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IPU Committee on
United Nations Affairs

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MEETING OF THE ADVISORY GROUP OF THE IPU COMMITTEE ON UNITED NATIONS AFFAIRS

United Nations Headquarters, New York, 19 November 2007

Introduction

The Advisory Group of the IPU Committee on United Nations Affairs held its second meeting on 19 November 2007, on the eve of the Annual Parliamentary Hearing at the United Nations. At the request of the Group members, the meeting was moderated by IPU Secretary General.

The purpose of the meeting was to discuss implementation of the decisions of the first session of the Committee on UN Affairs which were endorsed by the IPU Governing Bodies at the 117th Assembly. The Advisory Group also discussed its own programme of work for 2008.

Presentation by United Nations Assistant Secretary-General for Strategic Planning

The meeting began with a presentation by Mr. Robert Orr, United Nations Assistant Secretary-General for Strategic Planning. Referring to the problems that the United Nations encounters on many fronts in taking collective action, Mr. Orr highlighted the importance the United Nations senior management attaches to cooperation with parliaments through the IPU. Early consultation with parliaments on core questions served the interests of the United Nations. In that respect, Mr. Orr referred in particular to:

- The need for parliamentary involvement in the economic, political and social aspects of climate change;
- Securing the support of parliaments in addressing the humanitarian catastrophe in Sudan/Darfur and enforcing the international community's responsibility to protect;
- Implementing the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy. For governments to engage with each other on this strategy and give it real substance would require a tectonic shift in the direction of multilateralism, in which parliaments' role was crucial. Parliaments were also instrumental in building counter-terrorism and human rights policies that were compatible and ultimately served the same objective;

- United Nations reform. Parliamentarians can contribute to reform of the UN by lending their unique abilities in forging coalitions, building consensus, shaping agendas and generally moving the legislative process forward.

The Advisory Group then examined the Report of the first session of the IPU Committee on United Nations Affairs and considered ways to put its decisions into effect, as follows:

System-wide coherence of the United Nations: field visits

Eight pilot countries have been selected for the implementation of the unified approach to UN operations at the national level known as "delivering as one", namely Albania, Cape Verde, Mozambique, Pakistan, Rwanda, Tanzania, Uruguay, and Viet Nam. The Advisory Committee agreed that the approach, which is a pillar of current United Nations reform, could be more successful if it benefited from parliamentary scrutiny. The Group suggested that one of the pilot countries could be selected for an initial fact-finding mission in 2008. In organizing the mission it would work in conjunction with the national parliament.

Other United Nations reform

The Advisory Group recommended that in 2008 the IPU should continue to address the democracy gap in international relations, with particular attention to reform of the UN and its main bodies. With respect to the revitalization of the General Assembly, the IPU may wish to convene a round-table discussion in New York on good practices in reforming legislative institutions.

Peace building

The Advisory Group recommended that in 2008 the IPU should organize a panel discussion at United Nations Headquarters in New York on lessons learned in peace-building exercises, with a special focus on the role of parliament in the reconciliation process.

Regional bodies

The Group discussed how, in keeping with the recommendations of the Committee, IPU could take the lead in building greater coherence among regional and other parliamentary bodies. The IPU Secretariat was requested to prepare a preliminary study on these issues. The contribution of Advisory Group members (such as Mr. Mélégué Traoré, with a rich experience as leader of both a national parliament and a regional parliamentary organization) was also encouraged.

MDGs and other international commitments

The Advisory Group agreed that the Committee should strive to monitor compliance with major international commitments, and that an appropriate compliance monitoring mechanism would need to be developed. Referring to implementation of the MDGs as a first priority, the Advisory Group welcomed the fact that the 118th IPU Assembly in Cape Town will have as its main theme "*Pushing back the frontiers of poverty*", and that a special

segment will be devoted to issues relating to child and maternal health. The new Memorandum of Understanding between IPU and UNDP should also contribute to greater awareness and action by parliaments in support of the MDGs.

The Advisory Group recommended that in 2008 the IPU should conduct an evaluation of how development aid is dealt with in national parliaments.

Parliamentary involvement in the United Nations

At its last session, the Committee recommended that parliamentarians be systematically included in national delegations to the United Nations, involving them in international negotiation processes at an early stage, and providing them with comprehensive briefings prior to major international conferences. The Committee also agreed to make a survey of how each parliament organizes its interaction with the United Nations and other international institutions, and how it works with the government in the implementation of international commitments. The IPU Secretariat would draft the terms of reference of the survey, and then seek feedback from the Advisory Group in early 2008. The Group would then evaluate the responses submitted. The Group said that the ASGP should be closely associated with this exercise.

International Day of Democracy

The Advisory Group welcomed the recent decision by the United Nations to designate September 15th as the International Day of Democracy (echoing a proposal by IPU), and said that the IPU should play a leading role in shaping how this event is marked at both the national and international levels.

Hearings during the next session of the Committee

In preparing for the next meeting of the Committee in October 2008, the following two high-ranking United Nations officials could be invited to address the session: Mr. Kemal Dervis, Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and Ms. Louise Arbour, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. Depending on future developments, further consideration may be given to inviting other United Nations officials to participate in the next meeting of the Committee.

Follow-up

The IPU Secretariat will ensure follow-up on the above proposals. It will draw up proposals for a field visit to study system-wide coherence of the United Nations in action. It will prepare panel discussions on reform of legislatures and parliament's role in reconciliation and peace-building. It will also initiate studies on parliament's involvement in development cooperation, on regional parliamentary structures, and on parliamentary involvement in the United Nations.

While all activities of the Advisory Group in 2008 will need to be conducted within existing resources (and that those who participate in the field visit will therefore have to fund their own participation), the IPU Secretariat should prepare a reasonable proposal for the 2009 budgetary exercise.

PARTICIPANTS

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