



**121st ASSEMBLY OF THE INTER-PARLIAMENTARY UNION
AND RELATED MEETINGS**

Geneva, 19-21.10.2009

SUMMARY RECORDS

**OF THE PANEL DISCUSSION HELD DURING THE 121st ASSEMBLY IN GENEVA
(OCTOBER 2009)**

on the subject item

"Youth participation in the democratic process"

chosen for debate by the Third Standing Committee
(Democracy and Human Rights)

during the 122nd Assembly in March-April 2010 in Bangkok (Thailand)

Youth participation in the democratic process

Item 3(c) of the agenda

Panel discussion on the subject chosen for debate by the Third Standing Committee on Democracy and Human Rights during the 122nd Assembly in March-April 2010:

Sitting of Tuesday, 20 October (Afternoon)

The meeting was called to order at 2.10 p.m. with the First Vice-President of the Third Standing Committee, Mr. Y. Zhumabayev (Kazakhstan) in the Chair.

(A/121/3(c)-R.1)

THE MODERATOR explained that the meeting would consist of an informal debate to assist the co-Rapporteur in finalizing the report to be discussed by the Third Standing Committee during the 122nd Assembly of the IPU to be held in Bangkok, Thailand, in March-April 2010.

Ms. M. LUGARIĆ (Croatia), *co-Rapporteur*, said she had been particularly satisfied by the decision to discuss the under-representation of young people in decision making, since lack of youth participation constituted a threat to the future of representative democracy. She had been elected to parliament at the age of 21 years, and had soon realized that globally politics was dominated by men aged over 40. She had therefore decided, from the beginning of her political career, to work to promote youth involvement in political participation, and to combat discrimination in politics and democratic processes.

Despite the fact that human rights were guaranteed for all, young people still struggled to exercise their political rights. Since the concept of youth varied from culture to culture, some common ground must be found in order to begin the discussion on youth participation. One common consideration was that youth constituted a period of transition from dependence to independence. In some countries that period began very early, whereas in others it began very late, depending on conditions such as education, economic growth and national labour legislation. The existence of solid social structures that enabled youth integration into society and politics could be a common approach, which all societies could use. Consideration must be given to whether young people were perceived as a social group with particular interests that must be taken into account, or as individuals trying to find entry points into society, and therefore as upcoming stakeholders in a new era.

Although all social groups should have a voice and an important role in society, young people were perceived as being incapable of making decisions, which had resulted in their underrepresentation in decision-making processes. In comparison to women and national minorities, young people perceived their generation to be the most politically disadvantaged group in society. Age-based discrimination was yet to receive as much political attention as gender-based discrimination. In adopting the World Programme of Action for Youth the United Nations had recognized the importance of including youth in local, national, regional and international decision-making processes. Youth participation brought new perspectives from the point of view of young people as social actors, and promoted their wellbeing and the development of their skills, thus empowering and protecting them. While extra-institutional forms of political activity were important, particularly for developing a political culture and democratic behaviour patterns, focus remained on institutional political participation owing to the fact that in democratic and pluralistic societies varying opinions and interests were expressed predominantly through political institutions. Political power was concentrated in those institutions. An important question was whether youth participation in politics could be addressed through the same models as were used for promoting the participation of women and ethnic minorities, such as quotas for parliamentary representation.

The concept of youth participation was broader than political participation alone, since it encompassed the empowerment of young people through capacity-building and increased access to development opportunities. It represented a situation in which young people were no longer seen as recipients of but also as contributors to national development. Empowerment consisted of

two elements: firstly an institutional element, which included the responsibility of establishing points of entry into society for youth as equal participants in decision-making and social development; and second, the development of human potential, which implied that accessibility and availability of education and the acquisition of expertise were required for the full involvement of young people in society. Informal education was particularly important, and could be expanded through volunteer programmes and internships in government, and non-organizations (NGOs), where young people could become acquainted with democratic processes. Many organizations considered youth issues to constitute a small range of subjects, including drugs, alcohol, violence, teenage pregnancy and the minimum age for voting in parliamentary elections.

Investments in youth had too often been viewed as improving the welfare of young people, rather than as a part of integrated national development strategies. That attitude neglected the basic tenet of full youth participation in society: young people were equal partners in all elements of society. Young people should therefore participate in problem-solving. Information and communication technologies were a particularly important factor in youth participation, since they afforded opportunities for online education, and gave young people better opportunities to participate in society. Globalization, and the development of the Internet in particular, had fomented the expansion of the arena of activism from the national to international levels, which had created a paradox: in their desire to participate in current processes, young people were using the Internet to join global discussions, initiatives and organizations, while on the other hand in many countries the younger generation felt political apathy and lacked interest in joining traditional youth organizations. For many young people politics seemed far removed from daily realities. Low voter turnout and dwindling membership of political parties should not lead to the conclusion that young people were uninterested in the political future of their societies. Efforts should be made to ensure that the concept of participation was not simply a rhetorical device. The major criticism from young people was that participatory structures were merely rubber-stamping decisions that had already been made, which was a contributing factor to the lack of youth interest.

In order to fully address the issue of youth participation, consideration must be given to the position of young women in society, many of whom were relegated to the home or unpaid labour and enjoyed fewer rights to economic and political participation than young men. In some places lack of education, vocational training, healthcare and housing led to a particular vulnerability among young women and girls. Young people were not a passive group waiting for opportunities and resources to be handed to them. In all regions young people wanted to make a better life for themselves. Lack of adequate investment in youth, challenges related to globalization, changes in the world economy and other cultural constraints were contributing to the unfavourable context for youth development and participation. Young people needed an enabling environment that provided opportunities for them to be seen and heard. Giving youth greater visibility in development processes would strengthen their resolve to contribute to the advancement of a world in which they were equal stakeholders. Youth participation had witnessed a shift towards a legislatively-based focus on youth rights, and a movement away from the broad concept of youth participation in politics to a more narrow concentration of structures.

The report should form the basis for a discussion that would lead to specific guidelines on institutionalizing youth participation. She was therefore particularly interested to hear about different practices and initiatives to encourage youth participation among IPU Member parliaments. United Nations statistics on the situation of young people were disheartening: over 200 million young people were living on less than a dollar per day, over 130 million were illiterate, 10 million were living with HIV/AIDS, and over 88 million were unemployed. The international community must remember that young people represented not only the future, but also the present.

Ms. N. SHEPHERD, *Head of the United Nations Programme on Youth, Division for Social Policy and Development, Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA), Panellist*, said that the United Nations Programme on Youth had been established to enhance awareness of the global situation of youth and increase recognition of the rights and aspirations of young people around the world to participate in decision-making in order to increase their impact on social development. The Programme had been mandated to work with the World Programme of Action on Youth, which aimed to address the needs of young people and increase opportunities for their participation in society. The Programme included 15 priority areas: education, employment, hunger, poverty, health, environment, substance abuse, juvenile delinquency, leisure time activities, girls' and young women's participation, globalization, information and communication technologies, HIV/AIDS, youth and conflict and intergenerational issues.

