

# THE WORLD OF PARLIAMENTS



**The Speaker of the Ethiopian House of Peoples' Representatives said:**

**“Our goals: peace, democracy and development”**

Mr. Teshome Toga, Speaker of the House of Peoples' Representatives of Ethiopia, gave *The World of Parliaments* his views on the 120<sup>th</sup> IPU Assembly, to be held in Addis Ababa. See interview on pages 2 and 3. ▀



Photo: IPU/F.Glatz

*“We try to ensure that Ethiopian adolescent girls and young women are not left behind and that they also participate in the democratization and development process”, said Speaker Toga.*

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Photo: Presidency of the Palestinian Authority

*IPU President Dr. Theo-Ben Gurirab met with the President of the Palestinian Authority, Mr. Mahmoud Abbas.*

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## Marshalling support for a safer world

Nuclear non-proliferation, disarmament and security are themes that will be debated by legislators at the 120<sup>th</sup> IPU Assembly. In this issue of *The World of Parliaments*, the United Nations High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, Mr. Sergio Duarte, gives his views on how to tackle these challenges, while the Speaker of the House of Peoples' Representatives of Ethiopia, Mr. Teshome Toga, elaborates on the main issues on the agenda of the Addis Ababa Assembly. Security is a serious concern, especially for women in conflict zones. Ms. Eve Bazaiba Masudi, Senator and Chair of the Senate Committee on Socio cultural Affairs of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), describes the dramatic situation of women in her country. This issue of the IPU Quarterly Review is also largely dedicated to the analysis of the statistics on Women in Parliaments, following elections held in 2008. ▀

## Mr. Teshome Toga, Speaker of the Ethiopian House of Peoples' Representatives

*“Our goals: peace, democracy and development”*

Mr. Teshome Toga, Speaker of the House of Peoples' Representatives of Ethiopia, gave *The World of Parliaments* his views on the next IPU Assembly, to be held from 5 to 10 April 2009 in Addis Ababa.



Photo: IPU/EGlatz

**Q: Why did Ethiopia decide to host the 120<sup>th</sup> IPU Assembly?**

**T.T.:** For two reasons. Last year, we celebrated the Ethiopian Millennium and we wanted to have the IPU celebrate it with us. For certain reasons, we agreed to pave the way for our South African counterparts to host the Assembly in Cape Town last year, thereby allowing us to host the 120<sup>th</sup> Assembly in April this year. The second reason is that the Ethiopian Parliament has been a Member of the IPU for over 50 years, and we felt that it was time for us to host an IPU Assembly.

**Q: What for you is the added value of an IPU Assembly?**

**T.T.:** The IPU Assemblies represent the largest parliamentary forum globally. These important forums for parliamentarians from the world over give us the opportunity to deal with relevant issues and to meet with colleagues from different parliaments. When you network and meet with members of other national parliaments, you complement the overall relations between two countries. Parliaments are the representatives of people and it is important that people have good relationships.

**Q: The general debate of the Addis Ababa Assembly will focus on the role of parliaments in building peace, democracy and development in times of crisis. Can you share with us the Ethiopian experience in this field?**

**T.T.:** Two decades ago, we found ourselves in a situation of conflict and instability. We had to struggle for a long time to make the transition from

an undemocratic, unstable situation of conflict to what we have today. At the same time we had to move from a central economy to a market economy. Peace, democracy, good governance and development are the major national goals that we are trying to achieve. We defined our strategies to achieve peace through institutional mechanisms and legal frameworks to have a multiparty parliamentary democracy in Ethiopia, to eradicate poverty and develop our nation. The efforts we have made over the past fifteen years are bearing fruits and the parliament plays a very important role in this regard. But implementing policies requires a lot of resources. Given the current crisis, parliaments should play a greater role and the choice of this item for debate at the Assembly in Addis Ababa is highly relevant.

**Q: How do you implement democracy, good governance and development?**

**T.T.:** In Ethiopia, we have a highly decentralized administrative system that allows for the participation of all citizens. We are working to ensure that peace and multiparty parliamentary democracy take root in order to build a democratic culture.

**Q: The Assembly will also address the question of advancing nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament, and securing the entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty: What can be the role of parliaments in this respect?**

**T.T.:** This is an issue of concern to all of us. As parliamentarians, we have been advocating non-proliferation of nuclear

weapons and the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty because a nuclear weapon is a weapon of mass destruction. Different views prevail and many legislators from less developed countries feel that there are double standards in this area. All governments should sign the Treaty. Parliamentarians should make an effort to convince national parliaments that have not yet ratified the Treaty to do so in order to facilitate its entry into force.

**Q: The third item is related to freedom of expression and the right to information. What can legislators do to defend these two pillars of democracy and to support some of their colleagues whose rights are not respected?**

**T.T.:** The first thing is to recognize that these are fundamental freedoms which should be respected by all countries and governments. Legislators should create an enabling environment and pass appropriate laws to defend them. In my country, we recently enacted a law on the mass media and the right to information. As legislators, we should ensure that these laws are implemented for all citizens. In building democratic institutions, if people do not have access to these two pillars of democracy, other rights cannot be respected. Under every national constitution there are guarantees that recognize these freedoms, but sometimes it is difficult to implement these rights. Legislators have an important oversight role to play to ensure that they are respected.

**Q: What about legislators whose rights are not respected?**

**T.T.:** The IPU has a track record of fighting for the rights of colleagues whose rights are not respected. National parliaments have an obligation to respect the rights of elected parliamentarians, their participation in the work of parliament and their immunity. The IPU provides a forum to express our solidarity and support to these colleagues. Its Committee on the Human Rights of Parliamentarians has been working hard. The IPU should continue to express itself. It has done a good job and I encourage the Committee on the Human Rights of Parliamentarians, which is one of the most important Committees within the IPU structure, to continue to address this problem.

**Q:** The delegates will also have an opportunity to attend a panel discussion entitled "Adolescent girls: The girls left behind?" Could you elaborate on the problems that Ethiopian adolescent girls are facing?

**T.T.:** Ethiopian girls are facing more or less the same problems as other girls in developing countries. The traditional perception of women has a very negative impact on the development of adolescent girls. The fundamental problem is that traditional culture has imposed a norm whereby adolescent girls should confine themselves to household activities. The general view is that girls cannot achieve what boys can. Once the girls are confined to the house, the next step is to get them married at a young age so they can start their own family. Their participation in development activities is also very limited although they contribute a lot to household development, but that is not recognized. In Ethiopia, in the past decade and a half, we have recognized that adolescent girls should be empowered as stipulated in our Constitution, which provides for equality of men and women. We recognize that adolescent girls should have equal opportunities and access to education. Girls usually depend either on their husbands or their families for their income so it is also important to empower them financially. We have a policy that ensures their active participation in our development effort both in rural and urban areas. We try to ensure that adolescent girls are not left behind and that they also participate in the democratization and development process.

## Education and development: the new passwords of women

Some days prior to International Women's Day, we called the correspondent of a newspaper at the United Nations Office in Geneva to alert him to the latest IPU statistics on women in parliaments. His response was emblematic: "I will see what space my newspaper can give to your story. You know that the international media will have to run after two important women on the same day: Hillary Clinton and Micheline Calmy-Rey". They are respectively the new US Secretary of State and the Swiss Foreign Minister.

Two women were making headlines in Geneva, while in Paris another woman Prime Minister was being received by French President Nicolas Sarkozy: Ms. Ioulia Timochenko. Not to mention a women President in Iceland, called on to save her country from complete financial disaster. In other regions too male strongholds are being conquered by women, such as Latin America, where the Presidents of Argentina and Chile, Cristina Fernández de Kirchner and Michelle Bachelet, hold power, or Asia, where two women candidates were fighting for supreme power in Bangladesh: Sheikh Hasina and Begum Khaleda Zia.

This breakthrough of women in politics is not only evident at the executive level but also at the parliamentary level.

The latest IPU analysis and statistics shows that the world average of women members across all parliamentary chambers reached an all-time high of 18.3 per cent, following elections held in 2008. Although only one out of five parliamentarians elected was a woman, the trend is clear: women are slowly but surely climbing to the highest ranks of power.

In the words of Ms. Rose Mukantabana, Speaker of Rwandan Chamber of Deputies - the parliamentary chamber with the highest percentage of elected women legislators in the world (56.3%) - the novelty is that women have a new password to open the door to the most hallowed of halls: development and education. Two words that adolescent girls and women victims of female genital mutilation (FGM) intend to use to fight this harmful practice until it is eradicated. The same words that women in the Gulf States and in all corners of the world are committed to using to obtain their rights in the name of equality for a fairer and safer world, one free of nuclear threats. But this is another challenge that women *and* men will have to tackle.

