



The Inter-Parliamentary Union is a leading advocate of democracy. It promotes and strengthens the institution of parliament, helping parliamentarians to represent their constituents – freely, safely and effectively.

A Global Voice

National parliaments are the cornerstone of democracy. Parliamentarians are ultimately responsible for the enactment of sound law and supervision of the process of government.

The Inter-Parliamentary Union – IPU – is a global voice and facilitator of multilateral contacts for parliamentarians from over 140 national parliaments. It is the only organization of its kind with this global legitimacy.

It is an independent, self-governing body, largely financed by member parliaments. Its President and Executive Committee are elected by member delegates.

The organization was established in 1889 by enlightened political thinkers who believed that better contact between the parliaments of different nations would help defuse interna-

tional tensions and contribute to the peace and prosperity of the world.

This founding idea proved its worth in some of the darkest hours of the 20th century – and is more relevant than ever today.

The IPU is continually active behind the scenes in the world's hot spots, helping to avoid or resolve conflict and to nurture fledgling parliaments.

It offers the world's 40,000 strong community of parliamentarians a collective voice in international affairs.

It is an increasingly important bridge between parliamentarians and international decision-making in fields such as peace-building or global commerce.

It has been instrumental in driving the greater involvement of women in the parliamentary process.

It watches over the rights and liberty of parliamentarians in democracies where their freedom to speak and act is at risk.

IPU at Work

Members

Over 140 national parliaments are members of the IPU. National delegations reflect the prevailing balance in multi-party parliaments. IPU staffing and programs are financed by member contributions from public funds.

Governing Council

The Governing Council, the plenary policy-making body of the IPU chaired by the President, adopts programs, sets budgets and rules on membership. It is also responsible for electing the President and the Secretary General.

Executive Committee

The Executive Committee is composed of 15 member delegates who reflect

the geographic and political make-up of the IPU and is also chaired by the President. It takes the administrative lead within the organization, preparing recommendations for action by the Governing Council.

Assembly

The Assembly of the IPU is convened twice each year to enable multilateral exchanges between member country delegates. The agenda of each Assembly reflects both current and on-going international affairs. Standing Committees – on International Peace and Security, Sustainable Development, Financing and Trade, and Democracy and Human Rights – report to the Assembly and prepare resolutions for adoption.

Meeting of Women Parliamentarians

Women parliamentarians representing the IPU membership meet in conjunction with the Assemblies to discuss topics relating to the status of women. This group was established in 1978 and became part of the governing structure of the IPU in 1999.

Panel debates

The Assemblies provide an opportunity for less formal panel events that bring together parliamentarians, experts and journalists to discuss topics ranging from child trafficking to the question of nationality and statelessness.



World Conference of Speakers of Parliaments

The Second World Conference of Speakers of Parliaments took place at the United Nations in New York in September 2005. This landmark event, organized by the IPU, brought together the Speakers of the world's parliaments. In a formal declaration, it drew attention to the global nature of many of the challenges democracy faces and the need for national parliaments to participate more fully in the formulation of global responses.



■ Democracy is and will remain a fragile concept in many parts of the world, often perilously flawed in practice. Even where it is well established, democratic institutions are struggling to adapt to the huge new challenges inherent in globalization. The World Conference of Speakers of Parliament in New York drew attention to the emergence of a potentially dangerous “democracy gap”. As national parliaments lose influence, power moves away from the people.



It would be catastrophic to accept any of this. The spread of democracy is the start of a journey – never an end state in itself. And parliamentary institutions throughout history have proved remarkably resilient. What is clear, however, is that many of the perceived threats to our democratic well-being – be they from terrorism or world trade – can no longer be solved within the framework of individual nation states.

The first duty of all parliaments is to deliver the basic building blocks of democracy – representation and accountability. The strong must help the weak in this respect and never accept failure. Beyond this, the challenge of the 21st century is for parliamentarians everywhere to be increasingly international in outlook and capability in order to serve the interests of their constituents.

The goal of the Inter-Parliamentary Union is to help achieve this.

Pier Ferdinando Casini
President of the Inter-Parliamentary Union

Promoting Democracy

■ For the founding fathers of the IPU, world peace and parliamentary democracy were critically interlinked. The work of the organization continues to reflect this belief.

It has played a key role in the development of generally accepted democratic principles of governance and international standards for free and fair elections and the functioning of multiparty systems. Its Declaration on Criteria for Free and Fair Elections and Universal Declaration on Democracy are fundamental components of modern parliamentary thinking.