The underlying principle of youth participation was that it led to better policy and programme responses to the problems facing young people. Youth participation referred to political engagement in decision-making processes, as well as the empowerment of young people through capacity-building and increasing their involvement in the life of society. Including youth had a positive impact on society as a whole, particularly in respect of the promotion of democracy. The United Nations recognized that there were many possible impacts of youth participation on democratic processes, since young people brought a new perspective to problems. They should therefore be considered to be a resource, rather than a problem. Their participation in the community could result in greater success for them in adulthood, since the inclusion of different groups in society gave a feeling of local ownership over decision-making processes and made decisions more legitimate. Legitimacy was a prerequisite for a functioning democracy.

Young people involved in politics could act as civic role models to others of their generation, and help counteract the negative effects of frustration and feelings of social exclusion. The most effective policy processes had been those devoted to empowering young people. The United Nations General Assembly had adopted the World Programme of Action for Youth in order to strengthen national capacities and programmes to promote the active participation of young people in society. In calling for youth participation, the World Programme of Action outlined some overarching proposals, including: improving access to information to enable young people to participate in decision-making processes; developing opportunities for young people to learn about their rights and responsibilities; encouraging and promoting youth associations; taking into account the contribution of youth in designing, implementing and evaluating national policies and plans; and encouraging national, regional and international cooperation and exchange between youth organizations.

In implementing the World Programme of Action, the United Nations Programme on Youth had found that young people who had opportunities for participation had a better chance of a successful transition into adulthood. Those who were marginalized were more likely to feel alienated and engage in high risk and antisocial behaviour. There were still many obstacles to youth participation, and opportunities for it in political activities were often only tokenistic or symbolic. Approaches to engaging youth were frequently shaped by the expectations of adults, which limited input from young people. Opportunities for participation varied across social and economic groups, and while they could be provided by youth organizations, those organizations often lacked funds and resources.

Governments could take measures to give young people increased access to decision-making processes and policy implementation at the local level. Many young people did not see the connection between politics and their daily realities. Civic education should be offered in schools in order for young people to learn about their rights and responsibilities as citizens. Research had shown that although most youths had a strong desire to engage actively in their societies, they had little knowledge of decision-making processes. Increased knowledge of the political system would enable young people to better support candidates and participate in their election. The organizational structures of institutions should be assessed to enable young people to participate in their functions, and institutional reform would allow young people to participate on a consistent basis. National youth parliaments and local youth councils should be established as mechanisms for communication with national governments, in order to include young people in decision-making processes. Youth representatives should be included in national delegations to the United Nations General Assembly and other international meetings, since delegates would enrich debates and foster dialogue and cooperation between governments and young people.

Mr. A. GUERRERO, *Partnerships Manager, Civil Society Partnerships, United Nations Children's Fund - UNICEF, Panellist*, said that consideration should be given to why, in a world in which so many adults were denied the possibility to participate in society, was it crucial to allow young people to participate in democratic processes? Participation was essential in order for them to become autonomous, supportive, responsible and committed citizens. Experience had shown that giving young people the opportunity to identify the problems in their lives, and actively seek solutions, would build their self-esteem and encourage them to recognize and value the positive impact they could have on the lives of others. Participation was not only important to help children become fully engaged, democratic citizens, but also to achieve better results in respect of improved laws, more effective oversight of government and civil society, and more child-friendly allocation of resources. Global surveys conducted by UNICEF among children under the age of 18 years showed that through participation children and young people learnt to respect others, express themselves effectively, make responsible choices and grow into informed, engaged global citizens. Through increasingly meaningful participation in decision

making, children could develop a deeper sense of belonging and identity and realize their full potential, while discovering and understanding the world around them. Meaningful participation would help enrich and sustain intergenerational dialogue, as well as develop ownership of decision-making processes and their outcomes. It would also contribute to bringing together experience and new ideas for the development of democratic systems. Youth participation enabled young leaders to develop according to the principles of active democratic citizenship: to be accountable to their constituencies, provide regular feedback and exercise their functions with transparency.

A number of principles should guide the promotion of youth participation, including a human rights approach to children's rights, which placed young people at the centre of the development agenda, recognizing them as rights holders and social actors, and recognizing parliaments and governments as primary duty bearers, accountable to all their citizens and the community. The effective engagement of children and young people required an inclusive and non-discriminatory approach to participation. Children and young people should be able to participate voluntarily and without any form of manipulation. Many adults mistakenly assumed that young people's participation would mean handing over decision-making power to individuals who were ill-equipped to take on that responsibility. The United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child strongly advocated giving children increasing responsibilities in line with their developing capacities. While adults would often make final decisions, those decisions should be informed by the input of young people and the best interests of the child. The Committee's General Comment on article 12 of the International Convention on the Rights of the Child indicated that issues must be taken into account when considering the right of children and young people to express their opinions.

Equal access to education was crucial for successful youth participation, since it helped young people acquire the knowledge and attitudes required to become responsible citizens, and empowered them to bring about change in their own lives as well as in society. Access to quality education was still denied to many young people, particularly girls. Young people were an important resource for bringing about change and development, whether it was from their participation in global meetings, or their contributions to specific laws and policies on children's rights. In the Dominican Republic, for example, a national policy document on children, youth and HIV/AIDS had been developed at an NGO forum for young people. In Nepal, children's clubs, supported by UNICEF, had contributed to drafting the interim constitution. In Jordan, child representatives from the Youth Parliament had contributed to meetings and workshops to discuss legislation on children's rights and the National Plan of Action for Children. In Rwanda, young people had participated in the establishment of an economic development and poverty reduction strategy. In Tajikistan, former young offenders had participated in developing national legislation for the implementation of international justice standards. In Brazil a number of youth organizations had joined together to monitor public policies.

Parliaments should monitor their governments' fulfilment of their obligations to guarantee the right of children to express themselves freely and without discrimination. Parliamentarians were in a unique position to be able to strengthen the voices of that key constituency that young people represented and achieve better results with their participation. Efforts should be made to draft laws protecting the rights of young people. Parliamentary support should be given to NGOs that worked with youth parliaments. Measures should be taken to ensure that youth parliaments interacted directly with parliamentarians and served more than merely a symbolic function. Parliaments could also disseminate information to keep young people informed of parliamentary processes. Measures should be taken to legislate in favour of child-friendly formal and informal education systems. Young people could be invited to testify in parliamentary hearings and ensure that their voices contributed to policy and law-making, and to questions of resource allocation, as well as to parliament's efforts to hold government accountable to its many obligations to children and young people. Parliaments should be inspired by the enthusiasm, idealism and skills of young people, in order to establish a world fit not only for children, but fit for all.

