



INTER-PARLIAMENTARY UNION

THE PARLIAMENTARY TRACK TO LDC IV

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Mr. Chairman,

I would like to begin by thanking you and the Bureau of the Preparatory Committee for the Fourth UN Conference on the Least Developed Countries for inviting me to make this presentation.

The IPU is proud to have been called upon to help organize the parliamentary track to LDC IV. We very much value our close cooperation with the Office of the High Representative and are grateful to the member States for making it possible for us to be involved in this process from the very beginning.

As the world organization of national parliaments, including those of virtually all the LDCs, we have worked with the UN to help advance the development agenda that encompasses agreements such as the landmark Brussels Programme of Action.

Before I go on to present the main features and objectives of the parliamentary track, I would like to give you a sense of where we are coming from and what we have done over this past decade to support the BPOA. That context will help explain why we are keen to see a strong PoA emerge from the Istanbul Conference in May.

History of parliamentary engagement in the BPOA

The concerns of parliaments received only scant attention in the BPOA. Indeed parliaments were not at all involved in the process leading up to the BPOA, nor were they mentioned in the 2001 outcome. From the very beginning then, we believe the BPOA presented with a weak spot, in that it did not recognize the very specific role of parliament as a key institution of good governance (Commitment 2) which is - or should be - responsible for overseeing the implementation of such commitments through the budgetary process, the enactment of appropriate legislation and, more generally, through its representational role that aims to help bring the concerns of *all* citizens to bear on the policy-making process.

In order to build greater political support for the BPOA, the IPU has worked to raise awareness of the BPOA among its members and ensure a parliamentary contribution to its implementation. Back in 2001, the relationship between the IPU, parliaments and the UN was not as developed as it is today. But in spite of that some 80 MPs attended the Brussels conference, and the IPU organized a parliamentary roundtable to help MPs familiarize with the provisions of the new programme. The IPU also brought a parliamentary message to the conference.

Following the conference, the IPU's full membership endorsed the BPOA in a resolution issued in 2003 (108th IPU Conference, Chile) which also stressed the need for the effective implementation of Commitment 2, on good governance. In September 2006, as part of the high-level mid-term review of the implementation of the BPOA, the IPU and the Office of the High Representative (OHRLLS) organized a one-day panel discussion on "*the role of parliaments in building good governance in the LDCs*".

In the latter part of the decade we also realized that in most parliaments there was no designated structure, whether a committee or caucus, to help coordinate or catalyze the follow up to the BPOA. There was a need then to more pro-actively bring the BPOA to the attention of parliaments by encouraging the establishment of parliamentary focal points in whatever form suited the needs of individual parliaments and without duplicating existing structures. In cooperation with the Office of the High Representative, in 2009 we produced a guide to help parliaments determine what sort of structure may be most suitable to them ("*Mobilizing parliamentary support for the Brussels Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries*"). We also held two parliamentary meetings, one in Africa and another in Asia, to help support the appointment of parliamentary focal points.

As a result of this action, as of today 18 LDC parliaments have appointed focal points within their institutions. The parliament of Cambodia went the farthest by creating a joint committee for the LDC programme of action.

In spite of these developments, most parliaments today, including in developed countries, remain insufficiently aware of the BPOA. Developed countries' parliaments must become more engaged in support of the LDC agenda as part of the larger development agenda, and as an important expression of North-South partnership. All parliaments, and particularly those in the LDCs, must do more to hold their governments accountable for their commitments to the LDCs.

The BPOA was a good plan, but in the light of ten years of lessons learned, successes and failures, we now need a much stronger programme of action that captures the new challenges ahead for the LDCs in a changing global landscape, and one that recognizes the role of *all* stakeholders.

Mandate for parliamentary track and overall objectives

With this background in mind, I will now turn to describing the main elements and objectives of the parliamentary track to LDC IV.

As we know, the parliamentary track was sketched out in its broad elements in a Note of the Secretary-General on the modalities of LDC IV dated 14 August 2008 (A/63/284). Further discussion and elaboration of this parliamentary component took place through the inter-agency meetings in which the IPU participates. Further political support was provided by Resolution 64/213, which recognizes the importance of the contributions of all relevant stakeholders, including parliaments, to LDC IV.

The objectives of the parliamentary track come down to the following:

1. To facilitate the contribution of parliaments to the substantive consultations and, as appropriate, to the outcome document of the conference, at all levels – national, regional and global;
2. To encourage the participation of MPs in the UN conference and in parliamentary consultations before and during the conference;

3. To promote the outcome document of LDC IV among parliamentarians and help raise their awareness of the new commitments in order to facilitate their implementation in the following years.

Parliamentary involvement in LDC IV: national, regional and global levels

At the national level of the process, the most important one, our objective was to help parliaments engage in the review exercise, within the LDCs, of the BPOA. This was no small challenge, given that in many LDCs the BPOA reporting mechanism to parliament is weak, and parliaments themselves do not have strong ties to the UN community or to the governmental focal points on the ground.

Our approach was to mobilize the existing parliamentary focal points and encourage those parliaments that did not yet have focal points to establish them without delay. Except for six parliaments, we have developed exchanges with all other LDC parliaments in an effort to link them up to the national review process. Through their focal points, parliaments have been encouraged to identify the key priority areas they would like to see included in the new PoA, and to engage with their government counterparts to convey their views pro-actively. We also continue to share related information with all LDC parliaments, and provide them with updates on the LDC IV preparatory process.

