



# **Parliamentary Meeting on the Occasion of the Sixth International Conference of New or Restored Democracies**

Doha (Qatar), 29 October – 1 November 2006

## **Plan of Action**

We, representatives of parliaments gathered at the Sixth International Conference of New or Restored Democracies in Doha, Qatar, from 29 October to 2 November 2006, having adopted the preceding Declaration affirming the role of parliament as the central institution of democracy, hereby adopt the following Plan of Action. We undertake to encourage our respective parliaments to take the necessary steps to implement the measures contained in this Plan of Action. In so doing, we are cognizant of the fact that for parliaments to play their role effectively in promoting and strengthening democracy, they must ensure that their own processes are in conformity with the universally accepted principles and standards of democracy. This entails working evermore actively towards making our parliaments more representative, transparent, accessible, accountable and effective.

We undertake to encourage our respective parliaments to strive for the following five key characteristics:

### **1. Representative parliaments**

- 1.1. Work towards the establishment and/or strengthening of free and fair electoral processes that ensure equitable representation of all sectors of society, especially groups that are currently under-represented,
- 1.2. Ensure fair and inclusive parliamentary procedures, which give full opportunity to all members, including the opposition/minority parties, women and other marginalized groups to participate effectively in parliament's work; these groups should be equitably represented in the governance structures of the parliament,
- 1.3. Afford adequate protection to all parliamentarians in the performance of their functions, including through the enforcement of a system of immunities and privileges necessary to protect parliament and its members from arbitrariness, both during and following the parliamentary mandate,
- 1.4. Encourage the organization of parliament's business in an impartial and non-partisan manner,
- 1.5. Take special measures, where necessary, to establish structures and processes that in particular promote women's participation in political processes and promote gender equality in society as a whole.

### **2. Transparent parliaments**

- 2.1. Take steps to ensure that journalists and the media in general can report on the work of parliament,
- 2.2. Establish and/or strengthen legislation that provides adequate protection to the media in this regard while encouraging it to perform its functions in a responsible manner that is respectful of the rights of all; take the necessary measures to prevent the media from spreading hate speech and encouraging intolerance; encourage plurality of ownership of and independence of the media,
- 2.3. Guarantee citizens the right to access information held by public bodies, especially through the enactment and implementation of freedom of information legislation,
- 2.4. Adopt appropriate strategies for informing the public about the work of parliament (television, radio, Internet, mobile phones); take special measures to inform young people and stimulate their interest in the work of parliament.
- 2.5. Take all other necessary measures to improve public confidence in parliament as a democratic institution,

- 2.6. Promote the use of information and communications technologies to enhance the effectiveness of parliamentary processes and thereby foster transparency and accountability.

### **3. Accessible parliaments**

- 3.1. Devise appropriate mechanisms for facilitating direct contact between citizens and their representatives (establishment of constituency offices, organization of report-back sessions with constituents, etc.),
- 3.2. Encourage citizens' involvement in the legislative process, for example by publishing draft laws on the parliamentary website and organizing public hearings; encourage the media to give wide publicity to parliamentary business.

### **4. Accountable parliaments**

- 4.1. Adopt and enforce a public code of conduct for parliamentarians.

### **5. Effective parliaments**

At the national level:

- 5.1. Take all necessary steps to assert parliament's independence from the executive. These include an independent budget, staff and information resources, and parliament's control of its own timetable,
- 5.2. Ensure that adequate facilities are made available to all members, including those belonging to opposition/minority parties and women's groups,
- 5.3. Ensure that the various parliamentary committees are properly resourced and have the requisite powers to put questions to and obtain answers from members of the executive.

At the international level:

- 5.4. Oversee the activities of the government in the conduct of its external relations, in strict respect of the respective prerogatives of the executive and the parliament; in this connection, seek information, on a regular basis, from government on its policies and negotiating positions,
- 5.5. Establish a clear legal framework for the involvement of parliament in international affairs,
- 5.6. Encourage the participation of parliamentarians in government delegations to international organizations,
- 5.7. Participate actively in international parliamentary organizations with a view to promoting parliamentary diplomacy in fostering political dialogue for conflict resolution,
- 5.8. Monitor the functioning of international organizations and seek, including through governments, to ensure that the policies and decisions of these bodies are in conformity with democratic principles and standards.

### **6. Follow-up mechanisms**

We propose that the following parliamentary mechanisms be established to follow up on the recommendations contained in the Plan of Action:

- 6.1. The decision-making structures that were responsible for organizing the Parliamentary Meeting should be reconstituted to serve until the Seventh International Conference of New or Restored Democracies as an advisory body

called the Parliamentary Meeting - Democracy Advisory Commission (PM-DAC). The membership of this body should be restructured and broadened to make it more representative and provide it with the necessary expertise to deal with democracy-related matters.

- 6.2. Responsibility for organizing PM-DAC should be entrusted to the Advisory Council of Qatar, the Inter-Parliamentary Union and the Arab Inter-Parliamentary Union, and the convenors of the Parliamentary Meeting of the Sixth ICNRD. The IPU Secretariat could be entrusted with responsibility for serving as the interim Secretariat of the PM-DAC.
- 6.3. The PM-DAC shall:
  - 6.3.1. Provide substantive advice on projects and activities designed to ensure effective follow up to the Parliamentary Meeting and the International Conference of New or Restored Democracies as far as parliaments are concerned,
  - 6.3.2. In recognition of ongoing democratic progress in the Arab/Middle East region, develop special projects to encourage the improvement of systems of parliamentary governance,
  - 6.3.3. Assist in developing a diagnostic tool to help parliaments assess their own practice against the recommendations of the Parliamentary Meeting, and identify areas for improvement,
  - 6.3.4. Advise on and develop projects to encourage the participation of women in political processes in general and ensure gender equality in governance, including in the parliamentary field,
  - 6.3.5. Provide advice on ways and means of ensuring that parliaments are fully representative,
  - 6.3.6. Contribute to the development of internationally recognized standards for good parliamentary governance, in association with international and regional parliamentary associations and the United Nations,
  - 6.3.7. Monitor and report on progress in the implementation by parliaments of the Plan of Action,
  - 6.3.8. Promote synergy between the Parliamentary Meeting and the governmental and civil society components of the International Conference of New or Restored Democracies.
- 6.4. The PM-DAC should be part of the overall follow-up mechanism of the Sixth ICNRD and the host country will be required to take steps to mobilize resources for its functioning and activities; the PM-DAC should, in principle, meet at least twice a year and will be convened by its Chairperson. The first meeting of the PM-DAC will be convened by the IPU.
- 6.5. The Plan of Action of the Parliamentary Meeting should form part of the Plan of Action of the Sixth International Conference of New or Restored Democracies and will be presented to the United Nations General Assembly by the Government of the State of Qatar.