Mr. R. AMALVY, *Director, External Relations, World Scout Bureau, Panellist*, said that his organization brought together over 30 million young people. The concept of citizenship had evolved over time and could therefore not be defined in simple terms. Contemporary problems linked to social exclusion had resulted in a need to revive a sense of citizenship related to community values. Young people had an important role to play in that regard. Different types of community, such as school and work communities, village and national communities required different levels of participation. Too often insufficient consideration was given to the connection between being a citizen and being an elector. The Scout movement therefore referred to active citizenship: being a citizen required action. Civic education was a means of sustaining that concept, since it focussed not only on the situation of the individual, but

also on individual action. Active citizens should build society with non-violent democratic tools for the benefit of others. They should be committed and critical, take action before public bodies, respect the law and ensure that the law was fair. Young people, in particular the disadvantaged and marginalized, often considered political issues to be out of their reach. That situation must change. Rapid economic, social and political change had resulted in young people no longer having a sense of belonging to a single national or local community. New communities were created on the Internet through social networking, and the notion of individualism was increasing. The concept of community service was therefore particularly important.

Research had shown that only 4 per cent of young people considered participation in political parties to be worthwhile. It was therefore important to help young people understand fundamental human rights and the rules of democracy. To become active citizens young people must not only be aware of their situation and rights, but also capable of making choices and controlling their personal and social lives, being concerned for others and able to act on their behalf, capable of taking responsibility for their own actions through commitment, and able to affirm themselves in front of others in respect of their ideals and beliefs. While the Scout movement had been considered a good forum for management and leadership training, other informal education organizations also showed young people the context for participation, decision-making and active citizenship. Legislative frameworks should promote volunteer work, community service and informal education, by recognizing the informal education sector.

All legislation that promoted the rights and participation of young people should be supported. The Scout movement was a partner for governments and parliamentarians for the development of youth policies, which worked towards preparing younger generations to become committed members of society. Adolescents were capable of debating with parliamentarians and participating in parliamentary debates. In 1991 the Scout movement had established a global parliamentary union, comprised of elected scouts and non-scouts. That body was prepared to work with national parliaments to prepare national programmes for youth participation in political decision-making. The movement had contributed to the drafting of the United Nations Programme on Action for Youth. The Scout movement's ethos was to ask young people. Parliaments should be ready to do so, particularly when addressing legislation regarding young people, since young people could clarify any doubts parliamentarians might have about legislation and provide assistance.

Debate

Mr. J. MAKRADULII (The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) said that in order to institutionalize youth participation steps should first be taken at the local level, in municipalities. A member of his party, the mayor of one Macedonian municipality, had established a youth council, which made its own decisions and plans and addressed issues and policies related to young people in that municipality. Parliaments should play a monitoring role, for example through the organization of public hearings about the situation of youth participation in different municipalities. New roles should be devised related to youth and the younger generation. Practical action was required to promote youth participation in politics.

Mr. L.P. GHIMIRE (Nepal) said that young people were the most energetic and dedicated sector of society. All major political transformations had been influenced by young people, since youth constituted a force of change: a tide of resistance against autocracy and a symbol of social force in defence of democracy. Youth participation could assist in nation building and the development of democracy. Although youth participation in political democratic processes had increased, figures remained low. Young people's voices were rarely heard in decision-making processes in national institutions.

In Nepal, youth participation was considered vital for maintaining multiparty democracy. Young people had fought against autocracy in the 1950s and had been at the forefront of the democratic movements in 1990 and 2006. During those days of struggle a large number of young people had sacrificed their lives for the cause of democracy. The contribution of youth had been recognized by the 1997 Interim Constitution, which had called for the mobilization of youth in national development by various means of participation. A Ministry for Youth and Sport had been established, which was responsible for youth issues and young people's participation in national development and democratic processes. The inclusion of youth had resulted in a change in the structure and composition of the Nepalese Parliament. Youth parliamentarians were actively engaged in the constitution-making process,

and the new constitution would ensure that the aspirations of youth were enshrined in national politics. Parliaments were the most appropriate forums for youth to express their visions and impact collectively on the qualitative improvement of development processes. All parliaments should consider the possibility of establishing youth parliaments and take measures to ensure the promotion of youth participation in national politics. In that regard, the IPU could establish a committee for youth parliamentarians.

Mr. Z. AZMY (Egypt) said that parliamentarians should make a concerted effort to support young people around the world. The situation of youth differed from country to country. Many young people suffered the consequences of unemployment, illiteracy, wars, occupation, and other problems that restricted their development. Parliamentarians should adopt legislation to improve the links between young people and parliaments, and increase the involvement of young people in electoral processes. Young people should be the key concern of parliaments in all their activities, and their political participation must be increased.

Ms. S. AL-JASSAR (Kuwait) said that there were 1.2 billion young people aged between 15 and 25 years in the world. Their participation in government and society must be increased. Many countries did not have a strategy for the inclusion of young people, and the youth in those countries often faced great dangers and problems. Young people must be involved in decision-making, electoral and democratic process at all levels, in order to be active citizens and participate in the decisions affecting the future of their countries. Strategies for youth participation required a cross-cutting approach through education, labour, health and other sectors. The barriers that young people still faced must be torn down, and the provisions of international law and policies must take account of youth issues. Education and training in all sectors should be promoted. Stricter legislation was required to combat substance abuse, and efforts must be made to increase awareness of the dangers of narcotic drugs. It was essential that young people should be given the opportunity to participate fully in the development of their societies. Young people should be trained in the use of new information and communication technologies, and be given an active role in civil society through guaranteed participation in associations. Their voices must be heard in public and educational institutions, and they must be protected against labour exploitation. All civil and governmental organizations had a responsibility to ensure that young people played an effective role in the development of society.

Mr. Y. ALI BIN FADIL (United Arab Emirates) said that his delegation proposed that the IPU should prepare a book on youth participation in politics, in order for Member Parliaments to share best practices and be provided with the necessary information on how to improve democratic processes through youth participation. Youth parliaments should be established. A project specifically targeted at youth issues, and in particular the role of young people in transparent elections, should be developed by the IPU, in conjunction with the United Nations and other institutions. The Secretary General of the IPU should nominate one day of the year 2010 as a day for the participation of youth in combating terrorism, since democracy required political stability, which could not be achieved in an environment of terrorism.