L.B.

**Q:** You mentioned cultural perceptions. How would you handle this issue?

**T.T.:** First through education, not only for girls but also for boys and adults. I am referring to civic education, wherein the role of the media is important. In addressing HIV/AIDS or problems related to harmful practices, we must have public debate so that all sectors of society can share their views. We must ensure that society and all "owners" of culture take part in the discussion, in terms of the impact such traditions have on adolescent girls and on the community as a whole. Imposing laws or policies on communities has never achieved much. Only through dialogue and edu-

cation, supported by family laws to protect women and adolescent girls, can we really convince people.

**Q:** Is Ethiopian society ready to tackle traditional practices?

**T.T.:** There has been some encouraging progress. Gradually, society is opening up. Everybody cannot be placed in the same basket. Among youth there is an awareness and understanding of the problem. For older people, however, it will take more time to let go of tradition. Regarding HIV/AIDS, traditional, religious and other leaders have played an important role in educating people and dispelling myths and society is opening up.▶

## IPU President tours Middle East

After convening the Executive Committee in a special session in January to discuss the crisis in Gaza, the IPU President decided to go there in March to verify the situation on the ground for himself. Entering Gaza on 3 March, he saw the results of Operation Cast Lead all around him. Hospitals and schools were in ruins; the once vibrant industrial area in the north was reduced to heaps of smashed concrete and twisted metal. On all sides lay the rubble of ordinary people's homes that had been shelled to pieces by tanks and F16s. Ministries and government offices lay in ruins. The American School in Gaza had taken a direct hit, and shells had landed in the United Nations compound. At a loss for words, Dr. Gurirab expressed his shock at the destruction visible everywhere. He was appalled, he said, at the suffering that had been inflicted on the Palestinian people in Gaza, and especially the thousands of innocent women and children who, once again, had been caught in the line of fire.

Dr. Gurirab went on to meet with John Ging, Director of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for



The IPU President visiting a hospital in Gaza.

Photo: IPU

Palestinian Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) operations in Gaza. Ging briefed the IPU delegation on how UNRWA had coped during and after the violence. They concurred on the need to establish the full truth about what had happened during the conflict, and to ensure that proper reckoning is done.

There can be no hope of doing anything to assist the people of Gaza if food and supplies cannot even enter the territory. Construction materials and spare parts for generators, sewage plants, power infrastructure and medical equipment are all desperately

needed. Dr. Gurirab voiced a new call to the Israeli Government to lift its blockade so that basic humanitarian supplies for the people of Gaza could enter the territory and the laborious work of reconstruction could begin. He reiterated his conviction that we must find a way to put an end to the vicious cycle of construction, destruction, re-construction and renewed destruction on the Palestinian territories.

The President talked with political leaders of Hamas and with members of the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) in Gaza. Himself a politician tempered by a long struggle for nationhood, he stated his conviction that a solution to the conflict could only be found by the parties meeting around the negotiation table, not on the battlefield. He also outlined IPU's work in defence of the human rights of the Palestinian members of parliament detained in Israeli prisons, saying that the IPU was doing everything in its power to secure their release from unlawful detention. He added that he was looking forward to starting activities to provide technical support to the Legislative Council as soon as possible.

### Talks in the Middle East

At the Sharm el-Sheikh international conference to support the Palestinian



The American School in Gaza took a direct hit.

Photo: IPU

economy for the reconstruction of Gaza, Dr. Gurirab met with the President of the Palestinian Authority, Mr. Mahmoud Abbas. On 5 March he was received in Ramallah by the Prime Minister of the Palestinian National Authority, Dr. Salam Fayyad, and Palestinian leaders. The President also met with Mr. Saeb Erakat, Head of the Palestine Liberation Organization Negotiations Affairs Department, to talk about the prospects for peace.

Dr. Gurirab was received at the Palestinian Legislative Council by the President of the Fatah parliamentary block, Mr. Azzam Alahmad, and several members of the legislature, where he emphasized the need for the Palestinian parties and factions to reconcile their differences and establish a unity government.

He was also presented with a petition by 1,500 residents of the Al Bustan neighbourhood in East Jerusalem, who had received eviction orders to make way for the demolition of their homes.

Amman and Cairo were also among the stops on the IPU President's itinerary. In Amman he spoke with the Speaker of the Jordanian Parliament, Mr. Abdulhadi Majali, and in Cairo he was received by Dr. Ahmed Fathy Sorour, Speaker of the Egyptian Parliament. He concluded his tour of the Middle East by addressing the Conference of the Arab Inter-Parliamentary Union in Muscat, chaired by the new President of the Arab Inter-Parliamentary Union, the Speaker of the Shura Council of Oman, Mr. Ahmed bin Mohammed Al Issai. He met the Speakers and leaders of parliamentary delegations from Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Syria and the UAE. Dr. Gurirab also exchanged views with the Speaker of the Palestine National Council (PNC), Mr. Salim Al-Zanoon. ▀

## Achieving a nuclear-weapon-free world: How parliaments can help

*by Mr. Sergio Duarte*

*United Nations High Representative for Disarmament Affairs*

A world without nuclear weapons: what a great achievement that would be. And this is no fanciful "utopia." It is a goal that is finally getting serious attention across the globe and at high levels. This is more, much more, than just a noble "ultimate" goal, but a historic process. At long last, the world may well be starting to take its first tentative steps across the great bridge between disarmament words and disarmament deeds.

The United Nations, of course, has been pursuing this goal throughout its existence, given its specific mandates in the Charter, which the General Assembly elaborated in its first resolution in 1946 to include the goal of eliminating all "weapons adaptable to mass destruction." Today, 189 States have acceded to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), which includes nuclear disarmament amongst its goals. Even recognizing the difficulties ahead, the global norms of disarmament and non-proliferation continue to enjoy widespread support throughout the world.

The outpouring of support for progress in nuclear disarmament has come from a surprisingly wide variety of sources, both governmental and non-governmental. Four former US statesmen—George Shultz, William Perry, Henry Kissinger, and Sam Nunn—did a great service by authoring op-eds in the *Wall Street Journal* in 2007 and 2008 on this issue. We have seen similar op-eds by other distinguished quartets in Italy, Germany, and the United Kingdom. We have seen detailed proposals from the Weapons of Mass Destruction Commission chaired by Hans Blix, and are awaiting the recommendations of the new International Commission on Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Disarmament, established by Australia and Japan. Additional disarmament initiatives have long been introduced in UN General Assembly resolutions.



Photo: United Nations

These, of course, are only a few of such initiatives. Noting that the doctrine of nuclear deterrence has "proven to be contagious," UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon outlined his own five-point proposal for nuclear disarmament in a major speech last October before the EastWest Institute. In brief, he called for the following:

1. All NPT States Parties, especially the nuclear-weapon states, should fulfil their obligation under the treaty to undertake negotiations on disarmament, whether focused on a single convention or a framework of separate, mutually reinforcing instruments. He also called for deep reductions in the nuclear arsenals of the Russian Federation and the United States, who hold the most such weapons.
2. The Security Council's permanent members should commence discussions on security issues in the nuclear disarmament process. They could unambiguously assure non-nuclear-weapon States against the use or threat of use of such weapons. They could also consider convening a summit just on nuclear disarmament, a subject the Council has not addressed in many years.

3. The world needs to strengthen the "rule of law" in disarmament. The Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty should enter into force soon. Multilateral negotiations should commence on a fissile material treaty. The nuclear-weapon States should adhere to the protocols to the various regional nuclear-weapon-zone treaties, and the establishment of such a zone in the Middle East should be actively pursued, in accordance with commitments made at the 1995 and 2000 NPT Review Conferences, and long endorsed by the UN General Assembly.
4. The nuclear-weapon States should make public more information on what they are doing to implement their disarmament commitments, thereby helping to strengthen both accountability and transparency.
5. The world should pursue several complementary measures, including

the elimination of other WMD, new efforts against WMD terrorism, reductions in conventional arms production and trade, and new weapons bans, including missiles and space weapons.

Parliaments everywhere have enormous important roles to play in advancing this global goal, well beyond their responsibilities in ratifying treaties and approving their implementing legislation. They approve budgets. They help set national priorities. They can work to ensure the basic consistency between domestic legislation and international commitments relating to disarmament and non-proliferation. They serve as a forum for debate and for representing the views of constituents. They can work to forge common positions among political parties, while also promoting cooperation among different parliaments, with the help of organizations like the Inter-Parliamen-

tary Union, Parliamentarians for Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Disarmament, and Parliamentarians for Global Action.

