



**Translating international human rights commitments into national realities:
The contribution of parliaments to the work of the United Nations Human Rights Council**

Summary of the two-day conference
By Sen. Koko Pimentel III, Conference Chairman

It is an honor to report to you the highlights of this conference. Lessons learned and knowledge gained during the sessions included the following:

- The issue of human rights and the mechanisms to protect and promote human rights;
- Initiatives undertaken by the UN on this concern which include, among others, a Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted by the UN General Assembly on 10 December 1948, the adoption of a resolution by the General Assembly in 2006 creating the Human Rights Council and the establishment of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) mechanism through which the implementation of human rights obligations and commitments

- of the 193 member-states of the UN are examined every four-and-a-half years; and
- Regional conferences, dialogues and consultations such as our two-day activity have been initiated because none of the documents in the Human Rights Council mentioned the role of parliaments in the UPR.

Our conference, a part of the IPU-OHCHR regional initiatives, gave us the opportunity to explore relevant actions that parliaments should take through the collaboration and with the support of other actors to better promote and manage human rights which should be among the top priorities of parliaments.

It is in this perspective that our discussion focused on five main points, which are: the Universal Periodic Review mechanism and parliamentary contribution to this work; common human rights challenges in the Asia-Pacific region; the promotion of the rights of women; the place of human rights in development and its impact on disadvantaged groups; and strategies for an enhanced parliamentary contribution to the promotion of human rights at the national level.

During our two-day discussion, we agreed on the following basic principles, among others:

- Parliamentarians are the representatives of the people and are directly accountable to the people;
- Parliamentarians have key roles to play in the promotion and protection of human rights;
- Human rights are universal, indivisible and inalienable and are the foundations of life in dignity and worth; and
- While the implementation of human rights is a matter of State actors, all actors of society, including national human rights institutions and civil society have important roles too and that partnerships are key in this process.

We have been introduced to the UPR, a cooperative and intergovernmental process in charge of examining our respect for human rights obligations and commitments to the United Nations.

We learned about three (3) case studies in this conference which illustrated what role the different actors, including parliamentarians, the Executive, human rights institutions and civil society groups, should play during the different steps of the UPR.

We then recommended specific activities that could help parliamentarians strengthen their contribution to the UPR process. These are: capacity building; awareness raising; the creation of parliamentary standing or functional committees as mechanisms to promote the UPR; and the use of UPR itself.

On the capacity building, we adhere to the improvement of the reporting system, maximize the oversight functions of parliamentarians, and make sure that the parliamentarians appropriate reasonable budget for this advocacy.

The Philippines will take the lead in documenting its best practices and share it using the UPR mechanism as a useful guide for other countries.

On awareness raising, the public needs to be aware of the human rights issue through consultation with civil society and coordination between parliament and the executive.

On the Universal Periodic Review, parliamentarians participation must be institutionalized in the national consultation process preparation of the national report as well as in the recommendation and implementation phase.

On the common human rights challenges or situations in the Asia-Pacific region, we learned that these included, among others, migration, environment which referred to transboundary movement of hazardous wastes, pollutions, emerging diseases that impact on the population, and armed conflict within and between States that greatly affect the civilian population, particularly women and children.

Some recommendations were made during the conference. Let me highlight a few:

- treating human rights as a cross-cutting consideration in policy formulation and law-making;
- establishing and maintaining linkages between parliaments and sharing best practices in addressing human rights violations and related issues;
- encouraging inclusive engagements with stakeholders through dialogue and consultation;
- continuing human rights education and conducting public information campaign on laws dealing with human rights;
- creation of national and regional human rights institutions and mechanisms that are independent and have effective human rights promotion and protection mandates; and
- establishing parliamentary committees to oversee the implementation of international treaties and conventions on human rights, including mechanisms set up by the Human Rights Council and other treaty bodies.

To quote, former Senate President of the Philippines and former member of the Committee on Human Rights of the IPU, and my father..... Aquilino Pimentel, Jr., “Good governance has a lot to do with the proper promotion and protection of those rights - which does not automatically follow simply from the enactment of laws. Good men and women as

government officials are needed to faithfully implement those laws...”

After the comprehensive and very informative insights of all our distinguished resource persons, I am confident that the objectives of this conference have been substantially met and complied with. This conference definitely enhanced the awareness among members of parliament present the existence of the Human Rights Council and its Universal Periodic Review (UPR). Notably, this conference marks the commencement of the greater involvement of the members of the parliament in the different reporting stages in the UPR and better coordination with the Human Rights Council. With that, I congratulate all of you for actively participating in this conference. Thank you.