Mrs. A. KYRIAKIDOU (Cyprus) said that the limited participation of youth in democracy led to questions about how young people could be included in the economic, social and political structures of society. Parliaments had a duty to safeguard and support conditions favourable for sustaining democracy. Consideration of youth participation should go beyond the national level to shape an inclusive framework for public policies that enshrined the right of young people to participate in democratic processes. Consistent policies, such as continuous research and development as well as e-learning, should be at the core of efforts to improve youth participation. That could be achieved through cooperation between government bodies responsible for youth affairs. Special departments for youth affairs in competent ministries had been doing commendable work in coordinating youth projects at the national and international levels. Globalization had influenced youth participation in the democratic process, and that participation had gained ground with the support of a number of international organizations, in particular the IPU. Programmes aimed at fostering youth mobility, encouraging intercultural understanding and increasing cultural awareness had resulted in the establishment of a number of youth organizations that were participating in international activities. Education had a major role to play in those efforts, since younger generations needed the means to be aware of their rights and responsibilities. To that end, parliamentary initiatives and oversight of

government policies were particularly important. Youth participation and political awareness should be at the top of the international agenda, in order to strengthen democracy, peace and good governance, and ensure that young people could have the future they aspired to and deserved.

Mrs. E. PAPADEMETRIOU (Greece) said that in order to ensure full youth participation in society, the Greek Government had established local youth councils, and the Ministry of Education had introduced civic education modules in elementary and secondary education. Greece had school councils in all secondary schools, major student unions, a national youth council, local youth councils, an excellent young scientists' network, and youth organizations attached to all political parties. The work of the Greek Youth Parliament was particularly important, since it cultivated young people's interest in public affairs and helped them to shape a responsible citizen's conscience, as well as familiarizing them with the problems and challenges of democracy. The Greek Youth Parliament had 300 members from Greece, Cyprus and the Greek Diaspora. It met for a four-day session in the Hellenic Parliament in the autumn of each year, was chaired by the President of Parliament, and attended by the Prime Minister and many other parliamentarians. The Committees of the Youth Parliament were chaired by members of parliament. The sessions of the Youth Parliament constituted an exercise in political thought and reasoning for deputies. Youth deputies participated in the work of a number of parliamentary committees. In the 2009 session, youth deputies had addressed violence, drug abuse, the media, human rights, immigration and refugees, and the environment and conservation. For the first time 54 students from 28 countries in the European Union and Euro-Mediterranean region had participated in the 2009 session at the invitation of the Greek President, and had taken part in rounds of questions and answers in parliamentary committees and the plenary. On the occasion of the International Day of Democracy in 2009, the Greek Parliament had held an open competition on democracy among 180,000 pupils from middle and secondary schools, following which 60 prizes had been presented to the winners by the Greek President and the Secretary General of the IPU. That competition had been the first joint activity between the IPU and the Greek Youth Parliament. Further efforts would be made to strengthen that collaboration.

Ms. F. ALIA (Islamic Republic of Iran) said that the question of youth participation in democratic processes brought together a number of basic democratic elements, including cooperation, equal social rights, accepting the rule of the majority, respecting minorities, just distribution of power, and collective supervision. In the contemporary world, democracy emphasizing people and societies had gained importance. The main purpose was to observe human rights. Democracy was not merely political, but also a way of life in economies, cultures and societies. Democracy had always been associated with freedom. In that regard, youth participation was necessary, and would empower the younger generation into self-expression and an independent mindset. Three decades previously, the participation of youth in implementing democracy in Iran had resulted in an end being brought to the monarchy, and in the establishment of the Islamic Republic, based on freedom and independence. As independence and security were major factors in maintaining any democracy, Iran's youth, after having achieved victory in the eight-year war against the former Iraqi dictatorship, were now engaged in developing Iran's peaceful nuclear programme. The Islamic Republic of Iran aimed to create a society in which young people were independent, politically educated, free and aware of their Persian Islamic identity. The establishment of a student parliament, based on an initiative by the Ministry of Education had been a major step towards fulfilling students' expectations. The Student Parliament sought to enhance a culture of dialogue, cooperation and responsibility in order to prepare young people for participation in decision-making processes. It also sought to encourage the development of a variety of political groupings and parties that could safeguard freedom and democracy in society as a whole, the publication of a free mass media for youth, the active participation young people in national parliamentary and presidential elections, and the establishment of youth consultative institutions. A number of challenges threatened democratic processes around the world: the repression of young people's freedom and independence, particularly in the context of occupation, and the use of labels such as "terrorists" for freedom fighters, and "peace-seekers" for invading forces; the use of double standards; ignoring the need for religious and political education; and increases in the production of illegal drugs and pornographic materials. Efforts should be made to recognize the right to freedom and participation of young people in democratic processes in all countries, including the currently defenceless young people in the occupied West Bank and Gaza.

Ms. S. RAJAB (Bahrain) said that nations that paid attention to young people and their capacities were capable of renewing themselves at all levels with an open mentality. A number of societies excluded young people because they did not believe in their potential for renewal and modernization. Responsible authorities were afraid of losing their positions and being overtaken by young people, and they therefore ignored young people and their capacity to lead States forward. Her delegation proposed that Member Parliaments of the IPU should express their commitment to youth participation and that the IPU should oblige Member delegations to include young people. Decision-making authorities and leaders would lose out through the absence of youth participation.

Mr. F. SALABERRY (Chile) said that the participation of young people in democracy had decreased since the return of democracy to Chile. In the recent municipal elections in Chile, 80 per cent of young people had not voted, since the majority of the candidates' policies for election had not been in harmony with youth issues. The lack of youth participation was due to political apathy and a lack of confidence in political representatives, rather than to exclusion. Rectifying that problem had become a priority for electoral candidates. Efforts were being made to renew political processes and encourage political leaders to include young people and bring about the cultural change needed for their political participation. Permanent dialogue should be established with the younger generation, which was increasingly marginalized from electoral processes, but which had much to contribute to democracy. Young people must be involved in electoral processes and decision-making, and they must be made aware of the importance of exercising their rights and fulfilling their responsibilities as citizens. Modern citizenship was broader than formal political participation, and included cultural, environmental and educational elements, which included rights on social interaction and association. The contemporary, broad concept of citizenship no longer concentrated solely on basic political rights, but also sought social rights and reasonable quality of life for all citizens. In 1998 an experiment had begun on youth participation in Chile through the creation of a youth parliament. Among its greatest achievements were changes in legislation on military service, rendering it voluntary; and on education, affording protection from expulsion from school for pregnant girls. Emphasis must be placed on the value of the social, economic, political and cultural rights of young people, and efforts must be made to grant them greater independence and autonomy.

Mr. F.H. NAEK (Pakistan) said that young people represented the future of all nations. As a result of Pakistan's efforts to include youth in democratic processes between 20 and 30 per cent of Members of the Pakistani National Assembly were below 40 years of age. A Young Parliamentarians' Forum had been established to encourage young leadership in legislative processes, increase capacity-building for young parliamentarians, enhance interaction between them and their regional and international counterparts, and ensure effective participation of young members of the National Assembly when parliamentary reforms were required. The Forum had its own constitution and held regular elections for its executive committee members and office bearers. The focus of the Forum was to involve youth in efforts to contain militancy and extremism and encourage them to come forward as active members of society. Other initiatives of the Forum included working to strengthen the leadership potential of its members. The Young Parliamentarians' Forum and similar bodies from other IPU Member countries should be invited to participate in the next IPU Assembly, in order to coordinate their ideas for youth inclusion in democratic processes.