Parliaments can also help to inspire their national governments to action in numerous ways, by encouraging them to launch their own disarmament initiatives, hosting meetings, funding studies, promoting diplomatic dialogue, raising the issue in high-level official speeches, and countless other such activities.

Perhaps Jayantha Dhanapala, a former UN Under-Secretary-General for Disarmament Affairs, put it best by once telling an All-Party Group of the UK House of Commons that parliaments "help to give disarmament not only vision, but also some backbone, muscle, and teeth".

He was absolutely right. Parliaments are indispensable to disarmament. ▀

## Violence against women during periods of conflict: The case of the Democratic Republic of the Congo

*by Ms. Eve Bazaiba Masudi  
Senator and Chair of the Senate Committee on Socio cultural Affairs of  
the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC)*

Lying at the centre of the African continent, and covering an area of 2,345,000 km<sup>2</sup>, the DRC is home to some 60 million inhabitants, 52 per cent of whom are women. The country's coveted natural resources, far from enriching the country, have been the cause of repeated wars and indescribable suffering.

For more than a decade, or more precisely since 1996, the DRC has been tormented by a hellish cycle of armed conflict concentrated largely in the country's eastern provinces: North and South Kivu, Maniema and North Katanga. These conflicts have been accompanied by grave human rights violations—victimizing women and children in particular.

According to the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Wom-

en, "the term 'violence against women' means any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life." In the DRC, women have endured, and in some cases continue to endure, situations worse than those described in this definition. Displaced or itinerant women are among the most affected, together with disabled and elderly women.

### Sexual violence and impunity in the DRC

The problem of violence against Congolese women in situations of armed conflict relates in large measure to



Photo: Senate of the DRC

sexual violence. Such violence—during and in the aftermath of conflict—takes the basest forms of cruelty: individual or collective rape; penetration of the vagina with sharp objects, sticks, or other devices; abduction into sexual slavery; and forced incest (between brothers and sisters, sons and mothers, fathers and daughters).

The perpetrators of such atrocities can be counted among the ranks of lawless armed groups as well as regular

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armed forces operating in the country. The DRC has been a theatre of war for more than 10 regular armies and armed rebel groups for at least seven years—some rebelling against, others allied with, the government in power.

Even peacekeeping soldiers with MONUC (the United Nations Mission in the DRC) have taken advantage of women's vulnerable position in conflict situations to obtain sex, in some cases with young girls.

The victims range in age from three months to 80 years.<sup>1</sup> The causes are several— from shameless, obsessive and egotistical sexual need; to belief in obscure fetishistic practices as a supposed source of invincibility; to vengeance and humiliation of the "enemy", using rape as a weapon of war.

The consequences are varied as well:

- physical (haemorrhaging, laceration of the vagina or fistulas, lower limb paralysis) resulting in death for most victims;
- psychological (rejection by society, shame, self-denial, mental depression, suicidal tendencies and other forms of trauma);
- unwanted pregnancies, abortions;
- high rates of HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases; and
- high mortality rates for women and girls.

The suffering of women afflicted with fistulas—open wounds extending from the vagina to the anus—is inexpressible. Apart from continuous haemorrhaging, to such women lose control of their menstrual, urinary, and excretory functions, producing a nauseating, unbearable odour. According to the testimony of NGO physicians attending to such victims, corrective surgery requires multiple interventions and is a prolonged, costly and painful process.

Tragically, the perpetrators of such hateful crimes think little of them, enjoying as they do virtual immunity from prosecution. Some are occasionally identified and arrested but are then released by authorities supposedly responsible for citizens' security. Some of these sociopaths return to

repeat their crimes, sometimes against the very same victims. Such impunity represents an indictment of the country's judicial authorities, which have all the domestic and international legal instruments they need to effect the punishment required.

### Solutions for the eradication of sexual violence against women

In devising strategies to combat this scourge, it is important to take victims' concerns and priorities into account. From their standpoint, urgent priority should be assigned to clinical, followed by judicial and economic, interventions. Security concerns, pending a definitive cessation of hostilities in the areas still subject to open conflict, should also receive priority.

The law criminalizing sexual violence was adopted by Congolese legislators in September 2006. Provisions in the law included amendments to the DRC's Penal Code to expand and clarify the definition of rape—to eliminate ambiguity and to punish all forms of rape more heavily.

This represents an effort by the DRC to combat impunity and comply with relevant provisions of international legal instruments ratified by its government on the specific rights of women, and in particular Article 7 (g) of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, with respect to crimes against humanity.

It is important as well for authorities to take effective measures in this area, such as those indicated in Security Council resolution 1820, entitled "Women, Peace and Security". This resolution is welcome in that it strengthens resolution 1325, criminalizing rape and other forms of sexual violence in armed conflict situations as war crimes and crimes against humanity. It calls for targeted and graduated measures against parties to any armed conflict that commit such atrocities and, for United Nations peacekeeping operations, establishes the principle of zero tolerance to sexual exploitation and violence. ▀

## Women in Parliament in 2008: All-time high of 18.3 per cent

According to the latest IPU survey, the world average of women members across all parliamentary chambers reached an all-time high of 18.3 per cent, following elections and parliamentary renewals in 2008. One out of five parliamentarians elected was a woman.

For the past five years, women have increased their share of seats in 60 per cent of parliamentary renewals, while stagnation or setbacks have occurred in 40 per cent of chambers renewed. Fifteen per cent of parliamentary chambers have reached 30 per cent or more women members. Forty per cent of these chambers are in Europe, one-third in Africa and 23 per cent in Latin America. At the other end of the spectrum, one quarter of all parliamentary chambers have less than 10 per cent women members, and nine chambers have no women members at all.

**Women in Parliament in 2008** *The Year in Perspective*

**At a Glance**

A record number of women took seats in parliament worldwide in 2008. The rate of this phenomenon exceeded two in a century. In all, 36.6 million women stepped up to the national or local level in 100 countries. Women took a 20 per cent greater share of seats than the highest level recorded in 2007. Of these, 10.7 million were elected to 48 national parliaments and 15.9 million were appointed.

115 million women in the several participating states of women's organizations. Which is a record for the number of women in national parliaments. Women took a 20 per cent greater share of seats than the highest level recorded in 2007. Of these, 10.7 million were elected to 48 national parliaments and 15.9 million were appointed.

**Fifteen Percent of Chambers Reach 30 or More Women Members**

The number of parliaments that have reached the minimum target of 30 per cent women members on the first round of elections grows significantly in the past decade. In total, 15 per cent of chambers reached the target of 30 per cent or more women members. This figure has grown from 10 per cent in 2003. The figure has grown from 10 per cent in 2003. The figure has grown from 10 per cent in 2003.

**HIGHLIGHTS**

**Globally**

- A record number of women took seats in parliament worldwide in 2008.
- The rate of this phenomenon exceeded two in a century.
- In all, 36.6 million women stepped up to the national or local level in 100 countries.
- Women took a 20 per cent greater share of seats than the highest level recorded in 2007.
- Of these, 10.7 million were elected to 48 national parliaments and 15.9 million were appointed.

**Regionally**

- In Africa, 15 per cent of chambers reached the target of 30 per cent or more women members.
- In Latin America, 23 per cent of chambers reached the target of 30 per cent or more women members.
- In Europe, 40 per cent of chambers reached the target of 30 per cent or more women members.

**Photo: cover of the publication 'The Year in Perspective'**

The publication in English and French can be ordered from the IPU Secretariat.

<sup>1</sup> Stop the impunity for violence against women, MONUC Magazine, special issue on the occasion of International Women's Month, February–March 2007, page 19.

