

**Promoting inclusive parliaments:**  
The representation of minorities and indigenous peoples in parliament



**INTERVIEWS WITH PARLIAMENTARIANS**

**Diversity in parliament:**  
Listening to the voices of minorities and indigenous peoples



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# **Diversity in Parliament:**

Listening to the voices of minorities and indigenous peoples

**Edited by Elizabeth Powley**

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Printed in Mexico

ISBN: 978-92-9142-465-8

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Published by IPU and UNDP

### **Inter-Parliamentary Union**

5 chemin du Pommier  
Case postale 330  
CH-1218 Le Grand-Saconnex  
Geneva, Switzerland

Telephone: +41 22 919 41 50  
Fax: +41 22 919 41 60  
E-mail: [postbox@mail.ipu.org](mailto:postbox@mail.ipu.org)

[www.ipu.org](http://www.ipu.org)

### **United Nations Development Programme**

Democratic Governance Group  
Bureau for Development Policy  
304 East 45th Street, 10th Floor  
New York, NY 10017, USA

Telephone: +1 (212) 906-5000  
Fax: +1 (212) 906-5001

[www.undp.org/governance](http://www.undp.org/governance)

Design and layout: Julian Knott ([www.julianknott.com](http://www.julianknott.com))  
Rick Jones ([rick@studioexile.com](mailto:rick@studioexile.com))

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## Acknowledgements

Our thanks go to the parliamentarians who kindly accepted to be interviewed for the project:

Mahinda Yapa Abeywardana (Sri Lanka)	Tanya Gilly (Iraq)	Viktoria Mohàcsi (Hungary)
Bintu Jalia Abwooli (Uganda)	Syada Greiss (Egypt)	Sophia Abdi Noor (Kenya)
Netsannet Asfaw (Ethiopia)	Hone Harawira (New Zealand)	Donald Oliver (Canada)
Gyula Bardos (Slovakia)	Mazie Keiko Hirono (United States)	Sabina Orellana (Bolivia)
Yonathan Betkolia (Iran)	Michael Honda (United States)	Ernesto Ramiro Estacio (Colombia)
Alima Boumediene-Thiery (France)	Bjarne Kallis (Finland)	Radjkoemar Randjiet Singh (Suriname)
Mary Anne Chambers (Canada)	Nikki Kaye (New Zealand)	W.D.J Seneviratne (Sri Lanka)
Donna Christensen (United States)	Hakki Keskin (Germany)	Tarlochan Singh (India)
Glyn Ford (United Kingdom)	Francis Kiyonga (Uganda)	Maria Sumire (Peru)
Chew Mei Fun (Malaysia)	Elizabeth Leon (Peru)	Thol. Thirumaavalavan (India)
Juan Manuel Galan (Colombia)	Otilia Lux di Coti (Guatemala)	Maria Isabel Urrutia (Colombia).
Chantal Gillard (Netherlands)	Margaret Mensah-Williams (Namibia)	

The interviews with parliamentarians from Latin America were done in partnership with International IDEA ([www.idea.int](http://www.idea.int)).

Interviews were done by Elizabeth Powley, Beatriz Llanos and Paulina Gruszczynska between March and November 2009.

The selection and editing of the interviews for publication was done by Elizabeth Powley.

## Foreword

**T**he marginalization of minorities and indigenous peoples is a historical fact across many societies. It has resulted in disproportionately high levels of poverty, and lower levels of access to healthcare, education and employment. In fact, minorities and indigenous peoples are among the groups most at risk of not achieving the Millennium Development Goals.

The Declaration on the Rights of Persons belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1992, and the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 2007, reflect the international commitment to respect and promote the rights of all minorities and indigenous peoples. One of the ways in which they can exercise their right to development is for minorities and indigenous peoples to play a greater part in policy-making and decision-making. Yet until recently, this has seldom happened. The frequent absence of minorities and indigenous peoples from parliament and from parliamentary work in general is a striking example of their marginalization.

Indeed, the representation of minorities and indigenous peoples in parliaments can help stimulate broad-appeal policies that reduce conflict and maximize development potential. One of the criteria for a democratic parliament is that it should reflect the social diversity of the population in terms of gender, language, religion, ethnicity, or other politically significant characteristics. A number of representatives of minorities and indigenous peoples have overcome significant challenges to become members of parliament. Their presence in parliament is a first step that should be celebrated. It cannot, however, be an end in itself. The larger question is to what extent it is possible for minority



and indigenous parliamentarians to advance the interest of their communities, as well as to influence decision-making processes in general.

The interviews presented in this publication relate the personal experiences of 14 parliamentarians who describe their journey to parliament and the challenges they have faced in fulfilling their responsibilities. The interviews highlight that every country has its own political, historical and cultural context; there can be no 'one-size-fits-all' approach when seeking to promote more inclusive parliaments. They also draw out the many differences in perspectives among the minority and indigenous parliamentarians themselves. At the same time, the interviews offer hope that change is possible within the democratic system of governance.

Politics is the means by which the competing interests of society are discussed and transformed into actions for the national good. As the voice of minorities and indigenous peoples becomes louder, so they take their place within the political process that must aim to deliver democracy and development for all citizens.

**Anders Johansson**  
*Secretary General*  
Inter-Parliamentary Union

**Geraldine Fraser-Moleketi**  
*Practice Director*  
Democratic Governance Group  
Bureau of Development Policy  
UNDP

## Introduction

The recognition of minorities and indigenous peoples' rights, including the right to participation, is essential for democracy, good governance, and sustainable development. The full and effective participation and representation of minorities and indigenous peoples in governance and decision-making processes has been underpinned in legal and policy frameworks at both the international and national level.

Within the international system, the International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention No. 169 on Indigenous and Tribal Peoples is the most authoritative legal framework on the issue of governance and decision-making for indigenous peoples; it includes specific provisions on the rights to consultation and representation. The United Nations (UN) Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples is the latest international legal instrument on this subject. It recognizes indigenous peoples' right to "self-determination." On the rights of minorities, the 1992 UN "Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities" is a critical framework.

At the national level, some states have made specific arrangements for the parliamentary representation of minorities or indigenous peoples.<sup>1</sup> Mechanisms for this purpose include special elections, appointments, reserved seats, and less often, quotas. Other means for guaranteeing participation or "voice" in the legislative process include parliamentary committees and caucuses responsible for minority issues. Some states are engaged in active debate about whether, or how, to institute such affirmative action measures.

The recognition and participation of all people in public affairs are universal rights. Promoting inter-

**"I like to tell people that I have been arrested on more than 30 charges in my life. All of them political, for land rights, and for anti-racism issues... or for Maori rights issues."**

**Hone Harawira**  
*House of Representatives, New Zealand*



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cultural dialogue and mediating the interests of all people through the legislative process prevents violent conflict. In order to advance that dialogue and to promote inclusive parliaments, the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), in partnership with International IDEA in the Latin American region, have documented the experiences and stories of parliamentarians from minority and indigenous backgrounds, as well as some parliamentarians from majority groups who work on minority and indigenous rights. This publication provides excerpts from 14 of those interviews. The stories are told in the first person, in the words of the parliamentarians themselves.

The interviewees in this volume are diverse – they include representatives of national, ethnic, religious, and linguistic minorities (as per the UN definition), as well as indigenous peoples. Among the 14 interviewees are women and men from Africa, the Arab Region, Asia, Europe, Latin America, and North America. Some of the Members of Parliament (MPs) have been serving for more than 20 years, while others have just entered parliament on their first mandate. Additionally, the countries and parliaments included differ strongly with respect to the number and type of minority groups, history of democratic governance, and level of development.

Given the wide range of experiences documented here, this publication does not attempt to draw definitive conclusions about best practices or advance a “one size fits all” set of recommendations for the inclusion of minority and indigenous peoples in parliaments worldwide. Rather, by highlighting the stories and strategies of these 14 parliamentarians, it seeks to underline the obstacles that could emerge, and the approaches that may be employed on the road to representation. The publication draws out the experience of interviewees in different areas – entering politics, gaining seats in parliament, relations with minority and indigenous constituents, and efforts to

The parliamentarians’ stories illustrate a wide range of paths to parliament.



advance minority and indigenous rights. In doing so, this collection of stories makes a strong case for inclusive parliaments and suggests strategies that have been useful in achieving this.

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### Entering politics

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The parliamentarians interviewed for this report come from a variety of backgrounds. Some come from political families, while others were activists on minority or indigenous rights before entering the politics. Still others moved into government from other fields, such as education, law, or business.

Each of the interviewees from minority or indigenous backgrounds, however, explains that their identity as a member of a historically marginalized group was significant in propelling them into politics. Mazie Hirono, a Congresswoman from the United States, explains that her immigrant background has “everything to do with my wanting to give back to a country [the U.S.] that provided me with opportunities.” And Hone Harawira from New Zealand cites his identity as a Maori and his years of activism on Maori rights as his motivation for entering into politics. Some of the MPs were elected directly by their indigenous communities or movements, such as Ernesto Ramiro Estacio from Colombia.

In some cases, the interviewees identify with more than one minority group. Tanya Gilly, an MP from Iraq, personifies this sense of overlapping or even



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The debate between assimilation into mainstream parties versus the need for separate representation is a theme that echoes through several of the interviews.

- competing identities. She is a female secular Kurd. She sees herself as a minority on the basis of her sex, her religion, and her national/ethnic group. At one point in the interview, she says, “I identify with my ethnicity more than my religion, so I consider myself an Iraqi Kurd.” Later she elaborates, “I always say there are two reasons why I’ve become a parliamentarian. Firstly, because I’m a woman. And secondly, because I’m Kurdish.” This example is not atypical, and is instructive in its complexity.

Several of the interviewees seemed surprised that their activism had led to careers in formal politics; they were drafted into service by members of their minority or indigenous group who were seeking representation. María Sumire from Peru explained it this way, “Honestly, I had never thought of coming to Congress, much less being a Congresswoman. I did not have political aspirations... I am from the Quechua Nation, which asked me to come here and be their spokesperson, since they had no representative.”

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### Gaining seats in parliament

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The parliamentarians’ stories illustrate a wide range of paths to parliament. Some were elected by constituencies; some were elected through a party list system. Others were appointed. They operate in a variety of parliamentary systems – majoritarian, party list, and mixed.

Some of the parliamentarians are members of mainstream or traditional political parties, while

others are members of identity-based parties,<sup>2</sup> those founded specifically to represent the interests of a minority or indigenous group (e.g. the Maori Party in New Zealand, the Dalit Panthers in India, or the Kurdistan Alliance List in Iraq).

The debate between assimilation into mainstream parties versus the need for separate representation is a theme that echoes through several of the interviews. Some of the interviewees argue that the only path to power for minorities is by gaining influence in mainstream parties. Others reject this model and insist that the voices of minority and indigenous people will never be substantively included in the party platforms or legislative priorities of mainstream parties. Without separate parties, they argue, minorities will always risk being co-opted by the larger parties. Similarly, some MPs advocate for reserved seats or quotas, while others reject them. These differences of opinion come out forcefully in several of the interviews.

Once seated in parliament, representatives of minority and indigenous people often meet with resistance, or with a parliamentary culture that is unfamiliar. Many of the interviewees report that while individual colleagues were welcoming or supportive of their presence, they found the wider institution to be alien, and at times hostile or isolating. In addition to learning the formal rules of the legislative body, new MPs also have to learn the “unwritten rules” that govern interactions and access to power in a legislative body. Although the experience is certainly not universal, some MPs from minority or indigenous backgrounds find that the parliamentary culture reinforces their marginalization. Ernesto Ramiro Estacio from Colombia characterized the typical parliamentary culture this way: “I believe there are differences, because in other parties, many decisions are made over lunch or coffee, among party leaders or elites. In our case, we must reach consensus with the [indigenous] communities, and they are the ones that tell us what to do. So there is more participation, as indigenous people, in decision-making. The

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others are more elitist. I see more strongman-style leadership in [their] policy making.”

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### Relations with minority and indigenous communities

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All of the minority and indigenous MPs interviewed for this project feel a strong sense of responsibility to represent their community or people in the legislature. Some were sent to parliament explicitly to represent that group – either through a separate identity-based party, or in a reserved seat. Others, those who were elected by a constituency or who are members of a mainstream party, must juggle their sense of responsibility to their own group and to the larger population. Hakki Keskin, a Turkish-born member of the German Bundestag explains it this way: “As a migrant, particularly one from Turkey, it is true that I particularly consider the interests of my constituents. People expect me to stand for the stronger interests, should I say, in the Turkish minority populations. But at the same time, I am a representative of Germany. I am a German MP and

therefore I represent all the people of the Federal Republic of Germany.”

Another dominant theme that emerges from these interviews is the solidarity that representatives of minority backgrounds often feel with other minority communities or indigenous peoples. Most of the minority MPs interviewed for this study explain that they feel a responsibility to be a voice in parliament for marginalized groups. Often, in fact, other minority groups seek them out as allies and champions. Tanya Gilly from Iraq gave this example: “For me, I like to think that I represent the voices of the oppressed more than anything else. During a time, in Baghdad the Christians were being threatened and they were deported from their areas... So it was one of the things I did and because my name is ‘Tanya’ people thought that I was Christian. So it took me a while to explain to my colleagues that I am not a Christian but that they are an oppressed people and since we represent all Iraqis we must protect the rights of all Iraqis... I have not limited myself to just talking about the Kurdish people’s issues or even women’s issues.”



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**“My personal background has everything to do with why I got into public service... I truly believe that one person can make a difference, no matter what kind of job you have or your station in life. I just picked a very public way to do that.”**

**Mazie Hirono**  
*House of Representatives, USA*



- The nature of the relationship between constituents and their representatives was raised as a significant issue by MPs from indigenous backgrounds – more so than by MPs from minority backgrounds. Drawing on traditional forms of self-governance among indigenous peoples, these MPs emphasized the consultative and participatory nature of their relationship to their constituents as something that held them apart from the mainstream. Non-indigenous parliamentarians remarked upon the nature of their leadership, as well. For example, Elizabeth León from Peru observed the following about her indigenous colleagues: “There are other patterns, other codes, even of conduct, between the population and [indigenous] representatives, which sometimes conflict with the legal, formal norms that we have in Parliament. We [the majority population] need to make a greater effort to understand them. [Indigenous representatives] have a very clear idea of what they mean by representation. They don’t make decisions without consulting their organizations, and that makes processes slower.”

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### **Efforts to advance minority and indigenous rights**

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The parliamentarians whose stories are included herein come from countries with different histories and different experiences with the recognition and promotion of minority and indigenous rights. While some are still struggling for basic rights, others come from states where equality before the law is constitutionally protected. Some countries do not yet formally recognize minority groups, while others have outlawed discrimination and are moving to design electoral systems that actively promote the participation of minorities. Unsurprisingly, then, the legislative and policy priorities of minorities and indigenous people differ across countries.

Certain generalizations can be made, however. In all settings, a crucial first is the protection of the basic human rights and fundamental freedoms of minorities and indigenous groups in line with international legal standards. This includes, as many

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interviewees noted, the right to language or a “mother tongue.”

Beyond this, the MPs noted that their minority and indigenous constituents were more likely to be economically disadvantaged and more likely to have trouble accessing government services. Research demonstrates that, worldwide, minorities and indigenous groups are poorer, less educated, and less healthy than majority populations. This structural and systemic discrimination is a violation of their rights, and it also limits their ability to participate in democratic governance or achieve social and cultural influence. Thus, of particular importance for most of the parliamentarians interviewed here are socio-economic issues – health, education, and employment.

In many cases, the ability of parliamentarians to influence the issues that matter most to their minority or indigenous constituents is stymied. In the case of Egypt for instance, Syada Greiss indicated that the presence of minorities had very little impact on the parliamentary agenda. In Germany, Hakki Keskin reported that minorities were vocal but frustrated in efforts to advance their agenda. Ultimately, the rules and procedures of parliaments should allow for representatives of minority and indigenous people not only to serve in parliament, but also to influence parliamentary debates and the legislative agenda.