The collective expertise of IPU members is a unique asset in the spread of sound democratic practice. They provide advice, guidance and many forms of technical support for countries in political transition or in post-conflict situations.

In recent years, the IPU has played an active part in the development of parliamentary systems in over 50 countries, including Afghanistan, Albania, Equatorial Guinea, Iraq, Nigeria, Pakistan, Rwanda, Sri Lanka, East Timor and Uruguay.

Some of the organization's most important work takes place quietly behind the scenes when negotiations between executive branches of government have stalled. Patient, constructive contact between fellow parliamentarians has often brought results when the world's headline writers held out little hope of progress.

Democracy is a universal concept in the sense that all parts of the electorate should have equal rights of representation in parliament and enjoy



freedom of speech. But the application of these principles is still far from universal.

Some countries fear the freedom of expression that is fundamental to the principle of parliamentary debate. Almost daily, courageous parliamentarians put themselves at risk by speaking out on behalf of their constituents. The IPU actively supports those who have been persecuted or jailed for their beliefs.

The IPU has taken a global lead on the involvement of women in the parliamentary process. Many barriers to equality fell in the second half of the 20th century as women began to take their place alongside men at all levels of government. But global statistics show that 84% of the world's parliamentarians are men. In some parts of the world, progress towards gender equality has barely begun.

IPU and the United Nations

■ By virtue of its global reach and democracy-building mandate, the IPU is an increasingly important player in the system of international relations centred on the United Nations.

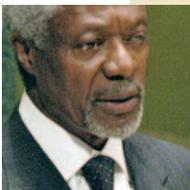
The IPU strongly endorses the role of the UN in promoting and sustaining the principles of democracy. But it also stands apart in the sense that it represents parliaments and is not, like the UN, an inter-governmental organization.

The growing concentration of power in the executive branch of government and international institutions is one consequence of globalization that concerns many parliamentarians and limits their ability to represent constituent interests.

The World Conference of Speakers of Parliament emphasized the growing importance of bringing a parliamentary dimension to the work of the UN and its belief that international



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“Parliaments are the principal repository of democratic legitimacy. Using your legislative powers and your democratic mandate, you can serve as genuine ‘tribunes of the people’ across traditional frontiers. You have a unique role to play in bringing institutions such as the United Nations closer to the peoples they are meant to serve.”

Kofi Annan

Secretary-General of the United Nations

cooperation should reflect input from across the political spectrum.

The IPU’s Permanent Observer status at the UN, granted in 2002, and its exceptional right to circulate documents to the General Assembly are important factors in enabling this.

The IPU works closely with the UN and specialized bodies such as UNDP, UNHCR, OHCHR, UNAIDS, UNICEF and UNDAW.

IPU and the World Trade Organization

■ The huge shifts in macro economics and the dynamics of international trade that have occurred in the last twenty five years have resulted in new global decision-making and control mechanisms. While necessary and in most respects beneficial, they are controversial.

The World Trade Organization is one inter-governmental body that is felt by many to be in greater need of accountability. In effect, its decisions

– which directly impact the lives of millions of people in both the developed and developing worlds – largely by-pass parliamentary scrutiny.

The IPU began a dialogue with the WTO in 2001 to address this situation. This led to the establishment, together with the European Parliament, of a Conference on the WTO, now held annually. The Conference also meets in conjunction with that organization's ministerial meetings.



“The role of parliamentarians is obviously vital in the definition, implementation and explanation of public policy. Parliamentarians are frequently grappling with citizens' concerns about globalization. In other words, economic globalization has taken trade policy out of the hands of experts and put it back in politics.”