Pakistan had established a Youth Parliament, which was a mock parliament, with 60 young members aged between 18 and 29 years, modelled on the National Assembly. The Youth Parliament considered the values of democracy and encouraged democratic dialogue and participation among young people throughout Pakistan. The Members were appointed by a non-partisan standing committee. The Youth Parliament had a dual-party system, with a cabinet, a shadow cabinet, standing committees and verbatim records of its proceedings, and provided excellent preparation for leadership roles for its Members, who learned to engage in civilized, informed and productive discussion on issues affecting Pakistan, and presented their well-considered views and alternative policies and plans to policy making institutions. Two representatives of the Youth Parliament had recently been invited by the Prime Minister to present their views on the draft national education policy in a Federal Cabinet meeting. Selected Members of the Youth Parliament of Pakistan should be invited to present their views on youth participation in democratic processes at the next Assembly of the IPU. He urged that young parliamentarians from around the world should attend that Assembly.

Ms. Y. SAGUFTA (Bangladesh) said her delegation agreed that young people not only represented the future but also the present. Almost one third of the voters in the most recent general election in Bangladesh had been young people, many of whom had been first-time voters, greatly inspired by the Government's forward-looking vision. There were many young Cabinet Members in Bangladesh, who had added a fresh dynamism to the decision-making process. Youth participation in democratic processes had always been a hallmark of the Bangladeshi political system, since young people had been at the forefront of the fight for freedom and the restoration of democracy. All major political parties in Bangladesh had subsidiary or affiliate youth and student organizations which had their own constitutions. That system helped to develop patriotism and democratic values among young people and defended their involvement in the nation-building process. Her delegation wished to make three recommendations for IPU action: Firstly, that the IPU should consider developing a modern curriculum for youth training programmes to raise awareness of parliamentary democracy; second, that the IPU should consider establishing a virtual platform on its website to enable young people to engage in parliamentary-style debates and political discussions; and third, that the IPU should consider hosting an alternative assembly for youth by encouraging each Member parliament participating in the IPU Assembly to include youth participants in their delegations.

Ms. A. NAUMCHIK (Belarus) said that the Belorussian Parliament was currently revising its general policy on youth and considering a new bill on State support for children's and youth organizations. It was also in the process of considering a draft education code and a draft bill on state youth politics. Belarus had established a Youth Parliament in Minsk, the members of which were age 13 to 17 years. Elections were held in schools, organized by children, and the conditions were as authentic as possible with electoral registers, lists of electoral candidates, from schools and youth organizations, and campaigns. An Internet portal had been established for Belorussian youth, and youth participation was encouraged through the printed media and radio. Belarus participated actively in international cooperation on youth political participation, in particular through the Council for Youth Affairs of CIS countries. It was crucial to teach young people to be responsible for their future, be socially active, participate in the work of national institutions and take decisions.

Mr. GUO QINGPING (China) said that young people were encouraged to participate in democratic elections in China at the level of the People's Congress and at the regional and municipal levels. Approximately 90 per cent of young people eligible to vote did so. There were an increasing number of youth representatives in the People's Congress. That involvement enabled young people to actively exercise their rights and obligations, express their ideas, safeguard their interests and participate in decision making. Efforts were being made to expand the channels of youth participation, since China attached great importance to youth participation in the civil service and national affairs. At the same time, civil society and NGOs had also provided many of opportunities for youth participation in society, economic development and the community. The rapid development of information and communication technologies was enabling youth participation in the supervision of public policies. Teenagers used the Internet and mass media to express their ideas on social issues. Globalization and the deepening development of information and communication technologies had provided many opportunities, but also increased challenges, such as poverty, youth crime, drug abuse and other problems that faced young people around the world. All States should work to guide young people and increase their understanding of the diversity of world culture. In that regard the People's Congress of China was willing to work with the world's parliaments to ensure that young people could participate in democratic processes for the benefit of the global community.

Mr. O. MĂRCUȚIANU, (Romania) said that two decades had passed since the fall of the iron curtain. Since 1989 young people in Romania had found themselves in the unique situation of participating in radical changes to their political system. Focusing on the role of parliaments in encouraging youth participation required consideration of successful models. One such successful example was the Francophone Youth Parliaments. Romania had embraced the idea of providing access to younger generations to the work of the United Nations. Romanian students were included in national delegations to the United Nations General Assembly and the specialized committee meetings. Young people were the hope and future of the State, and constituted an invaluable source of social dynamics, economic growth and technological progress. Romania faced the problem of an aging population. That trend should be reversed and efforts were therefore being made to promote legislation on healthcare, social protection, gender equality and family issues.

Mr. M. AL-RASHID (Saudi Arabia) said that the Government of Saudi Arabia placed considerable importance on freedom of expression, justice and young people's rights, tolerance and understanding. It was in the best interests of society as a whole to protect young people's rights. His delegation called for democratic dialogue. The democratic process of reform in Saudi Arabia was continually pursued, in order to ensure a fairer world. Saudi Arabia had developed many projects for youth, particularly in respect of education and training, and the private sector played an important role enhancing the participation of young people in many sectors through the provision of financial and moral support. In the Saudi Arabian Parliament young people from schools and universities attended meetings and were encouraged to participate in parliamentary debates, in order to learn how to express themselves in front of others and for parliamentarians to learn from them. Parliaments should ensure that young people were given the possibility of participating in parliamentary meetings to enable them to play an active role in shaping the future of their countries.

Ms. Y. REGUEIFEROS (Cuba) said that young people had a crucial role to play in democratic processes and in all sectors of political, economic and social life. The problems faced by young people could not be seen in isolation from the economic and social context. Over 80 per cent of young people lived in developing countries and suffered from problems such as hunger, poverty, malnutrition, illiteracy, social exclusion, HIV/AIDS, environmental degradation, lack of equal access to education, and economic and sexual exploitation. The global financial crisis was affecting everyone, and young people in particular. Young people should be granted a full and active role in democratic processes and decision-making at the national and international levels. The political will of those with resources who could assist developing countries was essential to enable marginalized young people to exercise their right to participate in democratic processes. Since Cuba had gained independence, young people had been entitled to be elected to student bodies. They could be elected as municipal delegates at the age of 16 years, and as deputies from the age of 18 years. There were over 2000 municipal delegates aged below 30 years and 54 deputies in the Cuban Parliament aged below 35 years. Over the past 50 years in Cuba, policies had been designed to promote an active role for young people. It was important to promote access to training for youth, without which they could not participate effectively in society.