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### Operating in a political environment

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The MPs profiled in this publication come from across the political spectrum. As indicated above, some represent identity-based parties while others are members of traditional or mainstream political parties. Among those in mainstream political parties, the MPs have diverse affiliations. Tanya Gilly in Iraq, for instance, indicates that her party is aligned with the social democratic tradition, while Donald Oliver in Canada represents the Conservative Party. Others point out that in their countries, there are

individual minority politicians who are members of almost all political parties.

The interviews highlight the MPs’ experiences in governing parties and coalitions, as well as in the opposition. Mazie Hirono, a Democrat from the United States, reflects on the relative power of the (largely Democratic) Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus and opportunities for leadership in a majority Democratic Congress. Gyula Bardos in Slovakia is pragmatic about his party’s change in political fortunes: “For four years, I was an opposition MP, followed by eight years in coalition... Our standing has changed slightly since the 2006 general elections and creation of the new government... [and] the perception of our party and the coverage of our party’s activities have changed. [Now] it tends to focus on ethnic issues and minority issues; this has become the front burner issue, rather than other issues that we used to focus on.” Several of the MPs from identity-based parties point out that their status as smaller parties makes them attractive to larger parties looking to construct governing coalitions.

These political realities underscore the need for cross-party cooperation in order to advance minority and indigenous rights in a legislative context, paying particular attention to the negotiations and trade-offs that are required and the difficulties involved, in achieving this. Hakki Keskin from Germany describes one such effort, which illustrates the inherent challenges: “Indeed, there is cross-party contact but party politics always prevails and there is no formal caucus... On the



Cross-party cooperation [is needed] in order to advance minority and indigenous rights.



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working level, we do of course have contact. One example of cross-party cooperation is that we are moving forward on an initiative, on legislation on the granting of nationality and respect for dual citizenship. We assembled a coalition of Green, FDP, Left and Social Democrats. This was comprised of minority members of the legislature and allies in their parties. But that coalition fell apart, or that cross-party work fell apart, because some of the parties were allied with, or governing in, the formal coalition with the Conservatives who were opposed to the legislation."

So you feel like an outcast when you join the ruling party... This is because they are trying to intimidate you. But I have to tell you that I'm a leader, a wife of my husband, and a mother of my children. There is nobody that will intimidate me. And I am as much a proper member [of the party] as the next person; there is no member superior to another one. So I am using my influence every day, to push and to call for inclusiveness, so it is now becoming language that is used more often. But if I was a weak person I would have been gone long ago."

In addition to discrimination, several parliamentarians mentioned the issue of resources and the cost of campaigning as an obstacle. Others reported that the political system itself, and particularly the lack of transparent decision-making in political parties, was a barrier for minorities. As Donald Oliver put it, "This kind of systemic and entrenched value system is one of the things that make it impossible for a visible minority to get in, no matter how hard they work, licking stamps, handing out envelopes, doing the legwork, trying to get inside a party."

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### Obstacles

Beyond the challenges of building cross-party support for minority and indigenous rights, there are other specific obstacles that these MPs face. There is a vast difference in the status of, and legal protections afforded to, minorities in the various countries. But all of the minority and indigenous MPs interviewed for this research reported some level of exclusion and marginalization. Even in countries with progressive non-discrimination policies, such as Canada, representatives of minority groups experience resistance to their participation, and sometimes outright racism, as described by Senator Donald Oliver.

Margaret Mensah-Williams from Namibia explains her experience of racism this way: "I am very cognizant of where I come from. I am cognizant of the fact that the tribe I come from, the mixed tribe, not many of [us] belong to the ruling party.

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### Strategies for success

As discussed above, the parliamentarians interviewed for this study differed widely in their support (or lack thereof) for reserved seats, quotas or other special measures, and in their support (or lack thereof) for identity-based political parties for minorities and indigenous people. There is no consensus on these strategies in this volume.

A central concern of all of the interviewees, however, was how to leverage power or political will on behalf of minority and indigenous peoples. Due to their relatively small numbers in parliament, these MPs must build coalitions and find allies for their agendas. One strategy that emerged relatively consistently across interviews was the importance of forming coalitions in general, and caucuses in particular. With the exception of countries like Egypt, where a caucus along religious lines (for the

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minority Coptic Christian population) would be unconstitutional, MPs in most countries identified the importance of working in concert with other minorities to strengthen voice and influence. Michael Honda of the US explained, “We see the tri-caucus’s priorities reflected [on the agenda] because we’ve developed a coalition and part of the barriers is numbers. If you don’t have numbers, you have no leverage; if you have leverage you have influence.”

By bringing all members of a minority, or members from several minorities, together to create a shared agenda and advocate collectively, minority MPs can have an impact greater than their numbers. Mazie Hirono, who has experience organizing women’s caucuses and minority caucuses in the US, put it this way: “I would say that any time a group gets together and behaves in a decent cohesive way in a political arena, then you become a lot more effective... At least [with a caucus] you] have an agenda,

you have bills, and you can talk about something in a really disciplined cohesive way.” In addition to formal caucuses, many of the MPs talked about seeking allies in the human rights community, or among members of other minorities, as a way of increasing their reach and impact.

Other strategies that received attention from MPs included cross-cultural dialogue to promote understanding and break down barriers, as well as the need for training and capacity building on issues of minorities and indigenous peoples’ rights. Training for MPs on diversity issues, particularly for MPs from majority populations, emerged as a common recommendation, across countries and cultures. The goals of such training would be to help majority MPs better understand the rights, needs, and challenges of their minority and indigenous constituents, as well as the role of parliament in protecting minorities, and the ways in which democratic institutions such as parlia-



**“...I am using my influence every day, to push and to call for inclusiveness, so it is now becoming language that is used more often.”**

Margaret Mensah-Williams  
National Council, Republic of Namibia

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- ment can represent and mediate the sometimes conflicting interests within a society.

Another strategy that received attention from MPs was the utility of regional networks in strengthening the capacity of minority and indigenous MPs. Several MPs from Latin America, for instance, mentioned involvement in the Parliament of the Americas as central to their political education.<sup>3</sup> Such venues provide training in international law, disseminate model legislation, build contacts and networks, and improve advocacy skills.

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### Conclusion

The substantive and effective representation of all of a society's people enhances democracy, promotes social cohesion, and can reduce conflict. In order to achieve this, countries must enact and implement legal frameworks that protect the rights of minorities and indigenous peoples. Implementation requires both political will and the allocation of resources. In addition, democratic institutions must have mechanisms and regulations that guarantee the meaningful participation of all segments of society. Finally, the capacity of legislators – those of minority and majority backgrounds – must be enhanced so that they can serve as leaders of multicultural societies.

Democratic institutions should reflect the diversity of a population – in terms of gender, language, religion, ethnicity, or other politically significant characteristics. The 14 stories that follow are parliamentarians' personal reflections on their careers in politics and parliament, their work on behalf of minority and indigenous peoples, and the barriers and opportunities that exist within legislatures. Their experiences should serve as a guide for those working to ensure the democratic representation of minorities and indigenous peoples.

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### References

- 1 Though largely outside the scope of this publication, it is important to note that many minorities and indigenous peoples have opportunities for governance beyond national parliaments. They are involved at state, federal, and regional levels, and in some instances, in autonomous regions or zones within states.
- 2 The term "identity-based parties" is used here because, unlike the more common "ethnic parties," it is inclusive of national, linguistic, and religious minorities.
- 3 Another example of a regional parliament and network for indigenous people, though it is not mentioned in the interviews included in this volume, is the Saami Parliament of Sweden, Norway and Finland.



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## Gyula Bardos

### Slovakia



**Chamber**  
National Council

**Affiliation**  
Hungarian Christian Democratic  
Movement

**Entered Parliament**  
1984

My name is Gyula Bardos. I graduated from the faculty of philosophy, faculty of arts, of the Communist University in Bratislava. Prior to 1989, I earned my living as a journalist. In 1992, I became spokesperson for the then Hungarian Christian Democratic Movement. That party later on [joined] with two other political parties representing the Hungarian national minority and formed a coalition. I have been a member of the National Council of the Slovak Republic since 1984. For four years, I was an opposition MP, followed by 8 years in a coalition [government]. As the head of our party caucus in parliament, I had experiences both being a member of the opposition and also being a member of a governing coalition.

I sit on the committee on Public Administration. I was also a member of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Slovakian Parliament, and this is the second term in which I have been a member of the Parliament's committee on Culture and Media. For the third consecutive term, I am a member of the Mandate and Immunity Committee of the Slovakian Parliament. I am also a member of the executive leadership body of the National Council of the Slovak Republic.

Looking back at my activities as a Member of Parliament, I am quite proud of the fact that I had the privilege of assisting Slovakia to become a member of the European Union. And I'm also happy that I am a member of a political party that very much supported Slovakia's drive towards membership in NATO. So this was my contribution and my party's contribution – catching up with the other countries. Since I am an MP for a minority party, which represents the Hungarian minority in Slovakia, [in addition to] our political agenda on obvious issues like the economy and social issues, we also [focus] our interest on minority issues.

#### On the representation of minorities in Slovakia

Fourteen percent of the Slovak population belong to ethnic minorities. Ten percent are Slovak citizens of Hungarian ethnicity. We are proud members of the Slovak Republic, nevertheless we are persons belonging to a minority, and we use our mother

tongue (Hungarian) in all our communication. The other 4% are various other ethnic minorities, including Romanians, Poles, Czech, Germans, and the Roma minority. Since 1989, we, the Hungarian ethnic minority, have been the only minority group to have political representation in Slovakia.

There are no reserved seats in the parliament [for ethnic minorities]. There is a free political competition. There is a 5% threshold to enter parliament. There is a 7% threshold for two-party coalitions, which obviously means that if we want to be represented in parliament we have to receive at least 5% of the vote, or 7% in the case of a two-party coalition. If we were not organised efficiently, we would obviously fail to [achieve] that 5% threshold. It is difficult to [know for sure], but according to some research surveys, as many as two percent of the votes we received [came from] citizens belonging to the majority population. And in the past, we have included people who were members of other ethnic minorities on our candidate list, people who were on our ticket who ran for parliament.

#### On perceptions of the minority party

[The challenges for the Hungarian minority] have historical roots. There is a certain degree of suspicion on both sides, there is not enough trust [between] the ethnic Hungarians and the majority population. We are, for instance, very often [accused of] actually trying to change the existing

borders of Slovakia. There is this constant fear on the part of Slovakia that ethnic Hungarians are trying to change the existing state borders, which is absolutely not true. There is no mention of any such effort in the program of our political party, still... this issue is obviously used as a weapon in political battles, and has become more acute since the Slovak National Party joined the existing governing coalition [in 2006].

The specific standing or role of our party stems from the nature of our constituency, the Hungarian ethnic minority. This is also reflected in how the media reports and covers our activities. Usually when we focus on issues like the economy or social issues, this tends to be under-reported, but when we speak about issues concerning ethnic minorities, it is then that the media focuses their attention, and it tends to be over-reported. A picture is thus being created as though our party is only interested in ethnic issues, rather than other issues, which is not true, which is certainly not the case. Obviously we regard ethnic issues to be very important, but during those 8 years in power when my party was a member of the governing coalition, we for instance, had four ministers. We also had people who were in regional administration... But because we were represented in the government by a member of the government who happened to be Deputy Prime Minister for Human Rights, that obviously tended to be reported more extensively.

Our standing has changed slightly since the 2006 general elections and creation of the new government. One of the political parties that formed the new government [is] the Slovak National Party, and the perception of our party has changed since then. We obviously respect the fact that the Slovak National party has a legitimate representation in parliament, [but] what we are not happy with, and do not agree with, is the fact that this party [was] invited to form a new [government]. That is what we object to. After 2006, the situation therefore changed to a certain extent, [and] the perception of our party and the coverage of our party's activities

This is also reflected in how the media reports and covers our activities. Usually when we focus on issues like the economy or social issues, this tends to be under-reported, but when we speak about issues concerning ethnic minorities, it is then that the media focuses their attention, and it tends to be over-reported.



have changed. [Now] it tends to focus on ethnic issues and minority issues; this has become the front burner issue, rather than other issues that we used to focus on.

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#### On working with other minority groups

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During the time that we were in government, it used to be the case that [other minority groups] approached us with their requests and suggestions. Unfortunately, this is no longer the case... They no longer feel an urge to see us as a mediator in the solution of their problems. The current government is doing all sorts of things to help them and solve their issues and make concessions, and so they don't feel the need to approach us anymore. [For] example, one of the hot, pressing issues debated in Slovakia is the Official Language Act. Most of the criticism directed towards this new act comes from our party, which gives the impression that we are the only ones who are dissatisfied with this Official Language Act. The impression has been created that [other minorities] are not critical of the law, but this is not true... Let me make this very clear, we are not against any measures to protect the Slovak language as such, its clarity, its place and the way it is used. We are very much in support of that. What



## Gyula Bardos

### Slovakia

- we are definitely opposed to is that this should not affect the use of other languages spoken by ethnic minorities. So this is where the bone of contention lies.

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#### On the protection of minority rights

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At present there is no act [in Slovakia] focused on the protection of the rights of minorities. There is no act dealing primarily with the standing of minorities [or] financing of their needs. And I think that, I have to [accept responsibility] in this case also, because during the 8 years that we were also in coalition, we failed to make this a front burner issue or to succeed in pushing for better legislation. But when we were in government, we managed to ratify the charter of minority languages in Slovakia.

That's OK. There is no problem in this respect. Where we do see problems is in translating this charter into new acts, making it part of our everyday life, rather than it just remaining a charter. I think that we definitely need an act on the standing and financing of ethnic minorities and that would obviously help us protect the needs and rights of minorities vis-à-vis any future government, not just the current one. The absence of such legislation obviously reflects the absence of a framework within which these issues could be resolved satisfactorily. Issues tend to be solved in an ad hoc way, rather than in a systematic way. And by that I don't just mean this particular government, the current government... In short, we [minorities] need more guarantees to feel part of the society, to feel more at home in our country, because a satisfied minority is a good minority.



# Ernesto Ramiro Estacio

## Colombia



Chamber	Affiliation	Entered Parliament
Senate	Movement of Indigenous Authorities of Colombia	2006

My name is Ernesto Ramiro Estacio. I was elected [to the national legislature] by the special indigenous jurisdiction. Of the 102 Senators in Colombia, two are indigenous. I am one of the two. I was elected by the Movement of Indigenous Authorities of Colombia (Movimiento de Autoridades Indígenas de Colombia, or AICO), which started in south-western Colombia, in the Department of Nariño, with the Pastos indigenous people along the Colombian-Ecuadorian border. I was elected in 2006, have served for three years, and expect to finish my term on 20 July 2010.

The Pastos people are an indigenous group found in 14 municipalities. We have 24 indigenous communities organized as an Indigenous Assembly and indigenous reserve. We are 100,000 people on the Colombian side of the border and some 30,000 on the Ecuadorian side. We are a binational people, and our landholding dates back to colonial times.

In the 1970s, the [Movement of Indigenous Authorities of Colombia] first focused on grassroots organizing, recovering lands that had been usurped by large landholders. Later, a group called the March of Governors emerged in the interior of Colombia, when the 1991 Constitution was being debated. The main idea then was to seek recognition of both individual and collective rights, and we won recognition of the right to political participation. We participated in the institutional reform and gained legal standing, and since 1991 we have had representatives in the Senate.

### On the representation of indigenous people in Parliament

There are two seats for the special indigenous jurisdiction in the Senate, and another reserved seat in the Chamber of Representatives. Thanks to this legislation, there will always be three indigenous representatives, as long as the Constitution is not changed. But other indigenous leaders have also won seats in Congress by running with political

parties or movements. In the last legislature, there were five indigenous senators – two who ran in the special jurisdiction and three who ran with other movements. We have an indigenous caucus [in Parliament]. There is some collaboration with other indigenous representatives from parties, depending on the issue.