Pascal Lamy

Director-General
of the World Trade Organization

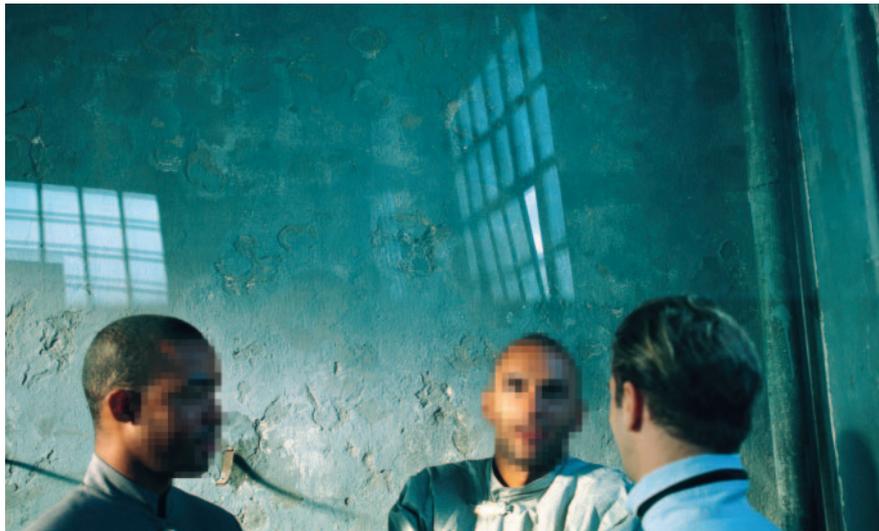
The fourth such conference took place in Hong Kong in December 2005. The consensus is that this parliamentary link is helping to ground WTO policy-making and make the organization more accountable.

Defending Freedom of Speech

■ The 40,000-strong community of parliamentarians includes many brave men and women who have risked careers and even their lives to express their beliefs.

The existence of a parliament does not necessarily ensure the right to the basic parliamentary principle of freedom of speech and debate. Some governments fear this to the point where critics are harassed, imprisoned and even killed. Parliamentary privilege counts for little in such states as many parliamentarians have found to their cost.

The IPU established its Committee on the Human Rights of Parliamentarians in 1976. It is mandated to investigate violations of these rights and seek resolution. Since then, it has examined over 500 incidents in over 100 countries and in a great many cases been able to secure a satisfactory outcome. The Committee works mainly through dialogue with the authorities but will also draw international attention to violations where this is appropriate.



“Without the IPU Human Rights Committee, the situation would be disastrous. It is up to us to make full use of such valuable resources available to MPs.”

Yawovi Agboyibo
leader of the opposition
Togo

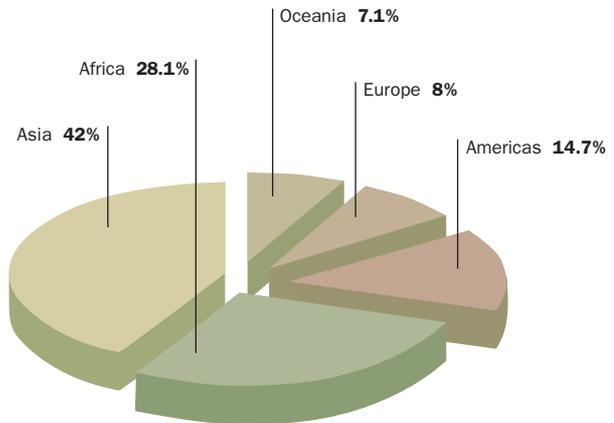


“I was heartened when the IPU took up my case and its mission to N’djamena played a decisive role in my release. I strongly encourage them to continue their efforts on behalf of political prisoners throughout the world who are rotting in dictators’ jails.”

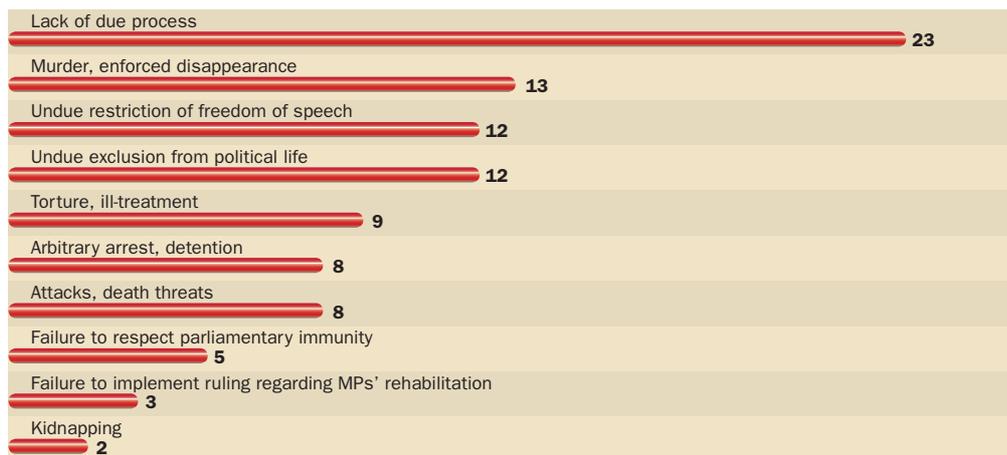
Ngarléji Yorongar
former presidential candidate
Chad

The IPU has stood up for the many imprisoned parliamentarians-elect in Myanmar and is working to secure the release of the members of parliament kidnapped by the guerrilla movement in Colombia. It fought for the release of four Turkish former parliamentarians, including Mrs. Leyla Zana, who were freed in July 2004.

