



INTER-PARLIAMENTARY UNION

Statement before the Third Committee of the General Assembly

Agenda item 69 (b.c): Promotion and protection of human rights

Introduced by Mr. Alessandro Motter, Senior Advisor

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CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Chairman,

Democracy and human rights are mutually reinforcing concepts and parliaments are at the centre of both. As the institution by which the sovereign people take part in State's affairs, parliament embodies democracy. At the same time, parliament is uniquely placed to helping make human rights a reality for everyone.

The IPU increasingly assists parliaments in taking on that responsibility. Our approach is based on two premises. First, there has to be respect for the human rights of parliamentarians without which they cannot effectively defend the rights of those whom they represent. Second, parliamentarians need to be fully aware of international human rights standards without which they cannot effectively ensure that such standards are respected at the national level.

Our efforts to protect parliamentarians and their parliamentary mandate are spearheaded by the IPU Committee on the Human Rights of Parliamentarians - whose current caseload consist of 392 parliamentarians in 39 countries. The work of this Committee shows that members of parliament continue to be under threat in many parts of the world and that speaking out is not an exercise without personal risk. Indeed, a number of cases concern the murder, torture, death threats and attempts on the lives of parliamentarians. Each time, impunity is a major concern. But the Committee does not only deal with violations of the fundamental rights to life and to security. It also addresses other violations, mostly the arbitrary application of legal procedures resulting in the loss or the suspension of the parliamentary mandate.

The Committee on the Human Rights of Parliamentarians has an impressive track-record and has often been able to help bring about a satisfactory settlement in the cases which have been submitted to it. Indeed, irrespective of the type of violation, parliamentarians, or their representatives, increasingly turn to the Committee because they know that it can help provide protection or redress.

With respect to my second point today, concerning IPU efforts to strengthen the role of parliaments in the implementation of international human rights norms at the national

level, it all comes down to a single question: How can parliaments ensure that reporting procedures which take place before the UN Human Rights Council and UN human rights treaty bodies - in conference rooms often far away from those countries whose situation is being examined - are fully connected to national realities?

Practically, parliaments can take the lead in critically reviewing the draft reports that the Executive has prepared for submission to international monitoring committees. Likewise, it is important that the recommendations that these committees adopt are brought back to parliament and seriously debated, in particular because they invariably require legislative action and budgetary means. The recommendations are also very useful in that they give parliaments a concrete tool to hold government to account for their human rights performance.

It is also important that parliamentarians see for themselves how representatives of the Executive present and defend their report before the monitoring bodies. Such direct exposure to the process will help them better understand the concerns that these committees may express and from there facilitate an informed debate in parliament.

State parties have to report every four or five years on implementation of the human rights treaties which they have ratified. There is a big risk that during these large intervals international recommendations end up in a drawer collecting dust. Parliaments can help turn the reporting cycle into a continuous one. They can ensure that recommendations remain on the agenda by asking the Executive for yearly progress reports.

We are keenly aware that we are still far from a situation in which parliaments are strong and continuously involved in UN human rights reporting procedures. Indeed, more often than not, parliaments are unaware of the existence of the UN Human Rights Council or the treaty bodies. They are hardly ever involved in the preparation of national reports and most of the time they appear unaware of the recommendations or concluding observations that the UN adopts regarding their country situation.

To help remedy all this, the IPU has become increasingly involved in helping parliaments make a more substantive contribution to the international human rights monitoring system. The IPU is familiarizing parliamentarians at the global level with international human rights norms and mechanisms. In recent years, the IPU has started to focus also on helping parliaments directly at the national level, in particular by assisting them in their role to see to it that international recommendations are effectively implemented at the national level.

We are confident that such efforts bring the international human rights protection system a little closer to home, which is where human rights matter ultimately. Indeed, the yardstick for success is the extent to which the human rights discourse has led to the concrete improvement in people's lives. The IPU is fully committed to working for this purpose with parliaments who take an interest in promoting human rights.

I thank you for your attention.