## The Top Ten

## WORLD CLASSIFICATION

Rank	Country	Lower or single House				Upper House or Senate			
		Elections	Seats*	Women	% W	Elections	Seats*	Women	% W
1	Rwanda	9 2008	80	45	56.3%	10 2003	26	9	34.6%
2	Sweden	9 2006	349	164	47.0%	---	---	---	---
3	Cuba	1 2008	614	265	43.2%	---	---	---	---
4	Finland	3 2007	200	83	41.5%	---	---	---	---
5	Netherlands	11 2006	150	62	41.3%	5 2007	75	26	34.7%
6	Argentina	10 2007	255	102	40.0%	10 2007	72	28	38.9%
7	Denmark	11 2007	179	68	38.0%	---	---	---	---
8	Angola	9 2008	220	82	37.3%	---	---	---	---
9	Costa Rica	2 2006	57	21	36.8%	---	---	---	---
10	Spain	3 2008	350	127	36.3%	3 2008	263	79	30.0%

The IPU statistics on Women in National Parliaments, as at 28 February 2009 can be downloaded at: <http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/world.htm>

## Fifteen per cent of chambers reach 30% or more women members

The number of parliaments to have reached the minimum target of 30 per cent women members set by the United Nations has grown significantly in the past decade. In 1998 just six single/lower chambers had reached the target, all of which were European. Today the figure has grown six-fold, with 24 single/lower houses of parliament having surpassed 30 per cent women members. This distinction is no longer limited to European parliaments: the lineup is now diverse and includes post-conflict and developing States from Africa, Asia and Latin America. In addition, 15 upper houses have reached the target, bringing the overall total to 39 out of 264 chambers (15%).

Rwanda reinforced its position at the top of the scoreboard by electing more than 56 per cent women members to its lower house in September 2008. This is the first single/lower house in history where women hold the majority of seats. That marked an improvement on its previous record, when in its first post-conflict elections held in 2003 it elected nearly 49 per cent women members. Rwanda is joined by Angola (37.3%), Burundi (30.5%), Mozambique (34.8%), South Africa (33%), Tanzania (30.4%) and Uganda (30.7%) as the seven African countries to have reached the target in single/lower houses.

Cuba, New Zealand and Spain consolidated their positions after slightly improving their proportion of women members, with 43.2, 33.6 and 36.3 per cent respectively. While Cuba and New Zealand have no legislated quotas, Spain has a mandated candidate quota requiring political parties to nominate at least 40 per cent women candidates. Austria was the only country to fall off the list after the proportion of women members dropped five percentage points to 27.3 following snap elections in which right-wing parties made gains. Globally, left-wing parties are more likely to

implement special measures to increase women's access to political office.

Belarus and The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia joined the list in 2008, electing 31.8 and 30 per cent women members respectively. It is the first time since the regime changes that took place during the 1990s in Eastern Europe that women have been elected in such numbers. Nepal is the first directly elected Asian parliament to join the ranks, with 32.8 per cent women members. Its new electoral arrangements mandated that at least 33 per cent of electoral candidates overall should be women.

In addition to the single and lower houses, several upper houses reached or surpassed the 30 per cent target in 2008. Swaziland's upper house saw the election and appointment of 40 per cent women members to the chamber, its highest ever. In addition, renewals in Belarus (33.9%), Belize (38.5%), Grenada (30.8%) and Spain (29.9%) resulted in a critical mass of women in each chamber. This brings to 15 the number of upper houses to have reached the target in 2008.

In contrast to these performances, one quarter of all parliamentary chambers (51 single/lower houses and 14 upper houses out of 264) have less than 10 per cent women members. In addition, there are nine chambers with no women members at all (mainly in the Pacific Islands and Arab Gulf States). So while overall averages indicate upward trends, there is little room for complacency with so many parliaments yet to achieve a bare minimum proportion of women members.

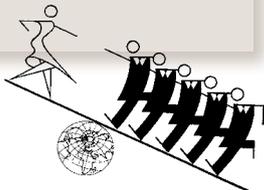
The IPU analysis *Women in Parliament in 2008: The Year in Perspective* can be downloaded at <http://www.ipu.org/pdf/publications/wmn08-e.pdf>

## Africa

In Africa, Rwanda's Parliament made history when its lower house elected a majority of women members, 56.3 per cent, while in Angola women took 37 per cent of the seats in its first post-conflict election. Rwanda reinforced its position at the top of the leader board by electing more than 56 percent women members to its lower house in September 2008. This is the first single/lower house in history where women hold the majority of seats. It improved on the previous record it had set, when in its first post-conflict elections held in 2003 it elected nearly 49 percent women. Rwanda is joined by Angola (37.3%), Burundi (30.5%), Mozambique (34.8%), South Africa (33%), Tanzania (30.4%) and Uganda (30.7%) as the seven African countries to have reached the target in single/lower houses.

## Asia

Asia has registered the slowest rate of progress in terms of women's access to parliament over the past fifteen years, reaching a regional average of 17.8 per cent. However, there were some significant gains for women in 2008. In all, 14 chambers were renewed and women took nearly 19 per cent of the seats on offer. The biggest gain was registered in Nepal, where women took 32.8 per cent of the seats. The new electoral arrangements mandated political parties to ensure that 33 per cent of the candidates chosen from party lists to take seats in parliament must be women, a measure that guaranteed women's success. Pakistan also elected the highest number of women to its lowest chamber, with women taking 76 of the 342 seats on offer. Sixty seats in the parliament are reserved for women, and 16 women won in the competition for open seats. In Bhutan, the first general elections were held to the new 47-member National Assembly, contested under a majority electoral system with women taking four seats. The lowest proportion of women was registered in the Islamic Republic of Iran, where women won just 2.8 per cent of the seats.



## The Americas

Some impressive gains were registered in the Americas in 2008. Women took 26.5 per cent of the seats, on average, for the 12 chambers renewed. Overall, women hold 21.5 per cent of all seats in the region, second only to the Nordic countries. The high annual gains are attributable to the success of women candidates in Cuba (43.2%) and the upper houses in Belize (38.5%) and Grenada (30.8%). In the United States, both houses of Congress held elections, returning their highest proportions of women members: 17 per cent in each chamber.

Women's access to parliaments in the Caribbean States is erratic, as highlighted in Belize and Grenada. While women were appointed to nearly 40 per cent of seats in the upper house in Belize, no women won election to the lower house. Just three women contested the lower house elections (compared with 90 men), none of whom was successful. In Grenada, the biggest percentage point drop – 13.3 – was registered after the number of women members halved from four to two in the lower house. Nevertheless, women were appointed to 30 per cent of the seats in the upper house. With small chamber sizes and the majority systems used to elect lower houses, women's chances of success are limited. However, appointing women to upper houses has proved an important counterbalance to poor electoral results in lower chambers.

## Europe

The consistent rate of progress in Europe was largely sustained in the 19 chambers that were renewed, with women taking more than 21 per cent of the seats on offer. In addition to Spain, Belarus, The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Austria already mentioned, women made inroads in parliament in France, Monaco and Serbia, all of which adopted some form of temporary special measures. Drops in the representation of women were registered in Georgia, Malta and Romania. The change in Romania's electoral system, from a proportional to a mixed member system where most members are elected by majority vote, contributed to a decline in the number of women elected.

## In the press

### Women hold just 18 per cent of Parliament seats

Women hold just over 18 percent of the seats in parliaments around the world, a 60 percent increase since 1995 but a long distance from equality with men in national legislative bodies, the Inter-Parliamentary Union said in its annual report card. "We still feel that progress is slow," said Philippines Senator Pia Cayetano, the President of the IPU Committee of Women Parliamentarians, stressing that on average fewer than one in five legislators is a woman. "The challenges that women face in accessing politics are immense," she told a news conference. "Prejudices and cultural perceptions about the role of society are among the greatest obstacles to women's entry." During 2008, parliamentary elections and renewals took place in 54 countries and women's representation increased to 18.3 percent – up from 17.7 percent last year and 11.3 percent in 1995, the IPU report said... "It is unfortunate that we are not seeing progress being made across all parliaments of the world," IPU President Theo-Ben Gurirab said in a statement. "While there were some impressive gains made in 2008, particularly in Africa, where Rwanda's lower house elected a majority of women members, more needs to be done in those countries where women are largely absent from decision-making bodies."

**Associated Press story in the International Herald Tribune  
06 March 2009**

## Pacific Island States

The lowest return rate for women in 2008 was registered in the Pacific Island States, at less than four per cent on average. The parliaments of Nauru, Palau, Tonga and Vanuatu were renewed, and just five of the 131 seats on offer went to women. Two women won seats in the upper house in Palau; it has been a decade since a woman last sat in that parliament. In Vanuatu, two women were returned to the parliament. In the elections in Nauru, Tonga and Palau's lower house, no woman won a seat. However, in Tonga, one woman was appointed to the cabinet, automatically becoming a member of parliament.

Three other Pacific Island States — the Federated States of Micronesia, the Solomon Islands and Tuvalu — have no women members either. While a handful of female candidates stand for election in these States, few receive enough votes to be elected. The extreme difficulties women face in being elected has led to calls from different sectors for governments and parliaments of the region to take action. A regional dynamic is beginning to take hold where special measures, such as reserved seats for women, are being proposed and debated as the only real policy option to redress the gender imbalances in parliament.