Mr. M. NHANHA (South Africa) said that all parliamentarians agreed that young people were the future. In most, if not all, struggles for democracy and justice throughout the world, young people had put themselves in the line of fire. In 1976 there had been a turning point in the South African struggle against apartheid, owing to protests by young people against Bantu education. Had it not been for those young men and women, South Africa's present democracy would not have been realized. That was an example of the importance of youth as a cornerstone of any vibrant democracy. The majority of countries had large youth populations and the general political apathy and low turnout during elections was cause for considerable concern. School curricula in South Africa included civic education, with elements on human rights and democracy, and information about the Constitution. Consideration should be given to how best to draw young people into institutions of democracy and keep their interest in the system. In South Africa encouraging cross-party youth participation in democratic processes and institutions was considered crucial, and statistics on youth participation showed that efforts in that regard were effective: 6.5 per cent of Members of the South African Parliament were young people. All Members of the IPU should agree that young people should speak for themselves in all discussions pertaining to youth issues. Youth parliaments should be compulsory for all Member parliaments of the IPU, and each delegation to IPU Assemblies should include at least one member of the Youth Parliament, since that would enable experienced parliamentarians to pass on their wealth of knowledge to the next generation, and would encourage young people to take control of their destiny, build their nations and become better citizens.

Mr. S. SHABIR (Kenya) said that many of the world's youth suffered the consequences of poverty and illiteracy. In Kenya the majority of young people were illiterate and unemployed, marginalized, depressed and turning to extremism owing to a sense of despair. The post-election violence that had occurred in Kenya in 2008 had demonstrated the effects of negative channelling of youth energy, which was a source of destruction. In order to prevent such occurrences, young people should be challenged and given opportunities to participate in democracy. In Kenya young people wanted to see immediate results. The ideals of the Scout movement constituted an effective way forward. Although Kenya had established a Ministry for Youth, a youth development fund and a national youth service, and adopted

a Children's Act, those actions had constituted lip service to young people, rather than providing tangible results. Young people were used as youth wingers, as a result of which they became depressed and marginalized, which had serious consequences. The youth of developing countries could be the cause of revolutions. Leaders should therefore involve young people in decision-making and the IPU should provide support in that regard. A worldwide youth group could be formed under the aegis of the IPU, using the Scout movement as a model. The IPU should recognize the Scout movement as a partner for working towards a practical, genuine and effective approach to youth participation. Young people, if they were involved in a positive way, could bring about positive change and power.

Mr. Y. CHIN (Republic of Korea) said that further discussion was required on the Internet-based forms of political participation used by young people. Online participation was a new form of participation that could overcome the shortcomings of existing decision-making processes. In the Republic of Korea public opinion among the younger generation often developed online, and then evolved into offline political action. That was likely to complement existing representative democracy by increasing government responsibility and accountability, and expanding public participation in politics. At the same time, there was growing concern that online participation could have negative side effects, such as the infringement of individual rights, including taking advantage of anonymity to violate other users' privacy. The IPU should make efforts to expand social education in conjunction with institutional improvements in the interests of ensuring positive outcomes for the participation of young people in democratic processes.

Mr. K.J. ZULU (Zambia) said that the participation of youth in democratic processes was very important and should not be underestimated. In Zambia youth was defined as persons aged between 18 and 35 years, and represented the phase in human life between dependence and independence, between childhood and adulthood. Young people required trust in their society, and solid structures to ensure their stable growth. In Zambia several measures were being taken to promote youth involvement in democratic processes: civic education had been introduced into the national curriculum in high schools; youth driven NGOs had been established to raise awareness among young people of the policy-making process; and the Zambian Government had established a National Youth Development Council, which monitored, coordinated and trained youth leaders, and mobilized the resources required for youth development. Zambia was currently in the process of drafting a new constitution. Youth groups and student unions were playing very important roles in that process. It was particularly important for world leaders to create an environment that gave young people a greater role in the development process and the advancement of global society. Young men and women were not only the future but also the present and required guidance from all experienced parliamentarians.

Ms. M. MD NAWI (Malaysia) said that in order to enhance youth participation parliamentarians should ensure daily media exposure and the encouragement of young, bright minds. Young people should be directly involved in electoral processes, and parliamentarians should be encouraged to take on young assistants as speech-writers or researchers. All political parties should empower young people and build confidence through internal and international participation in political forums, and incentives should be given to young people who have been involved in democracy-based NGOs. The link between youth associations, governments and the private sector should be recognized. Her delegation urged all Member parliaments of the IPU to establish national youth parliaments to ensure that young people were able to obtain proper training and experience democratic processes at an early age. Youth parliamentary meetings in the context of the IPU would then be a possibility. Malaysia had recently reviewed its Youth Societies and Youth Development Act, to introduce a stringent monitoring mechanism. Youth societies must report annually to the Government in order to receive government funding. It was compulsory for young citizens of all ethnic backgrounds and from all regions to perform military service for a period of three months. All parliaments should be equipped with the latest information and communication technologies, in order to accommodate the needs of young people. Youth participation should be encouraged through the possibility of e-voting and electronic registration in voting procedures. School curricula should include communication skills, analytical and social skills and teamwork, as part of the plan for training the leaders of the future.

Mr. Y. OHNO (Japan) said that the definition of youth varied from country to country. Japan was an aging society. Although voting rights were extremely important in respect of promoting youth participation, those rights went hand in hand with responsibilities, and youngsters must recognize the

two sides of that coin. Education was particularly important for encouraging young people to participate in democratic processes. Education and international cooperation were crucial for establishing democratization as a basis for economic development. Exchanges between young people of different nationalities were extremely important for bridging gaps and narrowing the differences between democratic practices and in that regard Japan was willing to host exchange students from other countries. His delegation hoped that the present debate would send a strong message to the world that youth participation in democratic processes was crucial and must be realized as soon as possible.

Mr. A.R. DERJI (Syrian Arab Republic) said that political participation was defined by the number of citizens who participated in decision-making processes, freely with no pressure from the authorities. Citizens should have the right to participate in decision-making and monitor the implementation of decisions taken. Individuals should have the right to participate through political frameworks and political parties, through candidacy for elections and taking up positions in legislative and executive bodies. Political participation was a democratic principle essential to all modern society. Democratic principles encompassed citizenship, responsible rights and freedoms, equality of duties and rights, and respect for human dignity without discrimination. It was important to remember that there was no single example of democracy, which could be imposed in all countries.

His delegation proposed that a specific number of seats in parliament should be set aside for young people. University students should be encouraged to develop societies with a focus on public affairs. The media should include programmes in which young people had an opportunity to express their concerns. Conferences and meetings should be organized to address youth issues. Parliamentarians should be responsible for the implementation of social and economic policies and should place sufficient focus on the principle that youth participation in society was essential for the success of all development efforts. Parliamentarians should take greater responsibility for encouraging greater participation of young people in society, in particular the strengthening of democracy and development.

