenda where the IPU and the United Nations can usefully join forces, identify and address concrete stumbling blocks in the way parliaments and the United Nations interact in countries and at the global level, and brainstorm around possible joint projects.

9. Substantive and operational cooperation with UN specialized agencies has also been developing at a fast pace, particularly in the cases of UNDP, UNHCR, UN Women, WHO, UNAIDS, OHCHR, UNEP and UNICEF. The IPU has cooperation agreements with several of these organizations, and undertakes joint activities including seminars and workshops, consultations on good practices and model legislation, joint publications, and technical assistance to parliaments, particularly in countries that are rebuilding their institutions in post-conflict environments. Concrete examples of joint activities between the IPU and UN entities are reflected in the 2018 Report of the UN Secretary-General on *Interaction between the United Nations, parliaments and the IPU* (www.ipu.org/sites/default/files/documents/sgr_e.pdf) as well as in the regular IPU Governing Council reports on implementation of the IPU Strategy (www.ipu.org/download/6322).

Strengthening implementation and oversight of UN agreements

10. To facilitate oversight of UN negotiations and processes, through its Standing Committee on United Nations Affairs, the IPU has elaborated a series of guidelines. These guidelines require that parliaments should:

- be given sufficient advance notice of negotiations that will take place at the UN;
- have accurate information about the issues at stake and the policies and negotiating positions under consideration;
- be able to put questions to ministers and negotiators, and to express parliament's views to the government;
- where possible, provide the government with an explicit negotiating mandate or have the power to influence it;
- be equipped with the necessary structures, procedures and resources to monitor negotiations as they develop and, to that end;
- be represented in national delegations attending these negotiations.

11. To sensitize MPs to key global issues and help implement corresponding UN agreements, the IPU regularly convenes parliamentary meetings in the context of various international conferences, such as the annual sessions of the UN Commission on the Status of Women, the WTO annual conferences, and the UN Conferences on Climate Change. In addition, the IPU organizes parliamentary meetings at special UN conferences where a new international agreement is adopted (e.g. the Parliamentary Meeting on the Global Compact for Migration in December 2018). Each year, the IPU convenes a parliamentary meeting during the High Level Political Forum in New York in July as countries review implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

12. By working with the UN Human Rights Treaty Bodies, the IPU has helped parliaments to increase their leverage in the national review of international human rights commitments. Perhaps the most successful to date is in relation to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). The IPU works with the parliaments of the countries under review so they can take part in the review process, providing input to the national report, attending the CEDAW Committee session and receiving the UN findings for consideration and action by parliament. Further to joint IPU-OHCHR initiatives and resolutions of the UN Human Rights Council, parliaments and parliamentarians are also increasingly robust in their engagement with the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) of their country's human rights commitments.

13. These oversight practices have now been extended to the Voluntary National Reviews that governments submit to the UN High Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development as the main global hub for tracking the implementation of the SDGs. Each year the IPU circulates a survey to the parliaments of the countries volunteering for a review enquiring on how the parliaments have been involved in the process. The results of the survey contribute to the IPU's overall assessment of parliamentary engagement in the SDGs.

Channelling policy recommendations into UN decision-making processes

14. In recent years, the IPU Standing Committee on United Nations Affairs has further expanded its work, providing a space where parliamentarians can interact with senior UN officials, debate and draft parliamentary input to major UN processes, and review parliamentary action towards the implementation of international commitments. In addition, the IPU works to channel into the relevant UN processes led by the General Assembly and its subsidiary bodies the resolutions adopted through the other three standing committees of the IPU (peace and security; sustainable development, finance and trade; and democracy and human rights), as well as the declarations from IPU Assemblies and specialized meetings.

15. Every year, the IPU and the President of the UN General Assembly jointly convene a Parliamentary Hearing at UN Headquarters in New York. The hearing seeks to influence major UN processes and bring a direct parliamentary perspective to ongoing global deliberations and negotiations. The 2018 Parliamentary Hearing at the United Nations, for example, was designed as a parliamentary contribution to the Global Compact for Migration. In 2019, the Hearing will focus on current challenges to multilateralism and the role parliaments can play to address them. These annual hearings and other parliamentary meetings the IPU organizes at the UN provide valuable opportunities for MPs to join national delegations, better understand global challenges, and play a greater role in the elaboration and implementation of international decisions.

16. A good example of IPU facilitating a parliamentary perspective to major UN negotiations is the role it played in the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The IPU and its Member Parliaments were actively involved in the global deliberations leading up to the adoption of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda. Working as part of a group of "friends of governance at the UN", the IPU succeeded in securing a strong commitment to institutional reforms. SDG 16, which calls for "effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels", very clearly entails the need for strong parliaments.

Assessing progress and the way ahead

17. Formally, the institutional relationship between the IPU and the United Nations has gone as far as it can in terms of having identified and utilized all processes and venues that are normally granted to observer entities.

18. An overall assessment of progress in advancing the parliamentary dimension to the work of the United Nations is not easy to make as so much depends on processes internal to each parliament. While the IPU-UN relationship has grown considerably since 2000, as noted in this report, a number of challenges remain:

- Resources (human and financial) to maintain and expand the IPU-UN relationship are limited and not commensurate to the commitments made over the years. The budgetary allocation to IPU's political work at the UN has gone up only marginally over the years.
- As a result of limited resources, many substantive UN processes, particularly in the area of peace and security, are not thoroughly covered. The IPU currently does not have the capacity to follow UN negotiations in depth, advance specific parliamentary input, and connect parliaments to such negotiations in real time.
- Parliamentary delegations to UN meetings are not always geared to the subject matter to be discussed, resulting in sub-optimal contribution to the discussion being held.
- Unlike IPU's other work, which is planned well in advance (e.g. IPU Assemblies, specialized meetings, etc.), following UN processes and mobilizing parliaments and MPs around those processes requires more frequent and informal communications than current tools and protocols can afford.
- The aforementioned IPU guidelines on parliamentary oversight of UN negotiations are not being implemented consistently and in all parliaments.
- In countries where a UN Country Office is in place, parliaments often lack the know-how and authority to interact with the relevant officials.

19. Looking ahead, the challenge for parliaments and the IPU is in identifying the next "frontier" in the relationship between parliaments, the IPU and the United Nations, so that the original vision of the first Speakers conference in 2000 can be fully realized. To this effect, members of the Preparatory Committee are invited to consider the following questions:

- (a) Have parliaments experienced this evolution in their own relationship with the United Nations? Are they able to give input to the international decision making processes?
- (b) Do parliaments feel that they have a greater say and are better able to exercise oversight, and legislate on matters negotiated and decided upon by their governments at the United Nations?
- (c) To what extent are parliaments equipped with mechanisms and tools that can enable them to play a greater role at the international level?
- (d) How can the IPU better assist parliaments in engaging with the United Nations in their home countries and in the international processes in Geneva, New York and around the world?
- (e) A campaign has been under way for several years for the establishment of a United Nations Parliamentary Assembly. What are your views on this initiative, and what would be the added value?