[Those who vote for us] are indigenous, but also [those who] sympathize with the process of struggle, “minga,”<sup>1</sup> resistance and the rise of original cultures. We have been accompanied in this process by anthropologists, sociologists, political scientists, academics, and a very interesting group called the “solidarity group.” We have voters in indigenous communities in rural areas, as well as in the large cities.

### On the barriers and obstacles that indigenous representatives face

There are many barriers. The first is that there are only two of us; there should be more. We do not have much influence on parliamentary decisions. The other is that we often are not heeded, because we think differently, and legislative proposals or draft legislation [ignore] different views. For example, we oppose the exploitation of our Mother Earth and the extraction of petroleum. To us, petroleum is a vital element of our Mother Earth, and to extract it is to make our mother bleed. According to the



<sup>1</sup> A pre-Columbian term referring to communal labour. In Colombia, it is also a form of grassroots organization for the purpose of reclaiming rights.

## Ernesto Ramiro Estacio

### Colombia

→ [majority] view, however, petroleum development is the same as economic development, generating revenues. There are contradictions, and that leads us to take positions that might be radical, because of our world view, and because we, as indigenous peoples, have always considered ourselves defenders of Mother Earth. We believe the earth should not be subject to exploitation. Obviously, that is an obstacle for the national government, because in implementing the prior consultation provisions of [International Labour Organization] Convention 169, we ask for consultation and consensus on projects that could have a negative or positive impact on the communities. These procedures have provided an opportunity to raise awareness about our rights and to guarantee participation, not only in elections but also in decision making.

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#### On institutional culture and parliamentary rules

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Fortunately, we have found good friends in other legislators, whether Conservative, Liberal or from traditional politics. But when it comes time to make decisions that affect those parties, we are obviously excluded. We have found that in Congress, everyone supports our participation in national and international events and the use of Senate facilities for our events.

Because there are two of us in the Senate, we can only be on two committees, which means we cannot be on all the seven constitutional committees. We concentrate on certain issues, but miss out on



others. For example, I am on the Fifth Commission, which handles issues related to agriculture, energy and the environment, where it is possible to present the indigenous view of development and politics. The other [indigenous] Senator is on the Second Commission, which handles international relations and matters related to international trade. But we can't serve on the other committees, which handle the budget, transportation, education and health, simply because we are dedicated to certain committees. I believe there should be seven indigenous senators, to cover all the issues being addressed.

One difficulty we have not been able to overcome has been participation in committee leadership positions. The Party Caucus Law (Ley de Bancadas) says that political, ethnic and opposition minorities should hold the second vice presidency of the constitutional committees, but we have not been able to achieve that yet. There has been no possibility. Perhaps there has been a lack of political will.

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#### On the influence of indigenous representatives over the legislative agenda

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There are cases in which our two indigenous votes have been decisive in passing legislation... In other cases, there has been no influence, because indigenous representatives take different sides. But when draft legislation is debated and the established procedures have not been exhausted, [often] you can see that indigenous peoples' proposals have not been taken into consideration. That has served as grounds for having the laws declared unconstitutional. In my case, for example, when the Rural Development Law was debated, I couldn't do much in the Fifth Commission. When it went to the Senate floor, the majority approved the law. But we had the chance to present our position and we saw that when the constitutional review of the law was done, it would be clear that there was a problem: the lack of prior consultation. We pointed that out, and the courts recognized our role, because the law was overturned.



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### On the challenge of representing both indigenous and majority communities

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I believe there are differences [between indigenous and majority communities], because in other parties, many decisions are made over lunch or coffee, among party leaders or elites. In our case, we must reach consensus with the communities, and they are the ones that tell us what to do. So there is more participation, as indigenous people, in decision-making. The others are more elitist. I see more strongman-style leadership in [their] policy making.

[But] one is not just an indigenous senator; one is also a Colombian senator, and must defend Colombia. It's a dual responsibility. Obviously, it is difficult, because the regions or departments often have one agenda, while indigenous people have another. There are cases in which indigenous people organize, for example, to protest against the departmental government. It is complicated to handle those situations. But when there are protests involving 10,000 or 20,000 people, it's clear where to go. You simply lead or accompany. But because you are a representative [of indigenous peoples], you are the direct interlocutor with the national government at negotiation or consensus-building round tables.

There is also a difference in the decisions and proposals themselves. For example, we have a very different concept of security. Some people think security means arming people, closing borders or having long chains of soldiers. We say security means having clean water, food, pure air and land to work, and living well.

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### On legislation that protects the rights of minority groups in Colombia

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We have Law 21, on prior consultation, because Colombia ratified ILO Convention 169. We also have

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Law 691, on health, and Law 115, on education, which guarantee specific rights for indigenous people. There is exemption from obligatory military service for indigenous people. The Mining Code also states that indigenous lands must be excluded, referring not only to mining, but also to flora, fauna, biodiversity and water.

Overall, there are many laws for indigenous peoples. The problem is that these laws are not respected or enforced. There are very harsh realities in terms of displacement, violence, and armed conflict in indigenous territories. We have found that entrenched drug trafficking is turning our indigenous territories into laboratories of war. We have a large compilation of rights. There are 25 articles in the Constitution that benefit us. But our actual situation is different. More than 34 of our indigenous peoples face physical and cultural extinction. The Constitutional Court has said that, and has called on the national government to protect the peoples that are becoming extinct. We need a development plan that would create a different situation for them.

# Juan Manuel Galán

## Colombia



**Chamber**  
Senate

**Affiliation**  
Liberal Party

**Entered Parliament**  
2006

[Speaking as a non-indigenous Senator], I think the progress that was made with the 1991 Constitution was very significant [with regard to] the participation of minorities in legislative venues. It would have been very difficult with the 1886 Constitution, which was replaced in 1991. With the new Constitution, there was a change in the basic institutional structure of the Colombian state, and many possibilities for public participation were introduced that did not exist before. These have been very important in guaranteeing indigenous people's participation. A special jurisdiction was created to enable indigenous people to participate in both the Senate and the Chamber of Representatives, and those communities have made an important contribution to the legislative process and the development of democracy.

### On the relationship between majority and indigenous representatives

I think there are still prejudices. There are still difficulties. But in the case of the Partido Liberal, which is in the opposition, with Jesús Piñacué, a Senator from the Alianza Social Indígena elected for the special jurisdiction, we have a good understanding. There is sharp confrontation with the government over massacres of indigenous people by the guerrillas or paramilitary groups, or because of incursions in which the Army has attacked indigenous populations, accusing them of collaborating with the guerrillas. There are also problems related to land. These are issues that create many problems between indigenous people and the government.

involved in political parties, to gain greater influence through those parties' congressional caucuses on issues that interest them, because working on those issues alone is not easy.

Of course, they still have problems in other areas. There are serious land conflicts, which are difficult to resolve, and violent confrontations over land ownership, especially in the indigenous reserves. To some extent, however, their participation in Congress has guaranteed progress in or protection of these rights.

### On the priority issues of indigenous people

I think the challenge is to push the agenda on issues that interest them. But to do that, I think they need greater representation. They need to become more

Because of their worldview and their culture, indigenous people have a view of nature, the land, water, environment, and natural resources that is highly appropriate for the needs of the world in terms of the environment and nature. These issues are highly respected, and their views are greatly valued. Right now, security is the issue that causes controversy in debates.

The vision of indigenous participation is very biased by the issue of security. The security issue colours Colombia's political agenda, and we have not been able to overcome that. All matters are viewed through the lens of security. Indigenous issues are not an exception, and that has forced [indigenous representatives] to take a very clear position against the guerrillas, armed groups and the military. When the state, the armed forces, or the military do not see that position as completely clear and solid, indigenous people are accused of collaborating with the guerrillas. Right now, the issue of indig-





enous people's security is of great concern to them, as are the violence and aggression to which they are subjected daily in Colombia.

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### **On the positions that indigenous representatives hold in the Senate**

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There are indigenous representatives on the First Commission, which handles constitutional and political affairs. They also sit on the Second Commission, which handles matters related to public order and foreign policy. But they are absent from the Third and Fourth Commissions, which consider economic and budget matters. They should have a stronger presence there, because they could have significant influence on investment programs and budget discussions.

We have to ensure that there is at least one indigenous person on each of the constitutional committees. In the Senate, there are seven constitutional committees, and there should be at least one indigenous legislator on each. I think that is important.

I think they should have the chance to participate in the leadership bodies, but to achieve that they need to have a stronger presence in political parties, and not isolate themselves as if they were different worlds. I think that has a negative effect. It puts them in a minority position and leaves them in a sort of "ghetto" among the parliamentarians. They have to make an effort to expand their relationships and have a greater presence in political parties, to attain positions that will give them greater influence.

[I do not think] there should be just a specific jurisdiction; political parties should make an effort to include indigenous participation in their congressional representation. That would ensure greater participation by indigenous representatives in political debate, and they could establish relationships and links with all parties, and even act



I think the challenge is to push the agenda on issues that interest them. But to do that, I think they need greater representation. They need to become more involved in political parties, to gain greater influence through those parties' congressional caucuses on issues that interest them, because working on those issues alone is not easy.

as a caucus, which would make them stronger and enable them to win more seats.

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### **On the way that indigenous leaders interact with their constituents**

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I am not involved in their decision-making. I see them in the committees, I am familiar with the statements they make and the positions they take, but I don't have detailed knowledge of how they consult and inform their constituents. It would be good to understand the dynamics and time frames, however, so we can be more tolerant and create more opportunities for their participation.

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### **On the potential for influence**

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[Indigenous leaders] have rhetoric that is generally very deep with regard to the values and principles they defend, for which they fight and in which they believe. Those principles and values are highly compatible with democracy, which is very important and good. But I would repeat that it is important for them to become more involved in the system of certain democratic institutions from which I think they are absent, such as political parties.

## Tanya Gilly

Iraq



**Chamber**  
Council of Representatives

**Affiliation**  
Patriotic Union of Kurdistan and  
Kurdistan Alliance List

**Entered Parliament**  
2006

My name is Tanya Gilly. I am a member of the Iraqi Council of Representatives, as part of the Kurdistan Alliance List. I represent the province of Kirkuk, which is one of the hotbeds in Iraq right now. I belong to the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, one of the main Kurdish parties. I have been in parliament for about three and a half years. I was elected in the 15 December 2005 elections, but the results were not verified until 16 March [2006], so technically it is a little over three years that I have been in parliament. We are going to have an election at the end of this year [2009].

My background is a little bit complicated. When I was growing up, because we are Kurds, obviously we were oppressed: members of my family were executed, others were killed, others disappeared. The area that we are originally from was part of the Anfal campaign where some people were buried alive and suffered chemical attacks. And so, growing up was hard and having my parents, who were very much activists, making sure that the world knew about the plight of the Kurdish people definitely put the seed in me that we are an oppressed people and we need to speak out, fight for what is rightfully ours. So I grew up with that; that is the path I started taking and I definitely started working in politics and I started doing that through one of the Kurdish political parties. And then through that I started working in the foreign affairs office for our political party in Washington, DC. [I lived] in exile and worked there for a few years.

I always say that there are two reasons that I became a parliamentarian. The first one was because I was a woman and the second obviously because I was Kurdish. So you know the women's issue is

obviously the one that is dearest to my heart and I am known to be more active on that issue than on the ethnic issues.

### On the Iraqi political system

In Iraq, with an estimated population of about 27.5 million, there are many different groups, whether they are ethnic or religious. We have not had a proper census in a very long time... but in general, there are Arabs, Kurds, Turkomans, the Assyrian ethnicities, and even within the Assyrians, you have the Chaldeans and the Assyrians; they are different ethnicities and their languages are even different. Also within the religious groups, you have the Muslim Shias, the Muslim Sunnis, then you have the Christian minority and then you have other religions. I identify myself more so with my ethnicity than my religion. So I consider myself an Iraqi Kurd.

The Iraqi system we tend to call it a very consensual democracy by which there are three main groups: you have what we call the Shia, the Arab Sunni and usually those are known as the Arab groupings, and then the Kurds that represent the third major group. And for all major decisions all three sides have to agree upon it in order for it to pass.

Personally, I got my seat because I represent a province and the way the election system is in Iraq, it has been a closed-list system where parties actually put together these lists of individuals and these individuals can actually be from any

My party is a social democratic party so we believe in the human rights aspects of making laws or to be incorporated into the laws or into the way we do things.

background or any ethnicity. For example, in the Kurdistan Alliance we do have Turkomans that represent the same province as I do. We have Christians or Assyrians, Chaldeans. In the previous council we had Arabs on the list as well. So the way our list works, it is not exclusively for Kurds. We have tried to bring in other minorities as well, or other groups that share similar interests or have similar visions of what Iraq should be. So, basically, there are no seats allocated or set aside for certain groups.

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### On the role of committees

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There is a women, family and childhood committee. It's a permanent committee. But unfortunately some of us felt that this committee does not serve the cause of women in that it predominantly has Islamist members in it. We need to really talk about women's issues as women and just stand up for them. For example, putting the 25 per cent [quota for women] in the election law. We worked on that. There was me and two other female colleagues who worked very hard on it. We do not have [a specific committee for minorities] but obviously we have a Human Rights Standing Committee and most of these issues should go to them.

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### On policy priorities

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Within the party, yes, we have Arab members, we do have Turkoman members, and we do have Christian members whether they are Kurdish or other ethnicities and so on. In our party our slogan represents democracy, human rights... Basically, my party is a social democratic party so we believe in the human rights aspects of making laws or to be incorporated into the laws or into the way we do things. Obviously we believe that democracy is the best way to do things. To actually get to that democracy we think of it as not just as a means but also as the goal of what we would like to see the country be.



So within the party we have been quite vocal on the rights of women especially, and also other minorities. [It] has definitely made us one of the most sought-after parties by, I would probably say, the youth or the people who believe in these rights. Within the list however, the way it has been in the last two elections is that we have had one common shared interest and that is obviously the Kurdistan region, which is an area of the country where the predominant population are Kurds. There are other groups there as well. The Turkomans, and there are Christians and you have some Arabs there, too. So the idea behind integrating those groups into the actual list, a predominantly Kurdish list, has been because we all have a common shared interest and that is the benefit of this area. So anybody who lives in this area [Kurdistan], basically we defend the idea of federalism. We are very much for a decentralised government. These are values that are very important.



## Tanya Gilly

Iraq

→ We believe in a free market economy. We believe that outside investment should be encouraged and within the Kurdistan region there is a parliament as well, that has passed very good laws or very lenient laws when it comes to outside investment and there have been a lot of good and positive laws passed to protect the rights of women. I think this has made the Kurdistan Alliance a list that people see as the defender of the rights of women and minorities.

### Representing the voices of the oppressed

For me, I like to think that I represent the voices of the oppressed more than anything else. During a time for example in Baghdad the Christians were being threatened and they were deported from their areas. Right now we have two members of parliament who are Christians. I sat down with them and they were not saying anything about this and I said, "You know we need to do something about it." And they said, "Well, you know how it is..." And I said, "Look, I am going to talk about it. I am going to raise it. We are going to ask for protection for them and so on." So it was one of the things I did and because my name is Tanya people thought

that I was Christian. So it took me a while to explain to my colleagues that I am not a Christian but that they are an oppressed people and since we represent all Iraqis we must protect the rights of all Iraqis. It was difficult for others to understand how I can take such a step. But again, for me personally I have not limited myself to just talking about the Kurdish people's issues or even women's issues. But, like I said, women's issues are always my number one priority. But again, just anybody who needs help, we will definitely stand up for them.