Mrs. P. KRAIRIKSH (Thailand) said that her delegation wished to stress the importance of public participation in democratic processes. The Royal Thai National Assembly had launched a number of programmes for the promotion of democracy among young people aged between 15 and 20 years. Democracy youth programmes aimed to promote critical thinking and moral awareness of the democratic monarchy systems. The Royal Thai National Assembly had launched a programme for strengthening local communities and local leaders, intended to provide knowledge and bridge the gap between young people and parliaments. High school and vocational school representatives participated in that programme, in discussions with members of the Senate. The Young People for Democracy movement had been founded to give young people an insight into politics at the national and international levels. The movement worked in cooperation with the International Union of Socialist Youth and Young Progressive South East Asia, so as to provide a regional platform for the exchange of ideas, strengthening of unity and development of strategies for progressive youth organizations, in order to advance democratization in South East Asia. The Royal Thai National Assembly continued to support and promote participation, and the opening of more channels for young people to express their political views. Her delegation urged parliaments to support youth participation by providing platforms for young people to exchange their views and bring their suggestions to decision-making processes. Efforts should be made to enhance young people's understanding of the democratic monarchy system and their knowledge of their fundamental rights and duties, including in respect of political parties and elections.

Ms. P.J.P. NAHATA (India) said that in a few decades India would have the largest youth population in the world. Young people in India faced problems of illiteracy, unemployment and poverty, which were limiting their prospects for the future. Parliamentarians had a duty to provide young people with education in order to set them on the path for development. India had adopted a National Youth Policy, which had been revised in 2003, and which was centred on youth empowerment in different elements of national life in order to give priority to the needs of underprivileged and marginalized youth. All ministries and departments of the central and regional governments were striving to make allocations in their budgets for youth development programmes. The Indian Government had taken measures to increase youth participation, including lowering the minimum voting age from 21 to 18 years, and the minimum age for standing for election from 25 to 21 years. Efforts were made to involve the youth in sub-national institutions. Parliamentary

proceedings were televised, and efforts were made to disseminate government reports and ensure that government employment opportunities were well advertised. Easy access to government information was also provided through access to the Internet and media coverage. The Election Commission had taken measures to encourage youth to register as voters. In some States of India university authorities were involved in registering students on campus and publicizing elections. The lower house of Parliament, Lok Sabha, currently had 79 members under the age of 40 years. India was one of the few countries that had large-scale youth associations and networks of youth schemes, including the national service scheme, Guides, Scouts and the Youth Red Cross. That network was very strong and was used to ensure that, when necessary, emergency responses could reach the remotest regions in the shortest possible time. A youth parliament competition scheme had been introduced to encompass all young people, including those in remote rural areas who did not attend mainstream schools. The Bureau of Parliament Studies organized short study programmes for school and university students, to inform them of the role of Parliament, and had launched a one-year internship programme for students.

Mr. W. MADZIMURE (Zimbabwe) said that young people represented 50 per cent of the population of Zimbabwe, and therefore a large proportion of voters. Zimbabwe had established a Youth Parliament where young people had the opportunity to discuss issues of concern to them. The system was however lacking a mechanism to ensure that Youth Parliament debates were taken into consideration at higher levels. At the senior political level all parties had created youth wings, as part of a deliberate movement to incorporate youth leadership into decision-making bodies. Some parties had allocated ministerial positions to youth members, as a means of preparing young people for leadership roles. Zimbabwe focussed on creating youth capacities through education. Sadly in some cases, politicians used money to influence young people to fight their political wars. That situation created polarization among young people, and instead of focussing on intellectual and political development those young people focussed on creating violence. Young people therefore needed better forums for debating issues that affected them, and they must be heard.

The Delegate from PALESTINE said that when his political party had been established all of its members had been under the age of 25 years. That party had made an active contribution to decision-making and had worked on guiding the Palestinian authorities. The participation of young people meant that decisions taken were in the interests of all members of society. Palestine was following the principle that a balance must be struck between the excitement of youth and the wisdom and calm of age. Young people must be heard, in order to guide older leaders who were steering the world towards certain catastrophe. The right of Palestinian youth to participate in decision-making at all levels was respected. The Palestinian Youth Parliament was active throughout Palestine, and its young members had acquired a wide experience in democratic processes. Members of the Youth Parliament were invited to participate in the activities of the Palestinian Parliament. Young people had a right to participate through voting and nominating candidates for election, which must be respected. The greatest challenge Palestine faced with regard to maintaining democracy and ensuring youth participation was the discrimination against the whole population, imposed by the occupying forces. His delegation supported the proposal made by the representative of South Africa on the participation of youth parliament representatives in the work of the IPU. He called on the IPU to strengthen democratic principles by helping Palestine bring an end to the occupation, and build democracy without external interference.

Ms. M. PANAYOTOVA (Bulgaria) said that parliamentary elections had been held in Bulgaria in July 2009, and that over 45 per cent of the members of the winning party were young people, which demonstrated that Bulgaria had managed to overcome political apathy among the youth. Many young people were placed on electoral lists, and their ideas and proposals had been taken into account in sectoral policies. One of the Government's key priorities was to ensure quality education for young people. Approximately 30 per cent of members of the Bulgarian Parliament were aged between 35 and 39 years, and the Joint Minister for Youth and Sports was in that category. Of the five members of the Bulgarian delegation to the current IPU Assembly, two were aged below 26 years. In order for young people to be active, they must be allowed to participate rather than simply observing. Young people could play an important role in overcoming the international financial crisis, since they were more adaptable and flexible than older people and shared a sense of global identity.

Mrs. L. MENCHACA (Mexico) said that in order to promote the involvement of young people in the global democratic process funding for education must be increased, since education was the key to improving equal opportunities, promoting human rights and increasing access to the labour market. Around the world 200 million young people lived in poverty and suffered the consequences of illiteracy and unemployment, and 10 million young people were living with HIV/AIDS. That situation must not continue, since it constituted a severe obstacle to growth. Youth participation in democracy must be promoted actively, and efforts were therefore required to overcome the political apathy currently felt among young people. Youth votes were very important, since young people had an important role in development and their involvement would be very helpful in overcoming problems and challenges. Mechanisms should be created to guarantee the participation of young people in decision-making forums, in particular for public policy making. A greater proportion of participants in IPU meetings should be young parliamentarians. Young people must be given the necessary tools and resources to become involved in politics. Young people would be responsible for generational change. They were already mobilizing in favour of environmental protection and conservation of natural resources. Parliamentarians had much to teach younger generations, and knowledge transfer was particularly important. Young people should be given more space to develop their own potential. She agreed that young people represented not only the future but also the present.

Mr. N. SALERNO (Panama) said that Panama was making great progress in increasing youth involvement in democratic processes. Each year school pupils elected a parliamentary representative and each deputy worked with an elected student from his or her region. Those students constituted the Youth Parliament, and had the opportunity to discuss and submit draft laws. Young people had been the focus of the most recent presidential administration in Panama, and as a result they had initiated great changes, including the election of the new President. Over 60 per cent of Panama's government ministers had come from the new generation of youth involvement. Young people were becoming increasingly involved in changes necessary for Panama's development. The present generation was a one of change both for the future and the present, since young people wished to promote democracy and development. More progress should be made to increase youth participation.