## Women Presiding Officers of Parliament

At the end of 2008, women presided over 31 of the 264 parliamentary chambers (11.7%) worldwide. The proportion of women holding the highest office in parliament has hovered around this mark for the past decade. The highest concentration of women Speakers are in Europe with 13, followed by 10 in the Americas, six in Africa, and a woman Speaker each in Pakistan and Israel. During 2008, a woman took up the post of Speaker for the first time in history in Rwanda, Serbia and Uzbekistan.

## Equality in Politics

An overview of key findings on Women and Men in Parliaments shows that in 2008:

- 1 - Women face greater obstacles entering politics
- 2 - Women bring different views, perspectives and talents to politics
- 3 - Numbers do matter
- 4 - Women and men prioritize differently
- 5 - Political parties do matter
- 6 - Parliaments are not gender-sensitive institutions

### Top five factors that deter men and women from entering politics

#### Deterrents for women

- ° Domestic priorities
- ° Prevailing cultural attitudes regarding the role of women in society
- ° Lack of support from family
- ° Lack of confidence
- ° Lack of finance

#### Deterrents for men

- ° Lack of support from the electorate
- ° Lack of finance
- ° Lack of support of political parties
- ° Lack of experience in "representative functions" e.g. public speaking
- ° Lack of confidence

### Policy areas in which men and women are most active

#### Among women respondents

- ° Women's issues
- ° Gender equality matters
- ° Social and community matters
- ° Family-related matters
- ° Education
- ° Health care
- ° Foreign affairs

#### Among men respondents

- ° Foreign affairs
- ° Economic and trade matters
- ° Education
- ° Justice and constitutional matters
- ° Social and community matters
- ° Infrastructure and development
- ° Public administration

The complete publication *Equality in Politics* can be downloaded at:  
<http://www.ipu.org/PDF/publications/equality08-e.pdf>

## Arab States

According to the latest IPU survey on the world average of women members across all parliamentary chambers, in 2008 the Pacific Island States and the Arab States once again saw the lowest return rate of women legislators.

Only four chambers were renewed in the Arab States. Women took over 9 per cent of the seats, on a par with its overall regional average. Women took the most seats in Djibouti, with 9 out of 56 seats, an improvement of two since women first entered the parliament in 2003. In Tunisia's upper house, women took 13.5 per cent of the seats, imitating the previous configuration. Early elections were held in Kuwait, and as with the previous elections held less than two years earlier, no woman candidate was successful. However, two women were appointed to the cabinet and took up seats in parliament (cabinet ministers also sit in parliament). No woman was among the appointees to the 35-member Qatari Advisory Council. Qatar, along with the Federated States of Micronesia and Saudi Arabia, has never had a woman member.

## In Togo women and men MPs map action for enhanced implementation of CEDAW

"We have a pressing duty to strengthen the action of our parliaments as a whole in promoting women's rights and honouring our international and regional commitments in this area". It was with these words that Mr. Mathurin Coffi Nago, Speaker of the National Assembly of Benin and member of the IPU Executive Committee, opened the seminar organized in Lomé (Togo) in February 2009 by the National Assembly of Togo, the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

The seminar dealt essentially with the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR) on the Rights of Women in Africa (Maputo Protocol).

The seminar provided an opportunity for the parliamentary delegations of Benin, Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger, Senegal and Togo to interact with CEDAW and ACHPR experts

and representatives of international organizations. Togolese human rights organizations also participated in the activities.

Participants placed the values and sociocultural specificities of their respective countries at the centre of their discussions and strove to map action for the enhanced involvement of parliament and parliamentarians in the implementation of CEDAW. They identified information and training, organization of parliamentary proceedings, legislative action, overseeing the executive and partnerships and sensitization as key elements for fostering the implementation of instruments aimed at protecting women's rights.

As part of the closing remarks, Ms. Nassara Djobo - Second Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly - said that the Speaker of the Togolese National Assembly, Mr. Abass Bonfoh, invited parliamentarians from the sub-region to draw inspiration from the seminar in order to engage in "action conducive to the effective implementation of CEDAW".



Photo: National Assembly of Togo

African MPs interact with CEDAW experts

## In the press

### Women account for 19% of MPs in Africa, according to IPU official

The Speaker of the Parliament of Benin, Mr. Mathurin Coffi Nago, who is also a member of the Executive Committee of the Inter-Parliamentary Union, said in Lomé that women account for 19 per cent of MPs in Africa and 18.4 per cent of women MPs worldwide. "Although significant progress had been made over the past years and the figures for Africa can hardly be considered unsatisfactory compared with the figures for other parts of the world, we must recognize that much remains to be done", said Mr. Nago. In his view, it was normal for women - who represent half and sometimes more of the population of countries - "to aspire to more equitable representation in our country's institutions of governance".

**Agence de Presse Africaine (APA - Senegal) - 16 February 2009**

### Joseph Stiglitz points a finger at offshore banking centres

Tax evasion and fraud as well as financial centres that welcome illicit and private funds of States will be targeted by the recommendations of the Stiglitz Commission. "We are not only looking at offshore centres as will probably be the case at the G20 Summit. It will be easy for the Summit to accuse countries that will not be present in London and who therefore cannot defend themselves. We are also concerned with offshore centres that are equally secret and opaque", said Joseph Stiglitz. The Nobel laureate in Economics heads a commission appointed by the President of the UN General Assembly that has been entrusted recommended measures to deal with the economic crisis that is affecting the whole world. At a press conference held at the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) Headquarters in Geneva, Mr. Stiglitz said that States needed to mobilize all possible funds to overcome the crisis. **Le Temps (Switzerland) - 12 March 2009**

## “We have to change the perception that women and politics do not go together”



Photo: Majlis A'Shura of Oman

Her Highness Dr. Mona bint Fahd Al Sa'id of Oman.

In the Gulf States, women parliamentarians have decided to address the challenges they face in their relations with the media. Last December, women legislators and political leaders from Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Yemen met in Muscat (Oman) to discuss partnership with the media and women's associations.

At the opening of the Third Regional Conference of Women Parliamentarians and Women in Political Decision-making Positions of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) States, organized by the Shura Council of Oman and the IPU, Her Highness Dr. Mona bint Fahd Al Sa'id, pointed to the advancement of the status of Omani women and their participation in all areas of economic, social, cultural and political life, particularly since women entered the Shura Council in 1994, a first in the region.

The participants said that by reporting on women's activities in politics, the media not only places the spotlight on the growing and indeed novel role of women, but can also encourage the young generation to enter the political arena. They added that “the media

could greatly benefit from reporting on the work and views of women parliamentarians and from consulting them as information feeders”.

As for women's associations, women MPs highlighted that they played a key role in women's political empowerment and were important allies in the promotion of gender issues. An effective partnership would allow women legislators to benefit from pertinent information and support provided by these associations, and in return, women MPs, in their capacity as lawmakers, could defend issues raised by the grass-roots organizations. During the two-day conference, several participants gave their views to *The World of Parliaments*.

### Women's participation: an essential part of democracy

“The media plays an important role in raising awareness and educating the public about women's participation in political life as an essential part of democracy”, said Mr. Geert Versnick, a Belgian legislator and member of the IPU Executive Committee.



Photo: Majlis A'Shura of Oman

Mr. Geert Versnick, Belgian MP and Member of the IPU Executive Committee.

Ms. Faten Ben Amor, a member of the Tunisian Parliament and First Vice-President of the IPU Coordinating Committee of Women Parliamentarians, underscored the need for women parliamentarians to build a healthy partnership with the media and decision-makers. “Women should give interesting information to the press and journalists should give space to women politicians in the media not only on topics related to women's issues but also seek their views on major political and economic events and other important issues”.



Photo: Majlis A'Shura of Oman

Dr. Gehan Abu Zeid, Egyptian expert in women's rights and development.

According to Dr. Gehan Abu Zeid, an Egyptian expert in women's rights and development in the Arab region, women parliamentarians have an extra challenge in this region. “They live in a conservative culture. Their mobility is limited and they do not have financial support from political parties. This prevents a lot of women from running for election or even thinking about it”. She added that the media rarely supports women parliamentarians or women in leadership positions in general.

Dr. Abu Zeid underlines the fact that parliamentarians have first-hand information, the right connections and direct access to local communities that could interest the media. "But politics is also a sensitive issue. Sometimes, we need to speak about politics without using political words. It depends on the political system. We can talk about politics, but what matters is how we do it".

