



INTER-PARLIAMENTARY UNION
OFFICE OF THE PERMANENT OBSERVER TO THE UNITED NATIONS

Third Committee

Agenda item 67 (b, c, e):
Promotion and protection of human rights

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Chairperson,

I am pleased to refer to the issue of the promotion and protection of human rights, from the perspective of the democratic process under way on the African continent. Indeed, **human rights** as a cross-cutting issue constitute an essential factor in promoting democracy and development.

As part of its work in close cooperation with national parliaments in Africa, the IPU has identified a series of challenges in terms of placing human rights high on the legislative agenda. Just consider the following questions:

- How to ensure respect for human rights if citizens are not fully aware of these rights?
- How to incorporate the provisions of international human rights instruments into national legislation if the elected representatives are insufficiently informed?
- How to instil a democratic culture if human rights - which are part and parcel of that culture - are not taken into consideration by parliamentarians?

Ladies and gentlemen,

The Inter-Parliamentary Union has sought to answer these questions - at least in part - through a project it launched a year ago **to involve parliamentarians in the work of treaty bodies**. The project's main objectives are ambitious: to involve members of parliament in drawing up the periodic country reports to be submitted to the treaty bodies, in following up their general observations and, in the long term, in taking on board or effectively taking "ownership" of the human rights question and the stakes involved. The project is designed in support of French-speaking African countries.

Given the delicate nature of this topic and the implications of carrying out the project, let me assure you that success is by no means guaranteed. However, the approach which aims to include all relevant stakeholders, as well as the calibre of the experts involved in this project, have managed to capture the interest of and elicit valuable contributions from the participating legislators.

Apart from the general presentations aimed at familiarizing parliamentarians and other participants with regional and international treaties, these seminars encouraged parliaments to take stock of their own activities in the area of human rights and have led them to recognize that tackling the issue requires the establishment of specific mechanisms, such as standing parliamentary committees. Similarly, the participants at the seminars held so far in Togo, Mali, Mauritania and the Republic of the Congo approached, with an openness and political will that we can only salute, certain problems related to human rights violations experienced by their fellow citizens: torture, slavery, female genital mutilation, forced feeding of young girls, rights of groups bound by a common identity, impunity, trafficking in human beings, etc.

In so doing, these challenging issues were brought to the fore, and concrete solutions were proposed, in the form of legislative measures that are part of a national strategy to be implemented by a steering committee.

One of the unique features of these events is the synergy created among parliamentarians, members of national human rights commissions and civil society. In essence, this initiative aims to create a framework of concerted action and reflection among the different stakeholders with a view to addressing human rights issues and proposing solutions in a spirit of transparency and dialogue. In addition, we hope that these thought-provoking activities will prompt the stakeholders to further develop a culture of dialogue, of participating in the management of public affairs in a spirit of exchange and mutual respect.

Chairperson,

Allow me to also draw your attention to **the outcome of this project**. The great interest and general enthusiasm generated at these related events have led to concrete results and prompted other activities. For example, at its sitting in June 2008, the Togolese National Assembly authorized ratification of the Additional Protocol to the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime that aims to prevent, suppress and punish the trafficking of human beings, in particular women and children. In the same vein, a subregional seminar will be held in Togo in mid-January 2009 on the role of women parliamentarians in promoting women's rights and the rights of the child. An intercommunity forum on the promotion of human rights and a culture of peace will be held in November in Mopti, Mali. In Mauritania, a bill will be drawn up on the establishment of a parliamentary committee on human rights in each parliamentary chamber.

These are some of the short-term results that I would like to bring to your attention. It would be remiss of us not to express our heartfelt thanks to the parliaments that hosted the national seminars in the first place, without whose cooperation and support the activities would not have been such a success.

Thank you.