IPU case-load per region, 2005



Types of prejudice suffered by parliamentarians, 2005



"I want to express my heartfelt gratitude to the IPU and salute the struggle for freedom it waged alongside us during all these years of suffering."

Alpha Condé
former presidential candidate
Guinea



"I was held in solitary confinement in Malayan prisons for six years and at the worst moment when my situation seemed desperate I received a note from the IPU. It revived my hopes to know that someone in a far corner of the world who cared about democracy and human rights had taken up my case."

Anwar Ibrahim
former Deputy Prime Minister
Malaysia

Women in Parliament

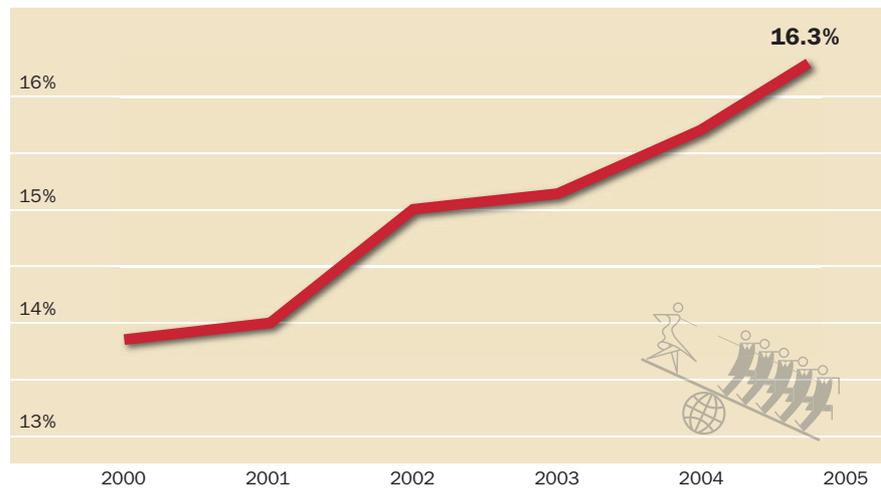
■ The IPU has campaigned tirelessly to improve the status of women and, in particular, to encourage their participation in politics.

The concept of democracy entails equal rights and representation for all sections of the community. The right of women to vote is now established in most parts of the world but their participation in political and parliamentary life still falls far short of

what would be equitable. In spite of a growing number of women in high office, over 80% of the world's 40,000 parliamentarians are men.

Correcting this imbalance will take time and it is clear that the initiative must come largely from women themselves. Wherever possible, the IPU tries to act as a facilitator.

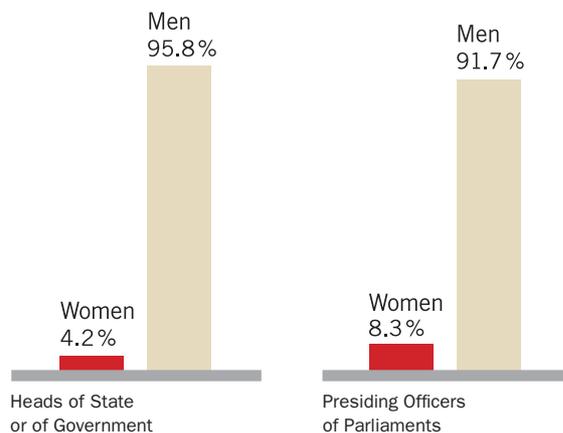
World average of women in parliaments, 2000-2005
Situation in both Houses combined*



* Does not take into account parliaments for which data is not available

Percentage of women in the highest positions of state

Based on January 2005 data



“The achievement of democracy presupposes a genuine partnership between men and women in the conduct of the affairs of society in which they work in equality and in a complementary way, drawing mutual enrichment from their differences.”