### The ball is in the women's court

Mr. Mohamed Ayich, a lecturer in communication at the University of Sharjah (United Arab Emirates), stressed that women have to be given a chance to enter parliament. "The image of women politicians is quite new in this part of the world but change is necessary. Society should be aware that women are becoming important actors in different sectors, including politics".

Should women be more proactive? "The ball is in their court and they have to take action and speak out for their rights. Support from the media is therefore very important". How can mentalities be changed in order to give women more visibility? "This is a long-term process. Society has to be educated. Citizens have to understand that women account for half of the population and that they have the right to represent the population in their constituencies. Education through the media, the social structures and educational facilities is needed. Women's capacities must be strengthened on how to face the media, how to give interviews and press conferences, how to appear on TV, and how to be convincing and persuasive", he added.

Ms. Samira Rajab, a member of the Shura Council of Bahrain, who is also a journalist and a columnist, is even more explicit. "Reaching a political position without a solid background and a strong personality is a disaster. We were on the verge of such a disaster with some male politicians so you can imagine what that would be like for women who are not well prepared". She points out that most



Photo: Majlis A'Shura of Oman

*Ms. Samira Rajab, a journalist and member of the Shura Council of Bahrain.*

of the time, women do not vote for women. This is just one of the challenges they have to face.

Can legislation change the situation? "It will not solve the problem. We have to face it openly. We need different education, information, rules, policies and also different media if we want to see a change. We have to start with young girls. For the women who want to go into politics the only way is to learn and to be trained if they want to face political parties, other candidates, and strong male politicians", she concluded.

Mr. Peter Knowles, the BBC Comptroller, argued that in general, to give women politicians a better hearing "we have to be more vigilant about making sure we get them on interviews and discussions. But personally, I think that either parliament or the political parties needs to invest far more in helping members become good public speakers - men and women. I can not think of any great or prominent politician who has not had those skills. Barak Obama proves that public speaking does still matter!"

Ms. Bahia Al Jishi, a member of the Shura Council of the Kingdom of Bahrain and Chairperson of the Council Services Committee, recalls that women are contributing a lot to poli-

tics but there is insufficient space for them in the media. "We came here to discuss with the media what we can do to enhance the image of women in politics. We have to convince them that women are good politicians. We have to change the perception that women and politics do not go together. We have to be proactive and show journalists that women can talk about politics and important issues such as the environment, the economy, defence, and that they contribute to the discussion in general assemblies but also in committees and behind the scenes".

She admits that women must understand that journalists work under pressure and women will have to deal with that. Not to mention that increasing the participation of women in parliament in this region is a controversial issue. "Here also the media can be decisive if they present women as strong advocates of pressing issues. It will change the image of women in society and show that women can deliver".

In Ms. Al-Jishi's view, women do not vote for women "because it is part of the whole culture. It is not that women are against women. It has to do with the image of women among men and also with religious issues. The media can play a major role in changing mentalities". ▾



Photo: Majlis A'Shura of Oman

*Ms. Bahia Al Jishi, a member of the Shura Council of the Kingdom of Bahrain.*

## Rwanda: How men support women in politics

Ms. Rose Mukantabana, Speaker of the Rwandan Chamber of Deputies – the parliamentary chamber with the highest percentage of elected women legislators in the world (56.3%) – shared the Rwandan experience with participants in Oman. Interview:

*Ms. Rose Mukantabana,  
Speaker of the Rwandan Chamber of Deputies.*



Photo: IPU

**Q:** Rwanda is leading the list of the parliaments with the highest percentage of elected women legislators in the world. What is your next challenge?

**Rose Mukantabana:** We must show the world that we deserve the situation we are in today and that we can take Rwandans forward on the road to development, in partnership with our brothers, colleagues and spouses. We cannot afford to fail.

**Q:** Are men supporting you in this initiative?

**R.M.:** Yes, because we consider the question of gender to be a tool of development rather than a means of turning the tables. That is why Rwandan men have continued the process – because the women are not aggressive about

promoting their rights. Our intention is not to take the place men previously occupied or to put men in the place we held in the past. Our aim is to be their partners with a view to our country's development. We complement each other and we make progress together. We want equal rights, as provided for by our Constitution and international conventions. We are striving for equal opportunities and for the removal of all obstacles to development.

**Q:** What are your expectations of the media?

**R.M.:** The role of journalists is crucial in all areas, particularly women's participation. In the past, the media has played a negative role. In our society, the image portrayed in the media was that of

women poisoning their men or fighting with other women. Women used to be portrayed in less than flattering tones. For example, radio commercials – which are a medium used by public agencies and civil society – used to send negative messages. Someone who was unable to clearly decipher the message could easily misinterpret it. We struggled to put an end to that kind of negative publicity. It is possible to send the same message to people using positive language and we are seeing the results of that. Showing naked women or bizarrely dressed women in the media is not the best way to promote women. Rather, it is a way of keeping them in a degrading condition. Today, when women's associations want to put an ad in the media, that is taken into consideration. ▀

## “Education is key”

Najla Faisal Al Awadhi is a member of the Federal National Council of the United Arab Emirates. She is also the Deputy CEO of Dubai Media Inc., Dubai's most powerful media group, and manages one of the network's six channels – the English-language one.

*Ms. Najla Faisal Al Awadhi,  
a journalist and member of the Federal National Council of the United Arab Emirates.*



Photo: IPU

**Q:** What is the major challenge for women in the Arab world?

**Najla Faisal Al Awadhi:** The major challenge we face is a lack of awareness about women's rights and responsibilities in society. Education creates in women the drive to go out and become part of the political system and to be actively engaged in it. Many women are not aware of their rights enshrined in the constitutions of our countries and in most constitutions of the Gulf

States. Educating women is one thing but it is also important to educate the rest of society: the men. This is because we often have gender roles that are set in stone: the role of the woman is usually limited to the home and raising children and the role of the man is to deal with issues such as politics and the economy. This is changing slowly. In the UAE, women entered the parliament in 2007. We have women ministers and one of them has the portfolio of foreign trade. Women are moving into this

field but they still represent a minority. There must be an emphasis on establishing education systems that make women conscious of their rights, their political participation and the importance of their engagement in all fields. Most Arab countries are moving today in the direction of sustainable development, which is tapping into all of our human resources, regardless of gender. We need to educate not only women, but the public in general, because Arab societies are traditionally patriarchal,

which means that most of the decision-making roles remain with the men. We also need to win over the men and convince them that women are their allies and their partners and that if we work together, we can achieve more.

**Q: Are men prepared to accept women working with them?**

**N.F.A.:** Some enlightened men are. In the UAE we are blessed because if it were not for the efforts of the country's leaders - all of whom are men - to empower women, we would not be nine women in parliament. There is a large group of men who support women, but there is also a large group of men and women who do not believe that women can actively contribute to politics as men can. This is changing slowly and the best way to change things is to lead by example and let the results speak for themselves. We should just show that women can do exactly what men can. It is all about access to education, equal opportunities and role models. This is the best way to change things.

**Q: Do you give space to women parliamentarians in your media?**

**N.F.A.:** We don't give them enough space and I am the first one to say that! I am proud to say that in the channel that I manage, women hold all of the senior strategic posts. Not because they are women but because they are highly competent and work very hard. These women are Emiratis from the country and not expatriate women. We are working on doing more programmes that deal with social issues. Media companies always have to strike a balance between public service and profit. It is not an easy task because most people prefer movies and music and it is up to us as media people to also create content that is intelligent and present important issues in an entertaining way so we do not lose our audience.

**Q: Do journalists give space to women?**

**N.F.A.:** It is a problem, because in our societies, a lot of the political programmes which could interview women parliamentarians happen to be produced by men. In the media industry, on serious shows, we need to create a better gender balance to include women. ▶

## “Women have to face social and traditional challenges”



Mr. Nasser Alsarami, Head of Media at Al Arabia TV Station.

Mr. Nasser Alsarami, Head of Media at Al Arabia TV Station, encourages women to come and speak to the media. He is also interested in developing with them and with the IPU a database of women legislators who could be interviewed by Al Arabia on pressing issues, at any time.

**Q: What are the main challenges for women MPs in the Arab world?**

**Nasser Alsarami:** They have to face social and traditional challenges. The image of women in politics is not understood by people. They still think that women can do only certain things and not others. For example, people look at business women more seriously. They think that business women are doing something great, but when it comes to women in politics, that is a different matter. Women in the region need to do a lot to prove their ability in politics and justify their participation in social issues. They have to be in the picture and for that they have to speak out to the media, to the people. They should not stay on their own and only organize their own meetings, but they should participate in conferences and other activities, be it in the region or outside the region. They have to show what they can do and achieve, because in this region, the image of women is that they can only do limited things.