Mr. D. MARK (Nigeria) said that countries should learn from each others' experiences of youth participation. Nigeria had been under military rule for many years and young people had therefore become accustomed to a military, rather than a democratic, system. Since the establishment of democracy in 1999 the young people of Nigeria had been obliged to reorient themselves towards a democratic system of governance. Nigeria's Youth Parliament was a replica of the National Assembly, with a House of Representatives and a Senate. Each year the Youth Parliament elected its own officers. The work of the Youth Parliament was integrated into the work of the National Assembly. The focus of that initiative was to teach young people about democracy from an early age. Allowing young people to participate in democratic processes in such a way was not simply doing them a favour, but rather granting them their constitutional right to vote and be elected. Nigeria had a National Youth Service Corps, in which all university graduates participated. That body formed part of the youth development system, which enabled young people to contribute to national development. The Niger Delta crisis had illustrated that the youth was the easiest sector of society to mobilize. In that case young people had been mobilized to take up arms. Young people had also participated very effectively in the amnesty. His delegation recommended the invitation of youth parliament members to the 122nd Assembly of the IPU in 2010. An IPU youth branch should be established, since the legislature was the pillar of democracy in each country.

Mr. N. THAVY (Cambodia) said that democracy and good citizenship were continually evolving. Almost two million people had died in Cambodia under the genocidal Pol Pot regime. Cambodia had bled itself to death. He therefore wished to stress that a country that carried the word "democracy" in its official name was not necessarily democratic. Democracy must be nurtured and allowed to develop. Democracy in Cambodia was making good progress and taking strong roots. Cambodia agreed with the findings in the draft report. Cambodia was making an effort to bring children as young as primary school age into the democratic process. That process was being kept simple, and was receiving the support of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). Democracy and citizenship must begin with children, and UNICEF should be involved in that regard.

Mr. G. VARNAVA (Cyprus) said that the widespread involvement of young people in democratic processes was the most effective safeguard against extremism and fanaticism. Since around 50 per cent of the world's population was under 25 years of age, young people must be taken into account when planning for the world's future. Worldwide, the majority of leaders was of the older generation and might not always share the aspirations of youth. A balance must be therefore struck. While it was often argued that democratic participation was achieved through the electoral process alone, involvement in decision-making processes was also extremely important. Parliamentarians' efforts must be coordinated to facilitate young people's participation in decision-making processes. A structure for youth participation in democracy should therefore be established, with specific resources for education. Reforms and innovations should not be limited to education, since young people had a vital role to play in contributing to community activities, in particular planning. Youth work and youth-oriented organizations should therefore be promoted. In Cyprus the involvement of young people in public and political life was imperative, particularly since more than 40 per cent of the territory of Cyprus had been under Turkish occupation for over 35 years. Participation in political processes was a fundamental right for all citizens and constituted the most efficient means of countering lack of interest, fanaticism, extremism and other negative phenomena that arose within marginalized and fragmented societal groups. The common goal of all parliamentarians should be to empower young people in the democratic process, in order to reduce feelings of exclusion in all levels of society.

Mrs. S. DAMEN-MASRI (Transitional Arab Parliament) said that the Transitional Arab Parliament had been established in 2005, and brought together representatives of 23 different countries. The Transitional Arab Parliament had established a committee for youth and women's affairs, and a youth forum for addressing issues affecting young people. Young people represented half of the present and all of the future. They were the cornerstone of all development projects and their participation should be very much encouraged. The Transitional Arab Parliament attached particular importance to the issue of HIV/AIDS, and was working to review legislation concerning the reintegration of people living with HIV/AIDS into society. Efforts were also being made to enable national laws that would promote the involvement of young people in democratic processes.

Mr. G. FEJIC (Observer, International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance – International IDEA) commended the draft report for having gone beyond the usual benchmarks of participation, such as voter turnout. He said that his organization sought to support efforts to build democracy and share experiences, including in the sphere of political participation and representation processes. His organization's evidence showed that political participation habits tended to be acquired early in life and that attitude to voting in the first three elections after having reached the minimum voting age tended to shape voting habits for the rest of a voter's life. Attitude to voting depended on the perception of what degree of real political change could be achieved through political choice and voting. 2009 was an important year for anniversaries of democracy: it had been 20 years since the fall of the Berlin wall, 30 years since the third wave of democratization in Latin America, and 15 years since the beginning of the movement to end apartheid. However, a paradox still existed between the belief that democracy was a driving force for political change worldwide and the distrust of democratic institutions, which were often considered to be elitist, unresponsive and lacking in representativeness. That perception did not reflect a lack of willingness among young people to participate in political life but rather a problem of the formal architecture of democracy and the need to reduce the credibility gap separating the work of those institutions from meaningful social engagement with young people. In order to reduce that gap politicians should be more open to change and increase their propensity to listen to youth, as well as ensuring that young people were granted opportunities to expand their knowledge of complex societal issues and get the sense that their voice was heard and their opinions counted.

Ms. N. SHEPHERD, *Head of the United Nations Programme on Youth, Division for Social Policy and Development, Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA), Panellist*, said that she had been interested to hear about the efforts being made to increase youth participation at the national level, and had been impressed by the commitment of the IPU Member Parliaments in that regard. She drew attention to the fact that a draft resolution on youth participation was currently before the United Nations General Assembly.

Mr. A. GUERRERO, *Partnerships Manager, Civil Society Partnerships, United Nations Children's Fund - UNICEF, Panellist*, said that 2009 was the 20th anniversary of the adoption of the International Convention on the Rights of the Child. While much progress had been made in respect of children's rights, many challenges remained to be overcome, including high rates of infant and child mortality. The debate had illustrated the importance of continuing to invest in good quality education, and in particular teaching the basic elements of democracy. Children had learnt to tolerate violence, and that trend must be reversed, in order for them to acquire the skills to build a peaceful world. He welcomed the establishment of youth parliaments and said that further efforts should be made in that regard. Youth parliament should form an integral part of parliamentary work, rather than being a symbolic playground for democracy. The voices of young people should be heard and taken into account when legislating.

Ms. M. LUGARIĆ (Croatia), *co-Rapporteur*, thanked all the participants for their contributions and said that the debate would assist in finalizing the report and preparing the draft resolution for the 122nd Assembly. Consideration should be given to whether adults were ready to relinquish some of the political power they held. Youth participation was a right, not a gift. She had been particularly interested to hear about the activities of youth parliaments, which were, at present, a fashionable element of the global political scene. Although many countries had developed legal frameworks for participation, further efforts were required to encourage the establishment of youth parliaments. Youth participation in national delegations to meetings should be increased.

The meeting rose at 5.50 p.m.