### On inclusivity

I think in Iraq one of the things we must think about is that there are minorities and the best way to be inclusive to all, whether they be women or ethnic or other minorities, is to be accepting of one another. I think it is one of the things we have been working on as well with other colleagues of mine and some who are ministers to try to put that into the curriculum, the accepting of others and this multi-cultural, multi-linguistic, multi... you know. And to this day I always get this "Oh, it doesn't matter, we are all Iraqis." And yes I am Iraqi but I like to keep my Kurdish heritage, my Kurdish culture...



## Syada Greiss

### Egypt



**Chamber**  
Egyptian People's Assembly

**Affiliation**  
National Democratic Party

**Entered Parliament**  
2004

My name is Syada Greiss. I belong to the National Democratic Party, which is the majority party in our Parliament, and I joined that party because it is the President's party and I am active in the women's committee of that party. I am an appointed member of the Egyptian People's Assembly, which is the lower house. I was appointed in 2004 at the beginning of a new parliamentary cycle. Very few women or Copts – the Christian minority in Egypt – won seats in the Parliament. In our Parliament, the President has the right to appoint ten members to the house. The house includes 444 seats plus ten additional seats that are reserved for the President to appoint. I was one of those appointees.

Women did not do very well in the elections that year (I think that probably it was one of the worst years in the history of women running), and Copts as well. So, of the President's ten appointments, five were women, as well five members, both men and women, who were Coptic Christian. This was a very obvious way of addressing the non-representation of minority groups and of women. Before my appointment, I was active in civil society. I did a lot of volunteer work in non-governmental organizations in Egypt, and I am also a development practitioner in the sense that I have worked in development cooperation programmes and have been exposed to a lot of the issues related to gender inequality and human rights so this has given me a great interest in the work of what parliaments need to do to be able to address some of those issues.

of political parties based on religious differences. In Egypt, with the majority of the country being Muslim, we could estimate that at least 10 to 15 percent of the population is Coptic Christian, but we do not have a special party and it is not even constitutional to be able to do so. We have 23 different parties [in Egypt]. But they do not all have seats in Parliament. There are three other parties [in addition to the National Democratic Party] in our Parliament, but they are very, very weak. The other party – well, they are not really an official party because, as I said, our Constitution does not allow it – is the Muslim Brotherhood. They sit in our Parliament, they hold 88 seats and they represent that group but they are called "independents," because constitutionally they cannot call themselves the Muslim Brotherhood. However, everybody knows who they are!

#### On the representation of religious minorities in Egypt

In Egypt we all speak Arabic except maybe for the Nubians who represent a minority in Egypt and have their own language. Both Christians and Muslims speak the Arabic language so we have one identity really; there is no difference in any of them. Very few Copts now speak the Coptic language; it is almost extinct and is only used in churches for religious ceremonies, etc. The political parties [in Egypt] are not divided across any lines related to minority groups. First of all, our Constitution does not allow the establishing

#### On the role of Christians in politics

In Egypt the electorate is generally very passive about entering politics. So, it is not a matter of [just] Christians excluding themselves. It is a passive attitude on the part of many people concerning what the outcomes of elections are going to be. But I would say, if I am talking about politics, the fact that only one - I mean I cannot tell you even how many Christians ran for elections - but the outcome was only one person, one Christian candidate and that was our Minister of Finance who is an international figure, Yusuf Boutros-Ghali, won in the elections. So only one was elected, and the rest were appointed. →

## Syada Greiss

Egypt

→ My experience, of course, in Parliament has been very interesting. I consider myself privileged in many respects, as an appointee of the President and the fact that I have come from the background that I have. I am a member of the Environment and Health Committee and the Foreign Relations Committee. If I tell you that in our Parliament there are only eight women who have seats in the Parliament so, of course, we are a minority. Personally, if I talk about my experience, I feel that [women] are marginalized ... the environment is not at all friendly towards women in general. We do not have a committee for women and children's affairs, which is something I have been calling for. When we talk about the rights of women, and women gaining extra seats, we have a very good spokeswoman for us, and that is the wife of the President. Last year we had a constitutional amendment which included a clause that guarantees a minimum number of seats for women. So, in our next parliamentary elections, we will have at least 68 seats for women. So we hope to see a change. Any discrimination [I have faced] I do not think it was related to my being a Christian. It is about being female but being a Christian, no. On the contrary, I have always been introduced as being a Coptic Christian and I have never been discriminated against in any way because of that. In the population generally of course there is discrimination. It used to be that you had ... a marginalization of Christians in the civil service, in posts that are government-related in academic life, professional life. However, because Christians are fairly well educated, they have fared

very well as entrepreneurs, businessmen and they have succeeded well there, and there were no government restrictions around that...

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### On political agendas

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We [Coptic Christians] do not have a legislative agenda as such. However, we have been calling, for example, for constitutional amendments. The second clause declares that we are a democratic country and that all of its citizens are equal, there is no discrimination based on race, colour, creed, that type of thing. However, the second clause says that Egypt is a Muslim country and Islamic Sharia... is the basis for some of our legislation. There is definitely a lack of clarity around that. So now a lot of Copts are asking the Government whether we need our own civil laws, because Islamic Sharia – up to this point not in marriage contracts because marriage contracts are always done in churches and the Muslims with the mosques, so each religious group has its own way of doing it. However, when it comes to certain inheritance laws or other measures, then it is the application of Sharia law, even to the Christians. So a lot of people are now asking if we need to have our own law.

So there is an agenda but I have not yet seen a very strong group of Christians coming out and saying, "This is our agenda: 1, 2, 3." There has been a lot of pressure coming from the West. Many of the Coptic Christians who have emigrated to the States and who have gone to Australia and other parts of the world, have been acting as pressure groups for change in Egypt. Some of it, in my opinion, is not very positive. Some of it backfires on those who are in Egypt.

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### On caucuses or political groups

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I think that minority groups should organize around their own agendas and use appropriate and legal





channels to bring forth their requests in our society, so that any of their grievances could be addressed in the appropriate channels, but creating groups ... Already we have incidents occurring and we hate to see increased violence based on religious intolerance. I always think that violence is the worst means of resolving any of those issues. We need to sit together and discuss, and people who think clearly about it can sit and see how we can come together to an understanding of what are the common objectives.

[But caucuses and political parties based on religion] are always going to be unconstitutional. You can have a women's caucus, that's fine. But I do not see that it is very healthy or positive to have caucuses for minority groups in the current environment that we have. I would rather build on the fact that we are all citizens of that same country, that we have the same rights and responsibilities, that diversity is very healthy for our society. And build a society where tolerance and acceptance of this diversity is enriching and it is good. Differences are good; you cannot have everybody being the same. This is how I like to see it...

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### On finding allies for minority issues

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It is still a challenge. We are still very few [in number]. You need a critical mass around an issue. If you don't have a caucus or don't have a group of people who work on a specific issue...

We have a committee on human rights but it does not really deal [specifically] with minority rights. With other parliamentarians we have a national council of human rights and we have representation. One of our Christian members is a member of that council and we go through certain channels that are available within our country through which we are able to claim certain rights for the Christian minority. We also have groups of Copts who come together. We have civil society organizations that are maybe called Christian or Muslim and that is



With the majority of the country being Muslim, we could estimate that at least 10 to 15 percent of the population is Coptic Christian, but we do not have a special party and it is not even constitutional to be able to do so.

allowed, so you could belong to one of those, then request or claim through official channels certain demands, review of legislation, that kind of thing. So there are channels available and there are lots of people who write about being citizens of the country, that this is a right, access to certain positions, certain demands should be granted.

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### On constituency work

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I have taken on the poor as my constituency. I work in a community. I did my civil society work in a slum area of Cairo, which is a community of garbage collectors. Garbage collectors, many, many years ago, at least 30 years ago or more, were predominantly Coptic Christians who emigrated from Upper Egypt and settled in Cairo, in the outskirts of the city and just lived in miserable conditions. An NGO was established, several NGOs, to address some of the problems related to this group of people. We have done a lot of work with them. Our association is open to anyone; we do training for empowering women, we do a lot of activities around recycling of waste. We are open to Christians and Muslims; we have both on our board. For me, that is really my constituency, I would say, to address issues related to the poor. The other area is the empowerment of women, of course, which is an area I have a lot of interest in.

# Hone Harawira

## New Zealand



Chamber	Affiliation	Entered Parliament
House of Peoples' Representatives	Maori Party	2005

My name is Hone Harawira. I'm a member of the Maori Party. I am a Member of Parliament for one of the seven dedicated Maori seats that are set-aside specifically for the indigenous community. I came into parliament in 2005, and stood again in 2008. I won my seat, so I'm still there. The Maori Party is the first independent Maori political party. There have been Maori in parliament since the 1900s [but] they have all been members of one of the mainstream parties. We are the first to be a Maori-only political party. There are only five of us from the Maori Party in Parliament. But because we all won Maori-only seats, it means the only people who can vote for us, and therefore the only people to whom we are accountable, are also Maori. The Maori are 15% of the population. We are a serious part of the population and we are starting to become very strong in our voice for political, economic and social change.

### On the establishment of the Maori Party

The Maori Party has been around five years. The Maori Party is a step towards realising the dream of the Treaty of Waitangi, and being a true Maori voice, because before there was never a true Maori voice. There was always Labour's voice, the left-wing voice, or a National's voice, a conservative voice. So the Maoris in those parties were only able to reflect the will of their leadership. We have no obligations to these parties, or to these people. We are voted in only by Maori, so our total accountability is to our people.

The Treaty of Waitangi was signed in 1840. We believe that the treaty established essentially a number of things: Part one, the right of the British Crown to govern in our country, to establish a parliament, a government, etc. But part two guaranteed us – although Pakeha [non-Maori] say it didn't – our sovereignty over our lands, our forests, our fisheries and our other treasures. And with pre-emptive sale to the Crown, we couldn't sell it to anybody else except the Crown. We think that that essentially established a partnership regime. The government doesn't agree, so we are constantly fighting to raise Maori status, that's why being a member of parliament is not simply enough. I would like to see two parliaments in my country. A Maori parliament and a Pakeha [non-Maori] parliament, where both of them have equal

standing under the Treaty and the principles of the Treaty govern them. Unfortunately, we once had 69 million acres [of land], and now we've got 3 million left. And we have suffered the classic degeneration of all indigenous peoples in colonial societies. But that Treaty is something that we fight to uphold and have done so ever since 1840. And that gives us the strength to keep fighting, to keep raising the issues.

### On bringing an activist agenda into Parliament

I like to tell people that I have been arrested on more than 30 charges in my life. All of them political, for land rights, and for anti-racism issues... or for Maori rights issues. And I've been involved in the Maori rights movement, as one of its key activists, for the last 30 years. So I actually class myself as an activist. I'm employed as a politician, but my heart still beats like an activist, and I want to get out of parliament before that fire dies. I don't want to that fire to die. Because I think the struggle for Maori rights requires there to be a strong force outside of parliament as well as inside of parliament.

We [the Maori Party representatives] came into parliament in 2005, but on the Opposition Benches. When we were re-elected in 2008, we made an arrangement with the Liberal Government. And the protest march that took me into parliament was against the Foreshore and Seabed Act. When



the government said, “you Maori have no rights to the foreshore and seabed, we own it all”; we [Maori] marched against it because we were so angry. Well, this year, we organised a national consultation and the report that came back to government was that the Foreshore and Seabed Act should be thrown out. That’s what brought us into Parliament and we’re glad that in 2010, that act will be thrown out. So that’s the first thing. The second thing is, by Christmas this year, we will have adopted a national Maori flag. The same way the Aboriginals, for example, have their own flag; we will finally have our own flag as well.

And I have just been successful, for the first time in the history of this country, in bringing a formal inquiry into the impact of the tobacco companies on the health of Maori people. We’ve never done that before, so I’m looking forward to that. That starts in February 2010. So again, going after companies that quite frankly have been going after, killing, indigenous people for far too long.

And the last, but not the least – probably the biggest of the lot – we have a treaty signed back in 1840 [the Treaty of Waitangi], which, we think, suggested a shared governance regime between Maori and non-Maori in our country. So we’ve just initiated a constitutional review, and our aim is to make the Treaty of Waitangi central to the new constitution of our country. So those are things that we’ve been able to get started. We’ve only been in the position to do anything for just under a year [since the agreement with the Government].

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### On Maori representation in other parties

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There are 21 Maori in parliament altogether, but only five of us truly reflect the will of the Maori people. That’s us – the Maori Party. In terms of indigenous representation, the experience of having the mainstream parties include Maoris in their party has not worked. I’ve seen some very good people, some who have spoken very strongly

I’ve seen some very good people, some who have spoken very strongly on Maori issues, who had to clamp down, been told to shut up.



on Maori issues, who had to clamp down, been told to shut up. And it’s why I believe a Maori Party is the right way to go – and I’m not saying the Maori Party is the best party in the world either. We have a long way to go as a party – but I think it’s the right way to go.

And dedicated indigenous seats in parliament, voted for only by indigenous people, so that when people come into that parliament they feel the freedom that comes only from representing your own. And, in fact, other Maori tell us all the time that they would dearly love to speak up for the things that we stand for and vote for the things that we vote for, but they can’t. They have to toe the party line.

We try to work together. We often find that we get to a point, though, when we’re trying to push Maori issues, and we find that they’ll say, “Oh, my party wouldn’t go with it.” For example, when Labour passed the Foreshore and Seabed Act, and took unto themselves the whole of the foreshore and seabed – basically stole it, because the courts said that government didn’t own it – all the Maoris in Labor voted with the government. That’s what I mean, they are more bound to the will of their party than the will of their people.

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### On the parliamentary culture

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On the very first day I was in parliament, when every member was there, all 121 of us, we were all sitting there, waiting for the Speaker of the House to come in. And it went really, really quiet, and I



## Hone Harawira

### New Zealand

- felt that something was wrong, so I stood up and welcomed everybody in Maori, and then I sat down again. Everybody was looking at me – really, really strange. Parliamentary Services came to see me to talk to me about it a few weeks later to tell me that Parliament had never been opened in Maori before. Well - I'm glad I did it, because as indigenous people, we shouldn't just submit to the protocols of

parliament. We should aim to try and change parliament so that it reflects the nature of our country, which is [both] Maori and Pakeha [non-Maori].

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#### On legislation to protect Maori rights

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There's no single piece of legislation dedicated to the protection of Maori rights. There are a number of acts... and a number of procedures that we can invoke, and there are the courts that we can appeal to and there is the Waitangi Tribunal that oversees claims to land rights. [But] the only way to protect Maori rights is to include the Treaty [of Waitangi] in legislation. It's been included in a number of pieces of legislation, but it doesn't go far enough... And most agencies tend to downplay the treaty. That's why I say we want to take the treaty out of legislation and lift it above [to the constitutional level], so it becomes an umbrella for all legislation.

Land is a big issue. We're currently going through a number of what's called Treaty settlements – breaches of the Treaty. The government agreed, twenty or thirty years ago, to review some of those issues and return some of the land to various tribes. And the return of that land has been the basis for considerable economic development by those tribes. So that's been a positive aspect. Although, in truth, no tribe has been successful in getting back more than 3% of the value of their claim. Land will always be a big issue for all indigenous people. I think sometimes we have become a little too European and we have almost come to view land as a commodity, like others do, which is a very bad way to see the world. If you see yourself as a child of the land, it changes your view completely. That was historically our view and it's a view we try to hold steadfastly to. So land is a big issue.

And language is a big issue. Because within the language, there's everything. You cannot truly understand your history unless you can understand it in the language by which it was handed down, generation to generation.



# Mazie Hirono

## United States



**Chamber**  
House of Representatives

**Affiliation**  
Democrat

**Entered Parliament**  
2006

My name is Mazie Hirono and I am just starting my second term in the US House of Representatives but this is my 25th year in elected office. I represent the State of Hawaii and I held legislative office there as well as being Lieutenant Governor of the State for eight years. [In the House of Representatives], I serve on the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee which is the largest committee in the House, with 75 members I think. I also serve on Education and Labour, two really critical committees to Hawaii.