**Q: Are the different societies in the Arab world ready to give women political space?**

**N.A.:** Compared to five years ago, a lot

of things have been achieved, but there is still a lot to do. If you wait for people to be ready, you will not get anything done. Things just happen and women have to deal with it.

**Q: Are these societies ready to vote for women in politics?**

**N.A.:** I think that they are not ready to fight for a woman to be elected, but that does not mean that women cannot be in parliament. It is a great idea to have women in parliament. But we have to start with fair elections, otherwise people will not understand why women are brought into the election directly.

**Q: Does the media give sufficient space to women politicians?**

**N.A.:** Yes. At Al Arabia, we invite women politicians on our different programmes. It is also up to women to come and speak to us about their agendas and programmes. During the recent elections in the region, we had women candidates on our screens. But women also have to campaign by themselves. Maybe from this gathering ideas will come out and women will benefit from training to deal with the media. ▶

## *Political will at the centre of achieving zero tolerance to FGM*

How to put an end to female genital mutilation (FGM)? With political will, which is at the centre of achieving zero tolerance to FGM, say the Inter-African Committee on Traditional Practices Affecting the Health of Women and Children (IAC), the IPU, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the Geneva Department of Institutions (DI). To follow up on the event organized last year, the four organizations held an interactive panel discussion on Friday, 6 February 2009, in Geneva, on the occasion of the International Day of Zero Tolerance to FGM. It was moderated by journalist Catherine Fiankan.

"The panel discussion is an expression of political will to continue and accelerate efforts to put an end to this intolerable form of violence against women and girls", said the IPU Secretary General, Anders B. Johnsson. Legislation is the first step in ending FGM. It is a public statement to say that this practice is illegal and prohibited. It allows girls to say no and to claim the right to protection by the State. The first objective is to ensure that all countries concerned pass legislation against FGM and that there is no difference in treatment from one country to another.

Ms. Maria Roth-Bernasconi, a member of the Swiss Parliament, recalled that FGM is practised primarily in North-East and West Africa as well as in some regions of the Middle East. However, migration flows have caused these practices to spread beyond the countries of origin. "FGM constitutes a grave violation of human rights. It is an expression of the gender inequality which is deeply rooted in the social, economic and political structures of the countries where they are practised". In the case of her country, FGM is considered under the Swiss Criminal Code as "bodily harm". "The legal situation in Switzerland was examined in the light of two legal opinions commissioned by UNICEF Switzerland. They concluded that it was preferable to include in the law a specific reference to this criminal act. "This is why I brought a parliamentary motion", she said

Ms. Sylvia Ekra, Gender Officer at IOM, underlined that FGM has become

a reality in Europe. "We know that there is no simple causal relationship between migration and the abandonment of FGM. It is not because these populations now live in Europe that they will abandon the practice".

As a concrete example, the Director of the Human Right Office at the Geneva Department of Institutions, Ms. Fabienne Bugnon, explained that Switzerland has to do all it can to provide people who find refuge in its territory with protection, information and care. "There are approximately 7,000 women from countries with a high FGM prevalence living in our country, approximately 1,200 in Geneva alone. This is a sufficient number for us to carry out prevention programmes".

Ms. Berhane Ras-Work, Executive Director of the IAC, played a significant role in having 6 February proclaimed as

International Day of Zero Tolerance to FGM seven years ago. Changing social attitudes and practices and political will go hand in hand. "Negative attitudes and practices towards women are so internalized that they manifest themselves in different forms and degrees of violence without much or any challenge from the community. Women have submitted to this social dictate, sacrificing their well-being and that of their daughters just to conform to social dictates". For lack of knowledge and alternatives in life women themselves tend to be strong guardians of the practice. "The cruelty and the consequences of FGM are tolerated in the name of tradition", she added.

This is a tradition that can be traced as far back as the time of the pharaohs of Egypt. Contrary to popular belief, FGM it is not encouraged by any religion. To put an end to this tragedy which affects three million girls every year, the IAC is calling for the full involvement of government leaders, legislators, local and traditional chiefs, religious leaders and civil society. ▀



The IPU, the IAC, IOM and the Geneva Department of Institutions (DI) launched a joint publication on how to put an end to female genital mutilation.

## Quotable quotes:

### Norwegian action plan: a living tool

"The Norwegian action plan has been a living tool. The first one was launched in 2000, and the third and current plan will run until 2011. Its main objective is prevention. The focus is on changing attitudes through dialogue and dissemination of information with the involvement of the groups concerned. Changing perceptions and attitudes takes time, but there is evidence that this will produce sustainable change. The action plan contains 41 measures that can be grouped into six main categories: capacity-building and transfer of knowledge; prevention and opinion-building; available relevant health services; intensified efforts during holiday periods; effective enforcement of legislation; and strengthened international action. FGM has been outlawed since 1995 for Norwegians. Effective enforcement of legislation is necessary. It is both a duty and a right for schools, health services and other relevant institutions to disclose information to the child welfare service".

**Ms. Bente Angell-Hansen, Ambassador of Norway in Geneva**

### Burkina Faso: a forerunner in the fight against FGM

Burkina Faso is one of the pioneering African States engaged in the fight against FGM. For 18 years it has put in place several institutional and normative measures to sensitize, dissuade and sanction potential or actual perpetrators of FGM. Several ministries have been entrusted with coordinating their efforts in order to put an end to this practice. From a legal perspective, the Constitution of Burkina Faso upholds the right to physical integrity of persons and the fundamental principle of equal rights. In application thereof, the principal deterrent is the Criminal Act of 1996, which facilitated a review of the Criminal Code and led to the introduction

of provisions that punish by way of fine or imprisonment the perpetrators and accomplices of persons found guilty of acts that violate the physical integrity of the female genital organs.

**Ms. Clarisse Merindol Ouoba, Legal Adviser, Mission of Burkina Faso in Geneva**

## Quotable quotes:

### Egyptian effort to eradicate FGM

"A significant ministerial decree issued by the Minister of Health and Population in June 2007 not only fully criminalized FGM and filled legal loopholes that now prohibit health professionals and others from performing the practice in both government-run and private hospitals, but also prohibited every doctor and member of the medical profession, in public or private establishments, from carrying out a clitoridectomy, as any circumcision will be viewed as a violation of the law and will be punished".

**Mr. Khalid Emara, Minister at the Egyptian Mission in Geneva**

## "The economic cost of FGM"

Findings from a WHO multi-country study in which more than 28,000 women participated confirm that women who had undergone genital mutilation had significantly increased risks of adverse events during childbirth. A striking new finding of the study is that FGM has negative effects on the newborn babies of some women who had undergone FGM. Most seriously, death rates among babies during and immediately after birth were higher for those born to mothers who had undergone genital mutilation compared to those who had not. The consequences of genital mutilation for most women who deliver outside the hospital setting are expected to be even more severe. The high incidence of post-partum haemorrhage, a life-threatening condition, is of particular concern where health services are weak or women cannot easily access them. As a follow-up to this study, WHO wants to focus on developing training materials for medical personnel using electronic media. The Organization is also continuing research on the economic cost of FGM, because that is sometimes the only argument that governments understand.

**Dr. Heli Bathija, Area Manager for the African and Eastern Mediterranean Regions, Department of Reproductive Health and Research, World Health Organization**



## Algeria

The Constitution was amended in November 2008, lifting the two-term presidential limit and creating the position of Vice-President. The post of Prime Minister was downgraded to the same level as other ministerial posts, with the premier no longer able to choose cabinet members or present cabinet's programme. Other amendments were introduced to ensure a more equitable political representation of women.

The amendments were adopted by parliament, in lieu of a constitutional referendum. On 12 November, a joint session of both chambers approved the amendments by 500 votes to 21 with eight abstentions. The amendments were ratified by the President on 15 November.

## Ecuador

On 25 July 2008, the Constituent Assembly published a 444-article draft constitution. A referendum on this draft took place on 28 September, in which over 90 per cent of the 9.3 million registered voters took part, with 64 per cent of voters approving it. The new Constitution, the country's 20th since it gained independence in 1830, entered into effect on 20 October upon being published in the official gazette.