IPU Universal Declaration on Democracy



The Meeting of Women Parliamentarians held in conjunction with IPU Assemblies provides a regular forum for the review and discussion of the status of women. Well over 100 women parliamentarians participate in this exchange which is a formal part of the organization's governing structure and reports to the Governing Council.

The IPU also monitors the progress of women in politics around the world. It keeps track of changes in women's right to vote and to stand for election, and it monitors evolving patterns of representation in political parties,

parliaments and governments. Its findings and other gender-related political studies are published on a regular basis. As a result, the organization has become the recognized authority and source of statistical information.

The IPU runs projects to encourage women to participate in politics and offers training and support to them when they have been elected to parliament. At the same time, it brings pressure to bear on countries where women are still denied the right to vote and run for election. It also helps parliaments address specific gender issues.

All You Ever Wanted to Know Abo

■ The IPU is recognized around the world as a unique source of information on parliamentary subjects.

It is a leading publisher of information on parliaments, issues of parliamentary concern, and parliamentary processes – over 50 titles have been added to its catalogue of materials in the last five years.

The IPU publishes a series of handbooks which provide guidance to parliamentarians addressing inter-

national issues such as protection of refugees, child labor and HIV/AIDS. Each provides reference material and models for the development of national legislation and regulatory practice.

The IPU also produces reference books on parliamentary democracy and parliamentary practice written by recognized international experts – standard works for parliamentarians and students of political science and a valuable addition to parliamentary libraries.



A Century of Quiet Diplomacy

■ Frédéric Passy of France and Randal Cremer of Great Britain founded the Inter-Parliamentary Union in 1889. Their firmly-held belief was that the interaction of parliaments, as well as governments, would be a force for good in international affairs.

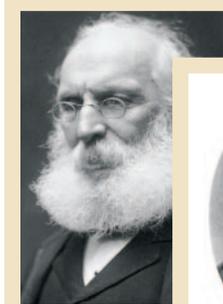
It was essentially an Anglo-French initiative. The first inter-parliamentary conference – which took place at the Hotel Continental in Paris – brought together seven British Members of Parliament and twenty five French Deputies. But the idea quickly took hold and began to attract other parliamentarians – first in Europe and then elsewhere in the world.

Early recognition of the work of the IPU came in the form of Nobel Peace Prizes for its two founders and for

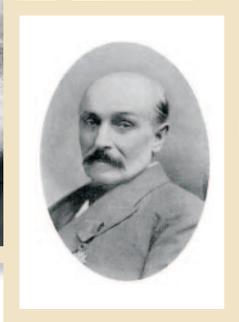
Albert Gobat, a Swiss parliamentarian who was the organization's first Secretary General. In total, eight IPU figures were awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.

The IPU continued to pursue its goals of peace and democracy throughout the turbulent, fast-changing 20th century. Often, in times of war and international tension, it offered a means of continuing communication when dialogue between governments had all but broken down – notably during the Cold War period.

The threats to peace and democracy are different today but quiet, behind-the-scenes diplomacy between parliamentary peers can be of greater value than ever in helping to avoid or resolve conflict.



Frédéric Passy



Randal Cremer



Albert Gobat

Serving the World's Parliamentarians

■ The headquarters of the IPU have been located in Geneva since 1921. In 2003, it took possession of an imposing early 20th century villa located in the suburb of Grand Saconnex. It was renovated by the IPU with the support of the Geneva cantonal and Swiss federal authorities. *The House of Parliaments* accommodates over 30 IPU staff, the Frédéric Passy information center and a fully equipped, multilingual conference facility.

The Secretariat staff is responsible for the day to day management of the IPU, under the direction of the Secretary General. It is drawn from many different parts of the world – as international as the work of the organization itself.

The IPU also has a Permanent Observer Office to the United Nations in New York.



The House of Parliaments

“The efficient functioning of the Secretariat will be increasingly critical to the role and influence of the IPU in the fast-moving world of international affairs. There must be productive dialogue between the legislative branches of governments if the principles of parliamentary democracy are to flourish in an era of geo-politics. Our task is to facilitate that in ways that benefit both developed and developing parliamentary systems.”

Anders B. Johnsson
Secretary General
Inter-Parliamentary Union

The skills and experiences of staff members reflect the IPU's mission. Aside from the selection of activities mentioned in this brochure, the IPU Secretariat also works in areas such as international humanitarian law, freedom of speech, child protection, reconciliation, democratic control of armed forces, combating female genital mutilation, or volunteering.

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