In Hawaii, there is no majority race in the racial mix, so there is no race that has over 50 per cent. That is probably one of the reasons that there is less obvious racial tension in Hawaii. It is there, but it is a lot more subtle [than on the mainland]. I think that the racial make-up is changing; it used to be that the largest racial group was Japanese but it no longer is. The largest racial group in Hawaii is now the Caucasians... Basically, Caucasians are the largest group [in the state] with maybe about 27 percent, somewhere in that region. Then there come the Japanese with about 22 percent, and then the Filipinos with about 17 percent. [Native] Hawaiians constitute maybe about 11 percent.

### On entering public service

My personal background has everything to do with why I got into public service. I am an immigrant; I was born in Japan. I was born right after the Second World War. We did not have running water in the house so it was a very rural upbringing. My mother fled an abusive marriage to start a new life for herself and her children. So she was a single parent. She [showed] tremendous courage in leaving Japan, a country where women were not given very much support during that period. That had everything to do with my wanting to give back to a country that provided me with opportunities that I never would have had in Japan. I truly believe that one person can make a difference... no matter what kind of job you have or your station in life. I just picked a very public way to do that.

I feel a sense of identity and a desire to articulate and push for certain minority issues that I think might otherwise not get the support that they deserve.



I turned to politics because of my experience in the anti-war movement. Although I was not one of its leaders, it was the first time that I had ever questioned my Government.... When I went to college I began to question and I think that one of the most important lessons one can learn is to begin to question what goes on and maybe you can do something about it. During that experience... we would get together and talk about how we could continue our activism and engagement. A pretty large group of us decided that you cannot just be protesting and holding signs. You have to be in a decision-making arena. One of the leaders of the anti-Vietnam movement in Hawaii asked me to chair his campaign for [State House of Representatives]. I had never done political things before and that was my first experience – running a campaign.

### On the importance of a minority caucus

In Congress we have a caucus called the Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus (CAPAC) – I am a member and generally it is the Asian Pacific Americans who are members. We [also] have other members who represent large segments of Asian



## Mazie Hirono

### United States



There is no question that when you are a minority, either racially or by gender, that means that you have different kinds of experiences than the majority.

- Pacific Americans in their districts. There is also the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) and then there is the Hispanic Caucus. These three caucuses have come together as a tri-caucus that represents... about 170 members of Congress. There are certain issues that we deal with as a tri-caucus and then there are certain issues that CAPAC, of which I am an active member, focuses on. These tend to focus on minority issues, of course. Education, health care, those are two that we have focused on as a tri-caucus and we will put together conferences. There is a whole range of things that we do together.

I would say that any time a group gets together and behaves in a decent cohesive way in a political arena, then you become a lot more effective... It is not as though you have a caucus and therefore you are just going to... it's not a "my way or the highway" kind of thing. It is part of the dynamic to compromise and do all of that. But at least [with a caucus you] have an agenda, you have bills, and you can talk about something in a really disciplined cohesive way.

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#### On being an effective voice for minority issues

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Generally, politics everywhere throughout the world is a male-dominated endeavour. I knew that I would be in the minority [as a woman]. And in Hawaii we have a really good racial mix but in Congress I am definitely part of a [racial] minority. There are only five Asian Americans in the House of

Representatives. So there are five of us out of 435. On the other hand, I think the fact that I had been engaged in politics for so many years before I got elected to Congress really helped me in terms of how I was going to be effective in Congress.

But clearly, as I said, I feel a sense of identity and a desire to articulate and push for certain minority issues that I think might otherwise not get the support that they deserve. For example, one of the issues that I am pushing for is political recognition of native Hawaiians. There are some 400,000 native Hawaiians throughout the country, most of them in Hawaii but they have not yet, as an indigenous people, attained the political recognition that Alaskan natives and American Indians have. That is an issue that CAPAC and I have introduced.

One of the big issues that CAPAC pushes for, as an example, is giving the appropriate level of support for Second World War Filipino veterans. We pushed to give them the benefits that they have been denied for decades, since the Second World War. CAPAC particularly took that on as an issue and it took this long, it was only this Congress that enabled them to get it at least a one-time payment. It is not what I would have wanted; I would have wanted them to get the full range of benefits that I thought they were entitled to, but even a one-time payment was a long time coming and CAPAC really pushed for that.

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#### On descriptive representation

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Getting back to racial politics, minority politics in Hawaii, as I said, even though there is no overt racism as such – it is much more subtle – but of course when you are a member of a particular racial background, you do try to reach out to those folks because they can probably relate to your experiences. I do not call it racism so much as that you can identify with someone of your race, it is a shortcut to understanding some common experiences.



There is no question that when you are a minority, either racially or by gender, that means that you have different kinds of experiences than the majority. It reflects itself in the issues that we care about. Sure, we need to represent our districts so that is part of it, but at the same time I think that some of the priorities and particular issues that we push would be informed by our experiences as a minority. I think that the Filipino veterans – that was a big thing for us and I think that, if we had not pushed for it, it might not have gotten to the point where people paid attention to it.

As a Member of Congress, I represent everyone in my district – 600,000 people of every party, every

ethnic background – but I do feel a special sense of connection and a responsibility and sensitivity to minority representation.

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#### On getting minority issues onto the agenda

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We have regular meetings with the leadership of the House – the majority leader, the caucus, the whip – we have regular meetings with them either as a separate caucus or all together we will meet with the chairs of the Committees. We want to have those meetings be much more of an institutionalized kind of approach so that leadership will be able to hear our concerns.



## Mazie Hirono

### United States



That is where my experience in politics did stand me in good stead ... I did not want to wait around for seniority to get anything done. I knew that building relationships with my colleagues, the chairs that I do not even serve with, that is one of the things I like to do and it is also a way for them to get to know me and that I can bring up particular issues with them. A lot of this takes place on the floor while we are voting, in between votes; I find that I use those times to get to know my colleagues.

- But definitely as individuals you can articulate your perspective because, for example, I am part of a group of people that our majority leader has put together to bounce ideas and have that communication. So I do that with [House Majority Leader] Steny Hoyer and then the Speaker, Nancy Pelosi. For the first time she instituted regular breakfasts. The freshmen members (I was a freshman in 2006) would meet with her every week. So I have been able to bring to that breakfast meeting issues such as asking my colleagues to support native Hawaiian rights.

So there are different opportunities, some are more formal [than others]. A lot of the work that happens in Congress is, I think, on an informal basis where you develop relationships and that is really, in my view, part of the art of politics and part of being effective in a setting like that. That is where my experience in politics did stand me in good stead... I did not want to wait around for seniority to get anything done. I knew that building relationships with my colleagues, the chairs that I do not even serve with, that is one of the things I like to do and it is also a way for them to get to know me and that I can bring up particular issues with them. A lot of this takes place on the floor while we are voting, in between votes; I find that I use those times to get to know my colleagues.

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#### On combating racism

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When I ran for Governor – in Hawaii we do sign-holding where you are out in the road and you are waving to people as a way to get yourself out there – someone yelled out: “Come back where you came from!” There is that kind of thing, and there are some subtle things that might happen. And people might have notions about an Asian woman, especially on the mainland where it is basically a Caucasian culture... [There are] much more overtly racist experiences on the mainland. This is something that I recognize so I do try to help Asians who run for office nationally because I think that they face particular challenges in terms of identity, politics and attitudes.

I believe in our country, as much as I think that America is a great place, there is, not very far below the surface, racism in our country. The great thing that happened was the election of Barack Obama, I never thought that in my lifetime we would elect an African American. That gave me such hope for our country but there is still a lot of fear of what I call racism, if you scratch the surface I think that it is there and there is always that potential for it to awaken and be very destructive in our country. I am glad that, as a minority person, I am in Congress where maybe we can respond to these kinds of issues in a way that is productive and helpful.

## Hakki Keskin

### Germany



**Chamber**  
Bundestag

**Affiliation**  
Left Party

**Entered Parliament**  
2005

My name is Hakki Keskin. I have worked for many years on immigration policies in Germany [in a variety of capacities]. I am from the Left Party in the German Parliament. I work in the European Union Commission and the National Defence Commission.

I was the first non-German member of the State Parliament in the city of Hamburg, I was there for four years from 1993 to 1997. When I left there I returned to my original profession as a university teacher and now I have been in the German Parliament for about three and a half years. I am a German national, but it caused quite a lot of attention in the public at the time when I made it into the State Parliament because I was the first person not born in Germany, with what we call a “migration background.” It was quite an honour for me.

I was born in Turkey and I lived in Turkey until after my A-levels [high school diploma], when I came to Germany to study political science. For decades now I have been dealing with questions of migration, both in terms of my professional background and with my work in a number of civil society organizations. I have been working as a university professor for 28 years and I have been teaching politics and, in particular, migration policies. For ten years, I have been the chairman of the Turkish Community of Germany and I have written a book entitled German-Turkish Perspectives, which deals with questions of migration and integration in our society.

#### On the situation of minorities and immigrants in Germany

Like the United States, Germany is a destination country for immigrants. About 20 percent of the overall population in Germany has what we call a “migration background.” Currently, about 7 million people in Germany live in the country without a German passport. They are non-naturalized foreigners. The largest share of those is the Turkish

community, people from Turkey. There are 3 million Turkish people living in Germany out of which 800,000 have been naturalized and have a German passport. Other large groups include people from the former Yugoslavia, also people from Italy, Spain, Portugal and Greece... Also, a trend that we have seen in the last couple of years is a number of immigrants from the former Soviet Union, from Russia and all the other successor republics.

#### On the major concerns of migrants in Germany

Migrants in Germany have never really had an easy time so there are quite a number of difficulties that persist. For many years, the conservative parties in Germany have not really understood or have not been ready to see the country as a destination for immigrants and have been reluctant to grant the same rights to immigrants as they would to Germans. There are still many problems related to the process of naturalization because of that political resistance. There is still quite a problem with naturalization because German laws require that before you get German citizenship you must denounce or return your original nationality. There are a number of foreigners who do not want to do that, who want to retain their original passport. But German law does not recognize dual citizenship. Therefore, we are facing a situation where there are 7 million foreigners living in Germany, some of whom have lived there for decades, were born and raised there, but officially they are classed as foreigners because they cannot become naturalized German citizens and get a German passport [without renouncing their citizenship of origin]. That also means that they are not enjoying the same rights as Germans – suffrage, etc.



## Hakki Keskin

### Germany



I must say that there is absolutely no discrimination at the working level in parliament. I can say that, actually very vehemently, there are equal opportunities across the board.

- Another example is education and training. Unemployment is a major issue that concerns migrants in particular; migrants have higher unemployment vis-à-vis the majority population and therefore we need more education targeted towards them. The same is true for apprenticeships, etc. Generally, the education problem also entails the questions of culture and language. We believe that migrant cultures or languages have to become part of the mainstream; they need to be included in national curricula.

#### On the election of minorities to Parliament

In the Bundestag, which is the Federal Parliament, there are eight minority representatives. We are five people who have a Turkish background. There is one Iranian, or Iranian-born. One Indian. In total, there are at least 8 out of 615. And as Germany is a Federal State, in the individual states, in the local or regional parliaments there are many more non-Germans.

The eight parliamentarians with migration backgrounds come from several parties... Three are from my party, from the Left Party, and these are also representing Turkey or Turkish-born. The SDP, Social Democrats, also has them and the Green Party. Not any yet from... the Conservative Party, and to my surprise none within the FDP, which is the Liberal Party. This is within the Bundestag, the Federal Parliament. Further down at the state level, there are indeed CDU [Conservative] members of

parliament with a migrant background in Berlin and Hamburg.

There are no special seats or set-aside scheme at all [for minorities] in the Bundestag. If you want to be elected into parliament, you have to be a recognized figure and you need to be someone who is active in a given political party. It is also true that people encourage potential candidates to stand for parliament because they hope that this opens up new voter constituents for them and this is also why the Left Party has asked me to go into parliament for them because they hoped, and I think not without justification, that this would open up new potential voter communities, which has happened in my case.

As a migrant, particularly one from Turkey, it is true that I particularly consider the interests of my constituents. People expect me to stand for the stronger interests, should I say, in the Turkish minority populations. But at the same time, I am a representative of Germany. I am a German MP and therefore I represent all the people of the Federal Republic of Germany.

#### Cross-party collaboration among minority parliamentarians

Among the members of the Bundestag from migration backgrounds, the eight of us, some are from the Left, the SDP and the Green Party. Indeed, there is cross-party contact but party politics always prevails and there is no formal caucus. It would be difficult to institute a formal group working across parties. On the working level, we do of course have contact. One example of cross-party cooperation is that we are moving forward on an initiative, on legislation on the granting of nationality and respect for dual citizenship. We assembled a coalition of Green, FDP, Left and Social Democrats. This was comprised of minority members of the legislature and allies in their parties. But that coalition fell apart, or that cross-party work fell apart, because



some of the parties were allied with, or governing in, the formal coalition with the Conservatives who were opposed to the legislation.

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### On committee assignments and parliamentary culture

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I must say that there is absolutely no discrimination at the working level in parliament. I can say that, actually very vehemently, there are equal opportunities across the board. It is true, however, that on some matters there are experts that are particularly qualified within the political parties as policy spokespersons both for integration policy and migration policy. All parties have those and they specifically address questions related to integration, refugees and asylum seekers.

When it comes to migrants – actually it's not migrants, it is Germans with a migration background – and work in committees, wherever there is a vacancy they can apply and fill that position. Obviously, if you take the Foreign Affairs Committee, a very popular one where there is hardly ever a vacancy, there is a lot of competition to get in there,



but as soon as there are any options anybody can apply, including Germans with a migration background. So once again we are treated definitely as equals.

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### On measures that would bring about a more inclusive society

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First, there is a need for equal rights and equal opportunities starting with reform of citizenship laws to make it possible for citizens to naturalize and become German citizens. This would mean eliminating the forced renunciation of previous nationality, or respect for dual citizenship.

Second, there needs to be recognition and support for foreign language and culture. It must be seen as enriching for the democracy not as a threat. We reject assimilation; we want integration,

Third, there needs to be funding for education and training for people from minority or migrant backgrounds because without education no one can move up. And in the political sphere, [without education] one cannot influence policy... Migrant children in particular are facing problems and having difficulty accessing education. An extension of this is a lack of opportunity in terms of employment. The unemployment rate among migrants is twice the rate [of that of] people of German descent.

Fourth, it is necessary to have anti-discrimination laws and a proactive legislation that prohibits discrimination. Such legislation should not just provide recourse through the police or the courts, because the official procedure for reporting is discriminatory. It is long and drawn out and expensive and doesn't work. Instead the anti-discrimination law should have a mechanism such as an ombudsperson, somebody who is a spokesperson-advocate. The burden of proof should shift from the individual proving discrimination to the institution, whether that be the employer or school, etc., proving that it did not discriminate.

## Elizabeth León

### Peru



**Chamber**  
Congress

**Affiliation**  
Union for Peru

**Entered Parliament**  
2006

[As a parliamentarian from the majority community, I believe that] for the first time there is now a notable presence of [indigenous legislators] in Peru. While there was visible representation in the last legislature, now there is more significant representation. For example, [indigenous parliamentarians' right to] use their own language and an interpreter is a step forward in terms of tolerance and multi-cultural expression in our country. Where the majority speaks Spanish, the majority rules. Nevertheless, there has been tolerance, and representatives who want to speak in their own language can do so, and that is a big step forward.

#### On improvements to indigenous representation in parliament

In terms of social representation, I think Parliament still has to make a greater effort to show that, as a body that represents the population, it can also reflect the country's multicultural nature. Right now, we face difficulties in resolving issues related to Amazonian peoples. There is an invitation, sometimes a demand, to work for the representation of Amazonian people. Although we are all Peruvian, we have different views and different worldviews. So there are sometimes misunderstandings if we cannot establish a dialogue that allows the Amazonian people to express their views when it comes to the legislative or executive decisions affecting their resources. We need to make a greater effort. Some people have raised the possibility of including representation of Amazonian peoples [in the national legislature], as has been done by local and regional governments. That effort has not been made at the national level.