The new Constitution provides for a 124-member unicameral National Assembly with a four-year term. Members are to be elected through a mixed electoral system: 103 members under the majority system in multi-member constituencies and 21 under the proportional representation system (15 in a nationwide constituency and six representing Ecuadorians abroad). The incumbent President is now allowed to run for re-election immediately upon expiry of his current term of office. The President may dissolve the National Assembly within the first three years of its four-year term. The National

Assembly may remove the President from office. In both cases, parliamentary and presidential elections will automatically be called.

Once the new Constitution entered into force, the National Congress ceased to function. A Legislative and Oversight Commission, comprising the members of the Constituent Assembly, was tasked in the interim with performing the main functions of the legislative branch until the National Assembly is established. Early parliamentary and presidential elections stipulated under the new Constitution are due to be held on 26 April 2009.

## France

On 21 July 2008, a series of constitutional reforms proposed by President Nicolas Sarkozy were approved by a joint session of the National Assembly and the Senate by 539 votes to 357, one vote more than the required three-fifths majority. Parliamentarians had been divided

over a plan to allow the President to address parliament, which had not been permitted since 1875 due to the separation of powers between the executive and legislative branches. The amendments give parliament more power to oversee the government and more control over its own agenda. Parliament can also veto certain presidential appointments. The President of the Republic cannot serve more than two consecutive terms.

## Maldives

On 26 June 2008, the Special Majlis (constitutional assembly) adopted a new constitution. On 7 August, President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom ratified it, paving the way for the country's first multi-party presidential elections, held on 8 October. Under the new Constitution, the President can serve only two terms. President Gayoom, who had been President since 1978, was allowed to contest the elections. He was defea-



French National Assembly (above) and French Senate (below).

ted by Mr. Mohamed Nasheed of the Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP). Parliamentary elections were constitutionally due before 15 February 2009 and newly elected members due to be sworn in by the end of February. However, at the time of going to print, the People's Majlis had not passed the electoral law which will determine the statutory number of members of the new legislature, widely expected to increase from 50 to over 70 directly elected members.

## Russian Federation

On 5 November 2008, President Dmitry Medvedev proposed constitutional amendments extending the term of office of the President and the State Duma by one year to six and five years respectively. After obtaining the approval of parliament and the regional legislative assemblies, President Medvedev signed the amendments into law on 30 December. The following day, they entered into force upon publication in the official gazette.

## Senegal

On 29 July 2008, the National Assembly adopted an amendment to Article 27 of the Constitution to extend the presidential term from five to seven years, although the same article stipulates that the clause "can only be changed through a referendum". After approval by the Senate and a joint session of both chambers, President Abdoulaye Wade promulgated the amendment on 21 October. Meanwhile, on 12 and 15 October respectively, the National Assembly and the Senate voted to modify Article 62 of the Constitution to reduce the term of the Speaker of the National Assembly from five years to one year, with immediate effect. Between 2000 and 2008, the Constitution was modified on average every six months.

## Turkmenistan

On 23 April 2008, President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov announced that major constitutional amendments would be introduced in September 2008. On 26 September, those amendments were adopted by the People's Council (Khalk Maslahaty), the supreme representative body comprising over 2,000 top officials and elders created in 2003 under former president Saparmyrat Niyazov. The People's Council then unanimously voted to dissolve itself and transfer its powers to the President and the parliament, the Assembly. The Assembly can now once again amend and adopt the Constitution. It had been divested of this power in 2003. It can also call referendums and presidential and parliamentary elections, ratify international treaties and address issues concerning the demarcation of the country's borders.

The amendments also increased the membership of the Assembly from 50 to 125 members. Individuals nominated from legally registered political parties and political movements, as well as public associations and assemblies of voters, are eligible to run for elections. Previously, only the members of the Democratic Party of Turkmenistan, the only legal party in the country, had been eligible.

## United Arab Emirates

On 1 December 2008, the Federal Supreme Council (the highest political and policy-making body of the federal government) approved constitutional amendments transforming the Federal National Council (FNC - the federal parliament) into a full-fledged legislative body with powers to scrutinize government action. The term of the FNC was extended from the current two years to four. The incumbent members who were elected in December 2006 will serve until February 2011.

## CONTACTS

### Inter-Parliamentary Union

*The House of Parliaments*  
5, chemin du Pommier  
P.O. Box 330  
1218 Grand-Saconnex  
Geneva - Switzerland  
Tel. (+4122) 919 41 50  
Fax (+4122) 919 41 60  
e-mail: [postbox@mail.ipu.org](mailto:postbox@mail.ipu.org)

*Office of the Permanent Observer to the United Nations in New York*  
Inter-Parliamentary Union  
Room 3002,  
220 East 42nd Street  
New York, N.Y. 10017  
USA  
Tel. (+1) 212 557 58 80  
Fax (+1) 212 557 39 54  
e-mail: [ny-office@mail.ipu.org](mailto:ny-office@mail.ipu.org)

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### Editor-in-chief:

Luisa Ballin

### Assisted by:

Akiyo Afouda  
Stara Ahmidouch  
Mohamed Amani  
Bérénice Auffret-Pereira  
Norah Babic  
Julie Ballington  
Catherine Blondelle  
Martin Chungong  
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Valeria Sistek  
Alain Valtat  
Hiroko Yamaguchi

### Website:

Pieyre Castelier  
Serguei Tchelnokov  
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The following are highlights of activities the IPU Technical Cooperation Programme has conducted in support of parliaments since the last edition of *The World of Parliaments*.

## Sierra Leone: Parliamentary strategic planning

In December 2008 the IPU and UNDP pursued their cooperation with the parliament, helping it to develop a strategic plan. Study visits for members of the parliament were organized to Kenya and Uganda. During the visits participants received briefings on the goals and objectives of a strategic plan, the outcomes of a strategic management cycle within Parliament, the process for developing a plan and lessons learned. In December 2008 and January 2009, the IPU and UNDP organized two missions during which the parliamentary authorities and senior secretariat staff were acquainted in greater details with the intricacies of a strategic plan. The missions also assisted the authorities through participatory exercises in developing a draft mandate, mission, and vision as well as identifying the parliament's core values for inclusion in the parliament's strategic plan.

## Global mapping of legislative strengthening programmes

In December 2008 the IPU completed a draft study, which began in September, to assess the feasibility of creating a database to map legislative strengthening projects. Behind the feasibility study is the IPU's view that a reliable, centralized source of information would facilitate more efficient planning, reduce the risk of overlap and duplication and enhance sharing of expertise and lessons learned.

## Conclusion of new agreements for continued assistance to national parliaments

In December 2008, the IPU concluded two new agreements. The first, in partnership with the European Commission and the Government of Equatorial Guinea, deals with the implementation of a project intended to build on an earlier phase of the project that began in 2004. The project, which falls under an overall programme designed to enhance governance in that country,

aims to: strengthen the capacities of parliamentarians, particularly through parliamentary committees; train parliamentary staff by supporting and encouraging the involvement of women parliamentarians in political activities and building the parliament's capacity to promote gender equality; and strengthen the parliament's representational capacity, including that of its members. The second agreement, concluded with UNDP in the Maldives, provides for the implementation of a three-phase project that will assist the parliament in preparing a Code of Ethics, drafting a strategic plan and devising a staff development plan.

## Cambodia – Promoting parliamentary input to the Brussels Programme of Action (BPOA) 2001–2010

Within the framework of the joint IPU-UN Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States (UN-OHRLLS) initiative to promote parliamentary input to the BPOA, the IPU organized a national workshop with special emphasis on commitment 2 of the BPOA relating to good governance. The workshop was held on 16 February 2009 in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, and provided an opportunity for participants to familiarize themselves with the BPOA and examine

areas in which the parliament could lend important support and provide input to its implementation. During the workshop, a detailed presentation on actions taken by the executive in Cambodia to implement the BPOA was given by the national LDC focal point from the Ministry of Planning. It provided an opportunity for participants to provide input to a national action plan for the parliament BPOA support group, including ways in which the IPU, UN-OHRLLS, the extended UN family, the international community and Cambodian civil society could support its work.

## Training staff in legislative drafting and legal research in Cambodia

In December 2007, the IPU organized training on legislative drafting and legal research for 16 legislative specialists, staff of both the National Assembly and the Senate of Cambodia. In February 2009, a follow-up complementary training was organized for the same legislative specialists with the additional benefit of providing them with skills to themselves conduct future training for new colleagues, thereby promoting sustainability. The overall aim of the training is to enhance the research and legal analysis skills of the identified staff through practical, hands-on demonstrations and guidance.



IPU training of staff at the National Assembly and the Senate of Cambodia.

Photo: Parliament of Cambodia