At our last count, 25 out of the 33 national reports received by the fall of last year referred directly to parliaments, and 27 referred to parliament's participation in the implementation of the BPOA through reference to legislation and the national budget. These references varied from vague to more detailed inclusions. On occasion, parliamentary presence at the validation of the report, or parliamentary approval of it, was mentioned. We also know of cases in which the national progress report was submitted to parliament for final approval (Togo), or in which the parliament was fully engaged and was able to provide input to the consultations for the national report (Bhutan). In a few cases (e.g., Benin, Malawi, Tanzania, Zambia), the national reports made regular reference to parliaments' participation in the implementation of the BPOA and provided details about parliaments' role in the LDC process.

The input of parliaments to the regional level of the preparatory process was less extensive than at the national level, where parliaments have a very clear role to play as well as formal channels of interaction. But we succeeded nevertheless in ensuring that an adequate number of MPs would participate in the regional meetings that took place in Africa and Asia. The African consultation was particularly successful in that MPs from 13 parliaments participated actively and constructively.

Finally, at the global level, the parliamentary track is proceeding through three main steps: a parliamentary briefing that took place on the occasion of the 123rd IPU Assembly in Geneva in October of last year, input to relevant pre-conference events - particularly one on governance that was led by UNDP, and a Parliamentary Forum that is scheduled to take place at the LDC IV proper.

The parliamentary briefing in October brought together MPs from both developed and developing countries, including of course many from LDCs, for a first brainstorming on some of the main concerns that parliaments would like to see reflected or addressed in the outcome document of the UN conference. It was a very frank exchange of views that benefited tremendously by the presence of the High Representative himself, Mr. Diarra. The discussion that followed corroborated and gave further shape to the many inputs received from national parliaments in the prior stages of the preparatory process.

The UNDP-led pre-conference event took place on 8 December in Geneva and helped highlight the key role of parliaments as institutions of good governance. While MPs are concerned with all aspects of the future PoA, they also feel that governance remains key to the success of the entire enterprise. We were very pleased that many of our views were incorporated in the substantive background paper of the meeting. We came away from this event even more convinced that parliaments should play an active role in the design, implementation and review of the next PoA.

As for the Parliamentary Forum to be held at the Istanbul conference, it will be a one-day event on 8 May, the eve of the conference. Since the outcome document of the conference will have been drawn up by the time we gather in Istanbul, the Forum will serve mostly as a platform for parliamentary exchange and commitment to action in the follow up to the new PoA.

Specifically, the Forum will aim to:

1. Review the role of LDC parliaments in the implementation of the BPOA over the past decade and identify successes, lessons learnt and challenges faced;
2. Promote parliamentary action on all issues on the LDC IV agenda, and ensure parliamentary participation in the implementation and review of the new PoA.

All parliaments will be invited to designate at least one representative to attend the Forum. The legislators will be encouraged to join their national delegations to LDC IV and to participate actively in the various parallel events of the conference. The Parliamentary Forum itself will conclude with a message that will be delivered to the plenary of the UN conference.

Main messages of the parliamentary community to LDC IV

All of the consultations that make up the parliamentary track to LDC IV have been tremendously useful and have provided many important points that we hope will be taken into consideration at this critical juncture, when negotiations of a first draft outcome document are set to begin.

Let me summarize here some of those points.

On the general shape and content of the outcome document, parliaments wish to see a PoA that is sensitive to the unique circumstances of so-called fragile states, many of which belong to the LDC category; a PoA that is flexible and adjustable to specific country needs and circumstances; and one that includes strong provisions for regular and stringent national progress reviews of the PoA, with a clear role assigned to parliaments. Other issues that parliaments have focused on echoes those of the official UN preparatory process and include: climate change, renewable energy, food security, productive capacities, agricultural development, and trade.

On the specific question of good governance, which remains a cornerstone for the development of LDCs and the implementation of the new PoA, the main points that emerged from the parliamentary consultations include the following:

1. The success of the next PoA will depend on enhanced national ownership, which in turns requires that not only the government (executive branch) but also the parliament be fully engaged in the process. There must be greater and stronger interaction and cooperation between the executive and the legislative if the design, implementation and reviews of the new PoA are to be effective. A

particular role of parliament is to debate national development strategies and require regular reports on their implementation.

2. The slow progress of the BPOA can be ascribed in part to poor implementation related to weak parliamentary oversight of government policies. A clear illustration of this is in the way ODA does not achieve the intended results in recipient countries. Weak oversight also accounts for corruption and other failures of governance. Aid is key to the future development of the LDCs, and the role of parliaments in aid effectiveness may appropriately be referenced in the new PoA as has already been done in the Paris Declaration, the Accra Agenda for Action and other official documents.
3. Broad-based national ownership also has to do with citizen participation in policy-making. This requires stronger parliaments that are more representative of all constituencies and better able to consult with civil society on a regular basis. It is important therefore that the PoA contain provisions to strengthen the link between parliaments and civil society.
4. Parliaments remain weak in part because they lack the capacities to function properly and with limited support to develop more effective oversight and legislative tools. For international commitments such as the next PoA to be effectively implemented at the national level, parliaments must have the capacities to perform functions such as enacting appropriate legislation (e.g., infrastructure, aid, trade, debt, taxation, industrial development, agriculture etc.) or scrutinizing the national budget. Donors must provide more and better funding for parliamentary strengthening programmes, and this funding should be channeled directly to parliaments.

The overarching conclusion from all of the above is that parliaments and their role and responsibility should be appropriately reflected in the Istanbul PoA. Parliaments are looking to you, the member States of the United Nations, for guidance and support, and in the same spirit of partnership that has nurtured our growing relationship over the last decade.

As for the IPU, we are ready and willing to work closely with you, and to whatever extent you will allow, to make sure that the outcome document of the conference sets the right priorities and provides a strong impetus to the further development of the LDCs.

Thank you.