#### On the need for quotas or reserved seats

The parties should [seek candidates from among indigenous peoples] internally... That is the problem. If we were not suffering from a crisis of institutions, we would not need either a quota law or reserved seats for Andean or Amazonian people. But... we do not have solid party structures. We have to rebuild a different kind of institution at

the local, regional and national level. National parties are not represented all the way down to the local level, for example. If there were a structure, an organized political party apparatus, issues being addressed locally and regionally would be reflected at the national level. But there is a [disconnect between levels], so we have to look for temporary mechanisms, such as the quota law or reserved seats. I think we have to make the effort and find a way, because Parliament must reflect the population. It should also reflect the country's multicultural nature. Peru has various nationalities. We have to show that we are a single Peruvian nation, expressed in all its diversity. Parliament must reflect that. Those efforts must come from the Constitution Committee. There have been some initiatives in the Committee on Andean, Amazonian and Afro-Peruvian People, of which I am President. We are not the committee that makes the rules, but those initiatives may go to the Constitution Committee.

#### On the relationship between majority and indigenous legislators

We are making progress, but it is slow... There are moments of understanding and tolerance, but also moments of confrontation, precisely because we cannot capture our different ways of seeing our relationship. For example, there are different approaches and very different political positions, from deep-rooted nationalism to a very dominant liberalism. We have to start building consensus.



Some committees, such as the Committee on Andean, Amazonian and Afro-Peruvian People, do reflect the country's diversity and allow legislators to propose their own initiatives. In this committee, 26 legislative initiatives have been presented for modifications to the Original Peoples Law, and a working group has been formed to analyze the issue. Interestingly, all the legislators on that committee represent the Andean world. Meanwhile, Parliament has allowed legislators who are interested in these issues to become part of broader structures, not just national but also international. There is a [regional] movement of indigenous Latin American parliamentarians. Although it is not part of the formal structure of Congress, arrangements have been made for legislators to form this committee.

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### On the challenge of consensus-building

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There [has been] a shift from initial tolerance to confrontation, which reached its most critical point last year, with the suspension of seven parliamentarians. It should be noted, however, that while this group claimed it was being suspended for "defending the Amazon," what was at issue were two different views of the development of that region and the inability to reach consensus, which led to polarization. It's not that everyone else was against the Amazon; rather, there were two different visions.

The Ethics Committee also received two or three complaints about alleged verbal aggression by indigenous representatives against majority representatives, expressed in an indigenous language. These cases clearly reflected different forms of expression. These cases were open to interpretation. Quechua is basically a language of oral tradition, with great symbolism. I speak Quechua, I know the language, and a word used by one colleague could be interpreted in different ways. When it was officially translated, in the representative's presentation to Congress, one meaning was a verbal slur,



but ultimately the word meant "white," referring to a person. So there are sometimes difficulties in interpretation of comments made in an indigenous language.

We are currently trying to build consensus, because we need to find common ground, common goals as Peruvians, for addressing the problems we face in areas such as climate change, prior consultation, natural resources, the forestry law, and land use and zoning.

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### On the role of the Committee on Andean, Amazonian and Afro-Peruvian Peoples

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In the last three years, the Committee produced 158 draft measures, but only three have become laws. Our goal now is to see how to handle all the material we have produced. There are 48 draft measures awaiting debate in the full Congress, and we have prioritized 14 of them, at a minimum, as issues that should be considered in this legislature. I hope this moves forward, because in one month we have had three measures approved by the full Congress. One is an important multicultural gesture by Parlia-



## Elizabeth León

Peru

→ ment – we have changed the name of 12 October from the “*Día de la Raza*” or “Day of the Americas,” which celebrated the arrival of the Spaniards (the Conquest), to the “Day of Original Peoples and Intercultural Dialogue.” Regional governments and the Education Ministry are to coordinate multiple celebrations around the country.

It seems like a simple matter, but the political underpinning is important – it constitutes tacit recognition that we are multicultural. The original version called for it to be called the “Day of Resistance of Original Peoples.” That was changed to the “Day of Vindication,” and ultimately we agreed on the name I mentioned. It was difficult.

### On barriers that indigenous representatives face in Parliament

I think there are great challenges. The committees need to open up a lot more, because rural, indigenous and Andean societies also have a need for intercultural issues to be mainstreamed in all the committees and in all legislation. What happens is that [indigenous legislators] have chosen mainly to deal with two or three issues that affect them: energy and mines, agriculture and the environment. These are the areas where I have seen the greatest participation. But because intercultural concerns cut across all issues, they should be of interest to all Peruvians. There are also difficulties there...



There are other patterns, other codes of conduct, between the population and [indigenous] representatives, which sometimes conflict with the legal, formal norms that we have in Parliament.

You need a lot of practice to negotiate agendas or priority issues, and sometimes certain minority views get lost, which can create a backlash.

I think we have to modify the rules, because we would need at least 26 representatives to have one [indigenous person] on each committee, and that’s not the solution. It’s a challenge to see how we will include the issue, whether through representation, which is one request, or through rules, so the committees are required to mainstream certain issues in each of the measures they consider, whether or not there are indigenous legislators on the committee.

### On the manner in which indigenous representatives relate to their constituents

There are other patterns, other codes, even of conduct, between the population and [indigenous] representatives, which sometimes conflict with the legal, formal norms that we have in Parliament. We [the majority population] need to make a greater effort to understand them. [Indigenous representatives] have a very clear idea of what they mean by representation. They don’t make decisions without consulting their organizations, and that makes processes slower. As representatives, they have to bear the cost of representation, both in Parliament and in dialogue with leaders of organizations.

Right now, we are considering the issue of prior consultation, and that assumes that we are talking with the representatives of original peoples, as well as the legislators who represent those people. I also think we have reached a point [in Peru] where consensus is crucial, and that means finding new approaches to relationships, beginning at the lowest (local or regional) levels of government... We need to make an effort to better understand that our country is multicultural and multilingual. To understand this multicultural representation in Parliament, we [all] need greater expertise in the parliamentary system itself... to avoid misunderstandings.

## Margaret Mensah-Williams

### Namibia



**Chamber**  
National Council

**Affiliation**  
South-West African  
People's Organization

**Entered Parliament**  
1999

My name is Margaret Mensah-Williams and I am in the National Council, which is the upper house, in the Republic of Namibia. I am in my second six-year mandate. We are elected from constituencies. We have a constituency base. In the National Assembly [lower house], they are on a party list system. But with us, we all belong to constituencies. I am the Vice-Chairperson, which is the deputy speaker in the [upper] house. I have been there for 11 years now. I was the first woman to be elected into a decision-making position in parliament. I was elected by my peers [to this leadership role].

My father and mother were both from different backgrounds. My father was from a Ghanaian background and he was black and my mother was mixed. So people would always look at them differently and, if my father was with us, [they] would ask, "Whose children are these?" But luckily for me, because I grew up in such an environment, colour doesn't exist for me, all people are just equal... I am a teacher by profession. Then I left teaching and joined the civil society movement, and it was from there that I moved over [to Parliament]. But my passion for politics and the rights of people started years back, when we had an oppressive system in Namibia, the apartheid system.

#### On coming from a minority background

There are other minority tribes, four in total. You get the bigger minorities, the second biggest after the Ovambos are the Hereros, then the Kavangos, the Namas, Damarans and then the mixed people, called the "coloureds" or whatever, who are very few. I am the only coloured who is in there [in Parliament].

Coming from a background where I am a minority, it was not very easy. It is like you are good enough to do the work but you are not good enough to occupy the position, because you are not from the right background. The Constitution of the Republic of Namibia makes us all equals. However, inequalities will exist.

For example, very recently, I had a public fight with one of our high commissioners who is a member of my party. He was saying that on World AIDS Day, he had a fight with the youth. He comes from the majority tribe in the country. So, in his [view], they have ownership, decision-making [authority] and more power. [The majority] should have more access, more positions, etc. And... the youth leader is not from that majority tribe... He was saying the youth are newcomers and they suffer from "political AIDS." They have the contagious virus of political AIDS. I found it very offensive. And this was World AIDS Day... So he was stigmatizing [them] and we are [supposed to be] fighting against stigmatization. So [he was] actually saying that everything that is bad has AIDS. So if you feel that the youth is bad, they have "political AIDS."

I took him on, on the issue. I didn't take it lightly... At a public meeting, he took me on, saying that: (1) I am a newcomer in the party, a newcomer because of skin colour, where I come from, my background, and (2) that I came from the DTA [Democratic Turnhalle Alliance], which is the party that most mixed [race] people belong to. So he took it for granted - I never belonged to that party, but he assumed. And to me that was an insult, and I told him it was a racist remark. I said, "You assume that because I come from a mixed background. And you assume that I am a newcomer to the party because you think that the majority tribe are the ones who own [everything]. But I have news for you..." So, that's what I am trying to say. I am speaking out.



## Margaret Mensah-Williams

### Namibia



I think that, through my diversity, I actually influence others positively ... It's a pleasure to show [people] that, if I can make it, then you can make it too.

→ I am very cognizant of where I come from. I am cognizant of the fact that the tribe I come from, the mixed tribe, not many of them belong to the ruling party. So you feel like an outcast when you join the ruling party... and you have betrayed [the mixed people]. And then when you are here, and [some of the majority tribe] feel that you are not worthy enough to be there. There are wonderful people also, but there are those [who discriminate]... So it influences you, and if you are scared or you feel that, "I am a minority, maybe I shouldn't speak up too much, maybe I will not get re-elected." This is because they are trying to intimidate you. But I have to tell you that I'm a leader, a wife of my husband, and a mother of my children. There is nobody that will intimidate me. And I am as much a proper member [of the party] as the next person; there is no member superior to another one. So I am using my influence every day, to push and to call for inclusiveness, so it is now becoming a language that is used more often, but if I was a weak person I would have been gone long ago.

#### On being the first female Vice-Chairperson

When I first joined [Parliament], it was a very male-dominated institution and I didn't feel very welcome. There were only two women in the upper house at the time. Also, my predecessor was still there and the majority of males supported him. There was this one very gender-sensitive and outspoken male, who knew of my contributions to the party [the South-West African People's Organi-

zation, SWAPO] and he was courageous enough to nominate me, and to stand for the principle of gender equality and that women are the equals of men. Obviously, it was not taken very well amongst his colleagues, and [my nomination for Vice-Chairperson] had to go to the politburo of the party, to be vetted.

I get triggered by things like that, so I told them: (1) I don't get intimidated, (2) I don't compromise my principles, and (3) I am going to challenge the status quo. That made me so determined and I knew that, in order for me to get in there, there was one important thing: that I would have to know the rules of the House. And that would be my weapon, because if I went in there without the proper knowledge, I would not [be a good model for] all the women who have to follow me, and for women and children in general. So I had to make sure that I set an example that women can be equal leaders just like men, and that women can be strong leaders.

I went to the staff members and started greeting them... and there was one gentleman who said, "Here are the rules," and added, "By the way do you know that you have to preside tomorrow?" I said "No," and he said, "You have to preside." So I said "Fine". I said, "Give me the rules and tell me what the procedures are." So he did and that whole night I did not sleep. I was standing in front of the mirror, practising. I studied the rules by heart. I equipped myself but I also told myself that I have to be in authority, and show them that women can also take positions, and I can exercise and exert my authority... So the next day I went there and was called to preside, and all of them were smiling because they thought "A-ha! Now she is going to fail." I went up there with a smile and I sat and presided and everything went smoothly because I knew the rules. I could see them physically sitting there, virtually with their mouths hanging open. When I came and sat back down, they looked at me and the man sitting next to me asked me. "How did you know how to do that?" I just responded, "Women are born leaders." He kept quiet and he



would never have known what I had been through the previous night.

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### On the inclusion of the San

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I think that in countries where minorities are suffering, it is the responsibility of parliamentarians to ensure that they are included. And for us it's good because the Constitution makes provision for that. And because parliamentarians have an oversight function, it's our responsibility [to ensure] that all the commitments are [implemented].

For us, our priority was the San, because the San are the [smallest indigenous people] in the country. They are like the Bushmen, the most marginal. The Deputy Prime Minister is a woman and she has a special project [for them]. We are now so proud, because those kids never used to go to school, they had a closed circle where they married each other and the girls were married at 13 and so on. So the government made inroads through having specific projects concentrating on those minorities. They now have schools. They had special problems so they brought them electricity, they built them schools and taught them about why education is important. Some of them have now finished high school, secondary school, and are going to university. The First President appointed [a San] in Parliament, and there is another one that will come to our House now because somebody is going to be replaced.

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### On the importance of role models

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I think that, through my diversity, I actually influence others positively ... You see, in the beginning, they would call me a white woman in their languages. They would say the "makua," meaning "the white woman." They would say, "Who is this white woman?" Now they see me as "our comrade" and the majority tribe women will come and kiss me and so on. In my community also, I think that seeing

me [in Parliament], seeing me speaking up openly and not fearing, and seeing that I [have been] there for so long – I think they thought, "She'll be gone, her mouth is too big" – a lot of them enrolled into the party, and they are more active.

It's a pleasure to show [people] that, if I can make it, then you can make it too. There is also another lady in Parliament; she is the Deputy Minister of Gender, and she comes from the Ovahimba, which is a real minority. She couldn't speak English when the President appointed her but she has learned. She went for English classes and she is such a good inspiration also.

I would say the environment in Namibia is very conducive for the minorities to take their rightful place and the government has really shown their commitment, and one example is the Bushmen or the San community and the government is trying to reach out. They have acknowledged all the traditional authorities. There is policy reconciliation and the government adheres to that, the ruling party adheres to that. But there are people, even from the whites, who really try their best and will contribute and I am very proud of that. We have better opportunities, our children have better opportunities because bursaries are given and hospitals and things are upgraded, so they start to see. We have to do more to [help] them to fully participate as citizens. And I think that's the only thing that needs a lot of work.



## Sophia Abdi Noor

### Kenya



**Chamber**  
National Assembly

**Affiliation**  
Orange Democratic Movement

**Entered Parliament**  
2007

My name is Sophia Abdi Noor. I am a Member of Parliament in the Kenyan National Assembly. I come from the northern part of Kenya, the North Eastern Province. I am the Chair of the Parliamentary Committee on Labour and Social Welfare. I am also a member of the Parliamentary Select Committee on Constitutional Review and a member of the Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee. I am a Vice-Chair of the Parliamentary Caucus for Women. I am also the Deputy Secretary General of the Parliamentary Pastoralists' Community, and the Secretary General of the Muslim Parliamentary Group.

I am a member of the Orange Democratic Movement. I am a member of [the movement's] National Executive Council. I am also Secretary to the Council of Humanitarian Affairs of my party. I was not elected to Parliament; my party nominated me. My party had six slots and they nominated three men and three women. [Each] of us who were nominated had a background of doing a lot of work for our political parties.

I belong to one of the minority groups in Kenya. There are very many groups in Kenya that fall under the bracket of minority. There are, I think, three [main tribes] in the country. The rest of us in the country belong to the minority category. When we talk about tribal lines, then I fall into a minority group. I am part of the Kenyan Somali group.

#### On religion and culture

I am a pastoralist. I come from a community that [favours boys over girls] and, at a tender age, I was discriminated [against]. Because of that, I felt I needed to stand up for the rights of women in particular and girls, so that people do not fall into the circumstances that I fell into. Because of that, I felt it was right for me to champion the rights of the voiceless, the rights of the minority and the rights of women and children.

My religion, Islam, is very good and there is a specific empowerment Surah<sup>1</sup> in the Koran, but

<sup>1</sup> A "Surah" is a chapter of the Koran.

when you come to my culture it is different. My culture and my religion are intertwined and people do not know the difference. The religion came in a foreign language, in Arabic, and most [members] of the community back home do not know Arabic. Whatever they see practised, then they believe that is the religion. So there is a lot of misinterpretation, misunderstanding of the religion and, in the process, the women and children suffer.

The Somali community has its own traditions. It is a patriarchal tradition. It is a culture that is really governed by the men. We have a traditional governance system and under this system judgements are made. Like with the girl child and women – they are not allowed to own property. [A woman] is not supposed to inherit in the Somali culture. There is female genital mutilation, which is conducted at a very tender age, when you cannot defend yourself. And women are married and divorced at will, without proper negotiations. There are forced marriages. There is also, for example, if you are a woman and you do not give birth to a baby boy, then you are not worth being a wife [to that man], so you will be divorced. This is what happened to my mum.

#### On discrimination

There was [also] systematic marginalization and discrimination by the Government. Within society at our own level, we had our own culture and



tradition that discriminated against us. [And] at the national level and at the government level, we were systematically denied our right to education, our right to survival, our right to food, our right to shelter – all of this was denied. Our region was closed. It was specified in the Constitution and, as a country, we [had to have a] pass to [travel to] the other parts of the country.

There were a lot of historical injustices that took place in the region where I come from. There were historical massacres that took place in the region. In 1980, there was a terrible massacre in Garissa, which is the headquarters of the North Eastern Province where I come from. In 1984, there was the famous massacre that took place in Wajir that is known as the Wagalla massacre. And in 1987, there was the Malka Mari massacre. We were under emergency law from the day Kenya took independence until 1997, when that emergency law was lifted.

Those are the broad issues that made me run for office. There are two parallel things: there are the cultural things within my community and the larger, broader things from my Government. This is what made me contest for a political seat in 1997. I have been in politics since 1997, and I have been in office now for two years.

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#### On minorities' access to parliament

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I don't think that people from minority groups have the same access to political party information or support, or [are] given a platform that you can run for. There are different systems because politics is all about the numbers. This is what unfortunately happens back home. What we talk about is how many numbers can this political party gain and how many numbers can you have and, when you talk in numbers, then the majority wins. It is the



## Sophia Abdi Noor

### Kenya

- majority that takes all. This is what happens to our political party. Even if you have the brains, even if you are qualified, even if you have all sorts of ideas that can improve your country, if you are from the minority then unfortunately no political party will accept you.

[Kenya] does not have any quota system. We do not have reserved seats for the minorities and, unfortunately, even if we put that in our system, I believe personally that it [would] be misused by the majority ... I believe that we should have a specific model for the minorities, that we should say that "this constituency is specifically meant for a [particular] geographic area"... You do not give the minorities a bigger share than the majority. But you look at their numbers, you look at where they live, you look at the conditions under which they live, you look at the poverty index, you look at the geographical features of the area, you look at the communications systems. These are [the] things that you need to consider for reserved seats for the minorities.

#### On the role of a caucus

I cannot give you the figure [off the top] of my head, but we are approximately 40 members [who represent minority communities] out of 222 [total MPs]. These 40 came together because they [each] believe they are a minority. We meet, we discuss. Some of us call ourselves indigenous, others call themselves minority, and others call themselves

pastoralists. So we come together as a caucus group. We discuss our issues and we see how best we can engage as a block with the rest of our friends in Parliament. Sometimes if one of us has a very good network and good relationship with the majority – because some of us are very good in negotiating, in lobbying and in talking to our friends and reaching out to them – sometimes our ideas can sail through, but not always.

#### On barriers and "unwritten rules" in Parliament

There are many difficulties that minorities encounter, even when elected. Say, for example, when we go for parliamentary committees... If you are [a member] of a minority group you cannot get a slot in one of those prestigious committees. Then, if you are a minority – and you know we have a mixed system in our Government – you will not be able to be appointed a Minister or Assistant Minister if you come from one of those minorities. Because Ministers are appointed on the basis of the... strength they will bring to their political party. How will they influence? What numbers will they bring to the table? That is how Ministers are appointed. So if you are coming from a minority it is very rare for you to be appointed as a Minister.

[These] are unwritten rules. They are not written somewhere but they are clearly demonstrated. There are blocs, like there are three majority groups who feel they are the majority, that do not like being penetrated. They believe if you come on



Within society at our own level, we had our own culture and tradition that discriminated against us. [And] at the national level and at the government level, we were systematically denied our right to education, our right to survival, our right to food, our right to shelter – all of this was denied ... Those are the broad issues that made me run for office.



board and you sit with them, and you hear what they are saying, then you will be able to take their strategies... to use against them. So they will not invite you to their meetings. They will always hide where they are meeting, what their agendas are, what they are going to discuss... They want to make the ends meet but they do not want to share those ideas and strategies with the minorities.

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### **On the size of constituencies and needed reforms**

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Currently, we are [drawing] boundary demarcation[s] in our country. We are redesigning the constituencies and administrative units of our country. The majority are saying we must create a constituency based on “one man one vote.” [But] where I come from is the third largest province in the country. The constituency I come from, which is called Ijara, has 12,600 square kilometres and is represented by only one Member of Parliament. And the Central Province, where the majority [tribe] comes from, has 32 members of parliament for 13,000 square kilometres. So, we are saying “one kilometre, one vote.”

This is not my political party [saying this], this is the region where I come from now, across political parties. So we are saying – this is now the minority – that we want one kilometre, one vote. Meaning that we must take the land mass into consideration when we are looking into the application of geographical demarcation of our constituency. So what we are saying is, [look at] another constituency, which is called Wajir South, and which has 27,000 square kilometres, [more than] twice the size of Central Province, and it has only one Member of Parliament. So those are some unfair things that, as people of the minority communities, we are talking about and we are saying we must get equal share of representation in parliament, whether [or not] our numbers are small. What matters is the kind of land mass, the geographical features we have, our communication systems, and our own community



interests. These are some of the legislative agendas that are completely different between the majority and the minority.

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### **On advancing minority rights**

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Fortunately enough, we have changed our standing orders and our standing orders now have accepted and accommodated some reforms. The first reform parliament has made is that we have established a Committee of Equal Opportunities. This Committee is now looking into all historical injustices that took place in the country. They are going round to [collect] documentation. Once they bring their recommendations to the Parliament and Parliament adopts those recommendations, we will have a new committee called the Implementation Committee. This Committee will follow up issues and hold the Government accountable for all the social injustices that took place in the country... These are things that I am dreaming of so much. [I hope] that they will happen before I retire from politics. And [I hope] they will [be] very successful and that we see the fruits of these historical injustices that took place in our country. And [we will] see that everybody as a human being has a right and is supposed to be given equal chances, equal space to participate in any matters of national importance in our country – and globally.

# Donald H. Oliver

## Canada



**Chamber**  
Senate

**Affiliation**  
Conservative Party

**Entered Parliament**  
1990

**My name is Don Oliver. I am a senator from Canada. I was the first black man ever to be summoned to the Senate of Canada. That was in 1990.**

I am a lawyer by trade and was the legal counsel of the Conservative Party for 25 years. I became an expert in election law and served as counsel for six general elections in Canada. I have devoted the last 20 years or more of my life to being a human rights activist trying to promote equality in Canada.

I said in my maiden speech to the Senate that in carrying out my duties I would not forget where I came from or the people that I represent, particularly what we in Canada call the visible minorities.<sup>2</sup>

Today, I am considered the Canadian champion of visible minorities and I am known for speaking out very bluntly and very frankly about the results of my research, what I found, what my experiences are, and what I have learned. I speak at universities, to school groups, to bureaucratic groups around the world about issues of pluralism, diversity, equality and human rights. I think my speeches and my participation in seminars and in panel discussions give people necessary facts and information. I also hope they inspire.

### On identifying barriers

When I was first summoned to the Senate, I wanted to get a picture of how represented visible minorities were in the private and public sectors. I would often go to large companies and notice that their board of directors was often entirely white. I would say to them: "The mosaic of Canada is not all white, so why can't your board reflect this mosaic?" And I would go to the public service that employs more than 210,000 people and notice that there were no

people of colour in the senior executive ranks. A similar question would arise.

The fact that barriers exist was apparent. Yet, I didn't have any concrete proof. To get it, I set up a committee, raised \$500,000, and with the Conference Board of Canada, a think tank, produced the largest study ever done in Canada on barriers to the advancement of visible minorities. The study found that not only were there systemic barriers against visible minorities, but there was also racism preventing the advancement of people of colour in both the public and the private sectors.

### On inclusion in political parties

One of the obstacles to the inclusion of visible minorities in the political process is the way that our political parties are organized. They are very much like boards of directors of corporations. There is a small clique in the search committee who are all white and who say: "Wouldn't it be nice if we could find someone to replace Jim, who is leaving, who is like us, who goes to our church, who plays golf at our course and who shares our values and looks like us".

This kind of systemic and entrenched value system is one of the things that make it impossible for a visible minority to get in; no matter how hard they work, licking stamps, handing out envelopes, doing the legwork, trying to get inside a party. The Liberal Party, the New Democratic Party or the Conservative Party, they are still controlled by their élites and their old party cliques.

<sup>2</sup> The Canadian Employment Equity Act defines visible minorities as "persons, other than Aboriginal peoples, who are non-Caucasian in race or non-white in colour".



I don't like quotas, so I am not going to recommend any kind of a quota system. Parties, themselves, need to look inside and realize that diversity is the way of the future; that if we don't get on the bandwagon soon, we are going to lose. I think that the political parties that are going to be the most successful in the Western world in the future are those that represent the mosaic nature of their societies. The exclusive parties that do not represent the mass voters will soon find that they are voted out of power.

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### On the legislative process

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The legislative process allows for a debate on issues of diversity, equality and human rights in several fora. In Canada, the Senate has virtually the same power as the House of Commons. A bill is introduced in the House of Commons, goes to first, second and third reading, then is sent to the Senate where it goes to first, second and third reading. After second reading, a bill is sent to committee where it is examined. It is then sent back to the chamber for an open debate. It is in committee and in the chamber that issues important to visible minorities can be discussed. Any person in the House of Commons or Senate can also bring in a private member's bill before the Parliament of Canada.

In the Senate of Canada, we have a Human Rights Committee and so issues of employment equity, human rights, justice, fairness, and fair accommodation, all of those matters, are taken up in that committee. I am not on it anymore but I used to be. The Committee is currently looking at areas for the advancement of visible minorities in the public service: Is there discrimination? Is there racism? What do we recommend about it? Most visible minorities on both sides of the chamber, the Liberal opposition and Conservative government sides, they want to serve on the Human Rights Committee. I can't think of any committee that visible minorities are excluded from. We also have an Aboriginal Committee in the Senate.

Some countries have minority caucuses that try to influence legislation. In Canada, we do not have enough visible minority members in Parliament – there are not enough black people and nor are there enough Chinese or Korean or Indian people. Secondly, partisanship is a major factor both in the House of Commons and in the Senate preventing there being good work done across party lines.

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### On initiatives to promote minorities

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Outside of parliament, I am also working on several different initiatives aimed at strengthening visible minorities, specifically the black community. There are many communities in Canada that, I think, know how to support one another. They promote their own members believing that maybe if one



## Donald H. Oliver

### Canada

→ succeeds, maybe two can, three can. In the black community, we have never had the ability to support one another. My late half-brother, who was a major human rights activist and a Baptist minister, used to say that we are like crabs in a barrel – as soon as one gets near the top, the others pull him down.

I am working to overcome this. I am creating for the first time in Canadian history a national black business organization that will support black entrepreneurs in developing their own businesses. I think that if we could have successful black entrepreneurs across Canada who can serve on a board with the desire to help one another, we would get some provincial and federal government support. I would like to see that, as a way of building and strengthening the black community, so that we will no longer be like crabs in a barrel.

Another initiative I was involved in was the creation of the Black Cultural Centre in Nova Scotia that we built to showcase the excellence that blacks have achieved. The centre provides youth with black role models. They come in, look around and say: “Look, there is hope for me. Maybe I should stay in school, maybe I should stay away from drugs, maybe I would like to be a doctor”.

Society needs visible minorities in senior positions which others can look up to and respect. When I was a young practicing lawyer, I would send the pleading over to another lawyer and it would come back with the note: “Send this over to the spook” or “Send this over to the nigger”. This type of discrimination occurred until those people realized that I was more than a nigger, more than a spook, and that I was also an honourable lawyer.

One such role model is Lincoln Alexander, a black man appointed by Prime Minister Mulroney to become the Queen’s representative in Ontario, Canada’s largest province. His appointment made an incredible statement. People said: “Oh my God, a black man representing us.” And yet, he

was elegant, dignified, and he promoted youth education. Today, he is about 85 years of age and still highly revered. If there could be more appointments like this, it would take the fear that white people have of successful blacks, of any black, and suddenly realize, “Oh, they’re not that bad, they are competent, and they can do the job.”

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#### On understanding diversity

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I also think that a sensitivity training course on diversity is something that is really required for all parliamentarians. It is never an easy thing to suggest or do, but once it gets started, people start thinking: “My goodness, I hadn’t thought of that”. I think all parliamentarians need to go through this training. After all, we are the voice of the people. If we are in denial about the reality that surrounds us, how can we properly represent the people?

The Government of Canada has recognized the barriers faced by certain segments in society. It developed a programme aimed at eliminating the barriers preventing four targeted groups – women, visible minorities, aboriginals and people with a disability – from entering government or politics. It has been a good programme for the most part. Women now make up about 50 per cent of the deputy ministers in the government, aboriginals have progressed, and the disabled have progressed. Visible minorities are the only group that has not progressed very much in either the public or private sector. Our biggest challenge remains in getting them into parliament.

Of course, I get very frustrated sometimes that there are not more visible minority voices in parliament, but I love my work as a Senator. A number of people have said to me in the last few years that I have been able to make change, particularly in the Canadian public service. There are huge changes taking place there and it in the private sector, but not only because of me. I think that I have been a voice that has been heard.

## María Sumire

### Peru



**Chamber**  
Congress

**Affiliation**  
Union for Peru

**Entered Parliament**  
2006

My name is María Sumire. I was elected in 2006, for a term that ends in 2011. Honestly, I had never thought of coming to Congress, much less being a congresswoman. I did not have political aspirations. I am from a community called Collachapi, which is in the district of Layo, in the province of Canas, in the Cusco region. I am the daughter of a founding leader of the Association of Campesinos of Cusco, the first movement that my father led. That's why I'm known. I have always worked in my communities.

I am from the Quechua Nation, which asked me to come here and be their spokesperson, since they had no representative. They never have, and many of their demands have never been heard. Initially, I refused. But when it came time to register candidates, they said, "We have to get you into Congress. We're going to talk with a party that is sympathetic to our demands." I asked, "What party is that?" They said, "The nacionalistas." We have always fought for better living conditions [for indigenous people], and I came to Congress with many dreams, filled with hope.

As a Quechua woman, I am on the Indigenous Peoples Committee. I have served on that committee since I took office. I am also on the Energy and Mines Committee, because mining and prospecting affects our communities. And I am on the Health Committee, which has to do with the lives of our communities, of our children.

#### On the exclusion of indigenous people

The Constitution says we are all equal, but that's not really true. Indigenous people, such as the Quechua, the Aymara, and the Amazonian Nation, are excluded from everything. Not just from representation, but also from health policy, from education, from everything. In our country, we live in two different worlds. One is "deep Peru," and the other is official Peru. That's how I see it. We Quechua people live far from the state. For us, the state is another nation. They have never come to our communities to ask how things work. We have even built the schools ourselves.

It goes back to the founding, the Spanish founding, and its elite, which has persisted – their children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren have formed Peru. We were never participants in the founding of this republic. Instead, they took away our best lands so they would be well off, and they sent us off to remote villages, where we developed our ancestors' technology so we could survive.

#### On hostility toward indigenous people in Parliament

The Parliament has always been elite. It has always been run by political parties. We have never had a political party. We have had organizations – organizations such as the Campesino Confederation of Peru, the Agrarian Confederation, organizations from our regions, trade unions and such, but never our own political party. Now, unfortunately... political parties, not social movements, are the ones that participate. Politicians have had their parties, and they are chosen within the parties. It's hereditary; it depends on their name. I say that, because when we [indigenous people] got to Congress, they started to say, "Look what kind of people have come!" They still say, "Look what kind of people have come to Congress!"

[There has been hostility] from the time I was sworn in, when I took the oath in the Quechua language. Taking the oath in Quechua was not just my idea. It was the mandate from my people. The Constitution says people can use their mother tongue, and my mother tongue is Quechua. Why not use my language? I've used it all my life, and we always speak



## María Sumire

### Peru



- Quechua in the communities. Why not use it to take the oath? My brothers and sisters travelled from the communities to the capital to see me sworn in. They made such a sacrifice, [they should be able to understand my oath]. [People] came to whistle at me, to say, “What is this? Make her sit down. She shouldn’t speak.” That didn’t happen to the others.

I can’t say [it is] sufficient, but I do feel support [from my party]. They have always supported us. The party caucus is the only one that stands up for us when they mistreat us. The worst thing is that people say about the party, “What kind of congressional representatives has Ollanta Humala brought here? Congress members who can’t write, who can’t speak.” They even say that about us.

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#### On legislative priorities

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One priority is, for example, the preservation and use of native languages. That has been waiting for

debate in the full Congress since 2006, because it has passed the Andean Peoples Committee, but it hasn’t been approved. It is based on a provision of the Constitution. The Constitution states that Spanish, Quechua, Aymara and other languages are official languages, but we don’t have a framework law... In the draft legislation, I propose that these languages be used in public institutions, that the ethno-linguistic map be respected, and that Quechua, Aymara and the Amazonian languages be recognized nationally in public and private institutions.

It often takes my brothers and sisters weeks and weeks to get into schools, health care institutions or banks. There have been times when my brothers and sisters from the communities have gone to get a loan, and they go around and around. What kind of development are we talking about? What kind of assistance? I also proposed bilingual, intercultural education, using educational material from each area, because the highlands, the Amazon basin and the coast are not the same. This law calls for each region to prepare materials in their own language.

Also, for example, I have a draft law on sexual and reproductive health with an intercultural approach, but they didn’t accept that, either. [And it is] the same with the anti-discrimination law. They [the majority population] didn’t accept the law against discrimination. Domestic workers are not recognized as persons. That also has to do with our people, because those workers are the daughters of our people. They are young women from the communities who migrate to the city, and the only way they can survive is by working in other people’s homes. Otherwise, they would never have been able to finish school or go to the university. So I believe it is important to change that law. The Integral Reparations Plan, which has to do with the political violence, has also met resistance. Various pieces of draft legislation are languishing in Congress.

The same is true of the Elections Law, so there would be parliamentary representation for original



peoples. Women have representation. Now they are saying young people should. And original peoples? If they're not equal to women or young people, then what are they? Aren't they people? I believe it is important that Congress consider them people.

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### **On working with constituents and other minority and indigenous groups**

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I go to the communities and get ideas for legislation. I talk to people about the legislation I am going to submit. They say, "We want legislation about health, education and reparations." I don't do it because a businessman brings it to me and says, "Do this." I bring proposals from the communities.

I go every week, but sometimes, when there is an activity in Congress, I can only stay for the weekend. I am always travelling, and not just to Cusco — sometimes they call me to other parts of the country. They say, "Congresswoman, you are not only the representative from Puno; you represent Peru." For example, I went to Ucayali. They asked me to inform them about the proposed law for conservation and preservation of native languages, because they didn't understand it. It is not just for the Quechua Nation, but also for the Aymara Nation and the Amazonian Nation. They told me they were grateful to have been included, because there are no [indigenous] Amazonian representatives. The mestizos from the Amazon represent other people.

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### **On the need for intercultural dialogue and participation**

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We need to talk. I would propose intercultural dialogue. I can say that for the first time, this discussion about original peoples is happening in Congress. Even though we have been trodden on, we are still alive and we want to be respected. We want them to see us as people, as nations, and recognize that we are part of the Peruvian state. At least we have gotten the issue onto the national agenda. There is

an Intercultural Round Table, which I have led, and which is now part of the Committee on Andean, Amazonian and Afro-Peruvian Peoples, the Environment and Ecology.

Intercultural dialogue among equals. Respect for international and national law and the Constitution, which is not respected. I believe it is important to respect ILO Convention 169 and the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. We need to work on all those things. If other countries can do it, why can't Peru? We have people born in bilingual communities who speak Quechua and Aymara, people from the Amazon, who are capable professionals. But these professionals aren't taken seriously, because of the racism in this country. For example, I am a lawyer, but they don't take me seriously as a lawyer. They look at me and say, "That little Indian woman."

The truth is that I'm waiting for a new generation, because it's impossible with this one. I would propose changes to acknowledge diversity. The Amazonian people, the Quechua Nation, and the Aymara are our brothers and sisters. I believe it is important to recognize that there are other peoples and that they must participate. We need to approve legislation on participation, not just women's participation, but participation by indigenous people.

Even though we have been trodden on, we are still alive and we want to be respected. We want them to see us as people, as nations, and recognize that we are part of the Peruvian state. At least we have gotten the issue onto the national agenda.



# Tholkappian Thirumaavalavan

## India



**Chamber**  
Lok Sabha

**Affiliation**  
Dalit Panthers of India

**Entered Parliament**  
2009

My name is Tholkappian Thirumaavalavan. I am a founding president of my party, the Viduthalai Chiruthaigal Katchi, or in English: “Dalit Panthers of India.” I was elected in May 2009. I am a Member of Parliament (MP) in the Lok Sabha, the lower chamber of parliament. I had already contested two times, in 1999 and 2004, but I wasn’t elected [then]. This time our party allied with the Indian National Congress Alliance. We got two seats out of 40 in Tamil Nadu Puducherry. I am a member of the Committee of Commerce, and a member of the Committee of Social Justice. The Committee of Social Justice deals with Dalits [lower caste people] and other minorities.

I am an [ethnic] Tamil. Tamil is one of the official languages of India. Tamils are a major population community in India, [perhaps] 6 percent of the total Indian population. Basically, I hail from a Dalit [lower caste] family. My parents are coolie workers in the agricultural field. We have no lands. My father was only educated to [the equivalent of eighth grade].

In 1982 I finished my basic graduation, then I entered into post-graduate studies, then I finished my law graduation. In those days, I was very keen on politics, particularly on the Sri Lankan issues. In 1983, many Tamils came to Tamil Nadu as refugees [from Sri Lanka] so the Tamil Nadu people supported the Sri Lankan Tamils and political parties held many demonstrations, rallies and public meetings. When I was a first-year student, I was motivated to enter into politics. From 1983, I entered into Tamil [ethnic] national politics as well as Dalit [caste] politics. I was a first-year student at that time. Many Dalit leaders came and gave orations... I fully dedicated my life to politics.



### On the experience of Dalit people within majority parties

India has religious, linguistic, and caste minorities. There is a dominant [religious] majority: the Hindu people. Dalits are a caste minority. Dalits are in each and every village in India. We can’t even contest in local elections without the support of political parties. We can contest only through the political parties, which are headed by dominant castes. After winning the election, we will be puppets; we cannot exercise our duties and powers.

The caste minorities suffer a lot from caste atrocities. We cannot enter into effective political participation. Although we are members of local assemblies, or our central parliament, we cannot exercise our duty on behalf of Dalits for Dalits. We



have to work for the dominant community. We have to obey the leaders of dominant communities and castes. There are more than 110 [Dalit] members of parliament, [in] the Lok Sabha itself, but no one can talk or work in the House for Dalits, except one or two like me. Because I am independent, I have an independent political party. So, we [the independently affiliated] can work or we can talk, we can discuss the Dalit community in the House. But [still] we cannot gather appropriate time in the House.

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**On parliamentary rules and the challenges of representing a minority**

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First of all, [minorities] have to establish their self-identity in the House. For example, myself, I have to establish my identity and this is very problematic because they allot only two or three minutes in any discussion. Within this, we cannot expose our focus on our subject and our problems. So we cannot discuss the real situations and conditions of the minorities in the House. This is the main problem in the House.

There is no visible discrimination. Being a member of the Lok Sabha, I can get all facilities. But, without the help of our allied parties, we cannot do any major work in the House, like [initiate] Private Member's Bills or any major discussions. If I want to participate in that broad discussion, I need allied party support, otherwise they will not allow it: Being a member of a minority, belonging to my minority community, this is very difficult.

In the Parliament, they should give a lot more time to minority members to discuss minority issues. They give more time to big parties, like Congress and BJP [Bharatiya Janata Party] and the popular leaders. They are often given ten or 15 minutes to discuss the business of the majority but the single independent member and minority members cannot get more time to discuss. I need a change in the allotment of time for discussion. This is very

Dr. Ambedkar said that the minority people [should] elect their representatives only by themselves, not with the majorities. Dalit representatives [should] be elected by the Dalits, not by non-Dalits. This is a so-called separate electorate and separate settlement... for minorities on the basis of population.



important. We have to discuss the marginalized people's issues.

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**On representing other minority groups**

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I am always aware of other minorities, particularly Muslims, Christians, Dalit Christians and women, like this. I used to talk about the other minorities in public meetings and public gatherings. In my first speech, my maiden speech, I discussed about the Dalits, Muslims and Christians, particularly Dalit Christians, and women, and even Sri Lankan Tamils.

Many people used to come and meet me and give their memorandums and problems to discuss in the House. I used to get the issues from other minority people.

You also have to do coordination work. Everyone joined with their political parties. They cannot come out from their fold. Many members from Congress, many members from regional parties and the BJP are afraid to talk with me, [or] the independent members, because if they come to me to talk, the party will take action against them. So they are afraid to have a friendship with me in the House and outside.



## Tholkappian Thirumaavalavan India



→ **On recommended changes**

[Currently], the system is such that all people [in] the constituency can vote for a Dalit representative. All political parties can field candidates. Even the majority community party, the non-Dalit political parties can field a Dalit candidate. All Dalits and non-Dalits can vote for him. But [the candidates] will be [beholden] to the non-Dalits, the majority. They [will be] totally dedicated to the non-Dalits; they cannot act for Dalits without permission.

Now I wish to [recommend] that Dalits and Muslims and women and other minority people [should be able] to elect their representatives by themselves only, not by the majorities. We can talk about

women, particularly Dalit women. There is no reservation for women in the parliamentary system but there is a reservation in local body elections, the local body structure. So there must be a change in the parliament and assembly, a reservation for women.

I would like to quote Dr. Ambedkar's opinion (Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar, lawyer and Dalit leader). He attended a round-table conference in London in 1931 and 1932. In the sessions, the minority sessions, of the conference, Dr. Ambedkar said that the minority people [should] elect their representatives only by themselves, not with the majorities. Dalit representatives [should] be elected by the Dalits, not by non-Dalits. This is a so-called separate electorate and separate settlement... for minorities on the basis of population.

## About the project

# Promoting inclusive parliaments: The representation of minorities and indigenous peoples in parliament

**M**any situations around the world demonstrate that an adequate representation of minorities and indigenous peoples in policy- and decision-making by society is instrumental in breaking the cycle of discrimination and exclusion suffered by members of these groups, and their ensuing disproportionate levels of poverty.

Yet minorities and indigenous peoples often remain excluded from effective participation in decision-making, including at the level of the national parliament. One of the criteria for a democratic parliament is that it should reflect the social diversity of the population. A parliament which is unrepresentative in this sense will leave some social groups and communities feeling disadvantaged in the political process or even excluded altogether, with consequences for the quality of public life or the stability of the political system and society in general.

The Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) are undertaking a project which aims to understand and promote the effective representation of minorities and indigenous peoples in parliament. The objectives of the project are to:

- Increase knowledge of the representation of minorities and indigenous peoples in parliament
- Provide tools for parliaments and other stakeholders to promote inclusive parliaments
- Build capacity to advocate for more inclusive parliaments

The project is funded by the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) for the period 2008-2010. More information is available at [www.ipu.org/minorities-e](http://www.ipu.org/minorities-e) and <http://www.agora-parl.org/node/1061>.

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### Interviews with parliamentarians

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Semi-structured interviews were carried out with 35 parliamentarians between March and November 2009. Most interviewees self-identified as members of a minority or indigenous group, whereas others were selected because of their responsibilities on parliamentary committees dealing with minority or indigenous rights.

Interviews were designed to gather data on (a) the ways in which members of minority and indigenous groups become parliamentarians, (b) the experiences of members of minority and indigenous groups serving in parliaments, (c) the ways in which parliaments include these groups in their work, and (d) how minority/indigenous representatives are able to make an effective and meaningful contribution to parliamentary work.

The 14 interviews in this publication were selected and edited for length and clarity by Elizabeth Powley. Interviews are published with the consent of the parliamentarians concerned.

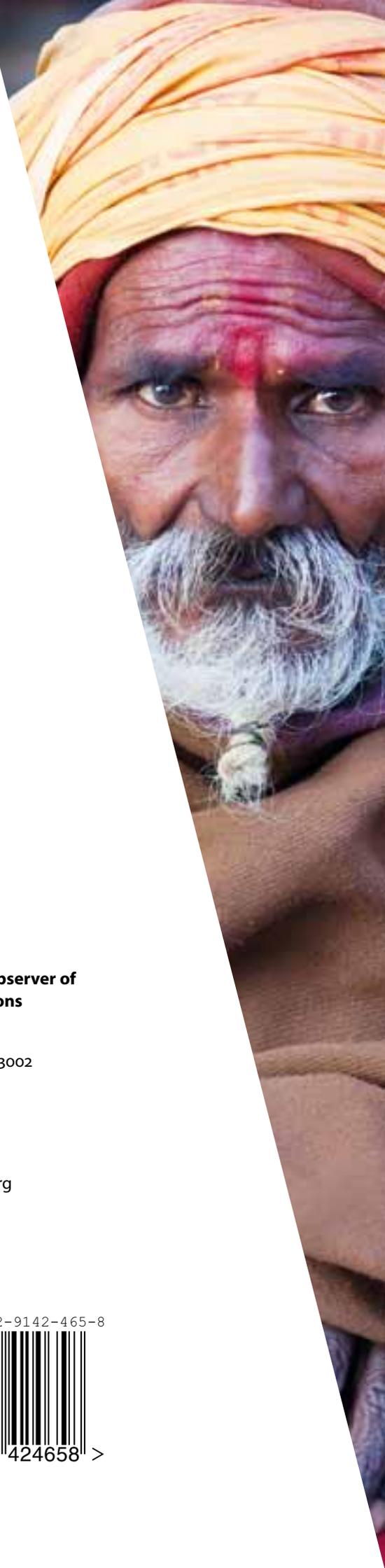
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### **Inter-Parliamentary Union**

The House of Parliaments  
5 chemin du Pommier  
Case postale 330  
CH-1218 Le Grand-Saconnex  
Geneva, Switzerland

Telephone: +41 22 919 41 50  
Fax: +41 22 919 41 60  
E-mail: [postbox@mail.ipu.org](mailto:postbox@mail.ipu.org)

[www.ipu.org](http://www.ipu.org)

### **Office of the Permanent Observer of the IPU to the United Nations**

Inter-Parliamentary Union  
220 East 42nd Street – Suite 3002  
New York, N.Y. 10017  
United States of America

Telephone: +1 212 557 58 80  
Fax: +1 212 557 39 54  
E-mail: [ny-office@mail.ipu.org](mailto:ny-office@mail.ipu.org)



### **United Nations Development Programme**

One United Nations Plaza  
New York, NY 10017, USA

Telephone: +1 (212) 906-5000  
Fax: +1 (212) 906-5001

[www.undp.org](http://www.undp.org)

ISBN 978-92-9142-465-8



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