

**ASSOCIATION OF SECRETARIES-GENERAL OF  
PARLIAMENTS**

**THIRD REPORT BY THE PRESIDENT**

**TO THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE  
OF THE  
INTER-PARLIAMENTARY UNION**

**ON THE ACTIVITIES OF THE ASSOCIATION  
FOR 2004-2005**

**GENEVA**

**16 OCTOBER 2005**

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## **Background**

This is my third and final last report I will make as President of the Association of Secretaries-General of Parliaments. I will be resigning from the position during the forthcoming meeting for reasons that I will address later in this report.

## **Brief Description of the ASGP**

The ASGP was formed more than sixty years ago. It is constituted as a consultative body of the IPU. I have described its functions and methods of operation in previous reports.

In this report I would like to concentrate in the functions of assistance to the IPU, when asked to do so, on subjects within the scope of the Association. This has been an increasing activity in the recent past. The Association is formed under the IPU, and in recent times both the IPU secretariat and the ASGP have been alert to ways of maximising the benefits of the synergies of both bodies.

## **Main activities during the year – Meetings**

The ASGP meetings are held in conjunction with the meetings and assemblies of the IPU. Therefore, it meets in Geneva in the northern autumn and during the northern spring at the location for the Assembly and related meetings. As with the IPU, the official languages of the Association are English and French.

First there were the formal meetings –Two formal meetings, in Geneva in October 2004, and in Manila in April 2005. Rather than describe the agenda items of the two scheduled meetings, I will note some particular issues raised. They are as relevant to the IPU as they are to the ASGP. I believe that all secretaries-general are experiencing the impact made on our work by the increasing globalisation of institutions such as parliaments. Of course this is the core business of the IPU - coordinating the international activities of parliaments and maximising the impact of a parliamentary viewpoint on world affairs. The ASGP tries to help parliamentary secretariats participate in the global parliamentary world for the benefit of all parliaments. This of course emphasises some beneficial aspects of globalisation, both in respect of the operations of the IPU and the ASGP. Developed and new democracies learn from each other and learn to understand each other. This process is greatly enriched by the personal contacts made through both the IPU and the ASGP.

There was also an additional meeting in New York in September 2005 at the same time as the Second World Conference of Speakers of Parliaments. The New York meeting paralleled a lunchtime assembly of secretaries-general accompanying their Speakers to the First World

Conference of Speakers in 2000. There was a general belief that the 2005 meeting should follow a firm agenda, and to the maximum extent possible, reflect the themes of the Speakers' Conference. As the ASGP secretariat felt that at least one and a half days before the meeting and one day after would be necessary to support a formal meeting, the decision was made to hold an informal meeting, without normal secretariat support, and for invitations to be issued by the Secretary-General of the IPU and the President of the ASGP. It was generally regarded as being a most successful meeting. A more complete summary of proceedings is attached.

#### *Attention to IPU emphases*

The agenda for the meetings held during the year included a mix of communications delivered by members on matters of parliamentary interest, and thematic considerations. In its consideration of themes, the ASGP continued to seek to include matters of current emphasis by the IPU. In Geneva in September 2004, the general debates were

#### *Financial Control in Parliament:*

- *The relationship between Parliament and the highest state financial bodies*
- *Expertise in Parliament in relation to financial scrutiny of government Expenditure*

(Moderator : Dr. Hafnaoui AMRANI, Algeria) and

#### *The tension between the wish to deal as speedily as possible with passing bills and the need to ensure that they are properly scrutinised*

Proposed by Mr Roger SANDS, Clerk of the House of Commons of United Kingdom, moderator: Mr George Cubie).

At the Manila meeting, the topics for general debates were *Development of Parliamentary Staff* (proposed by me). The ASGP has endorsed an ongoing exercise of the development of a curriculum for parliamentary staff. The topic of the second general debate was *Inter-parliamentary cooperation within geopolitical regions* (proposed and led by Mr Anders FORSBERG, Secretary General of the Riksdagen of Sweden).

#### *USA participation in ASGP meetings*

There was a hope that the Parliamentarian of the House of Representatives of the United States of America, as an ongoing member of ASGP, might attend the New York meeting. This occurred with the lunchtime meeting in 2000. However, the House of Representatives was meeting at the same time as the Second Conference of World Speakers and this was not possible. However, representatives of the National Conference of State Legislatures, based in Washington DC, attended the meeting as observers.

## **IPU/ASGP relationship**

I have explained that the ASGP is a subordinate, constituent part of the IPU, reliant on it for part of its budget, and that the ASGP seeks to complement the IPU. This includes interaction at meetings, from which stems interaction at a more practical level. The practice of Senator Sergio Páez Verdugo, President of the IPU participating in ASGP meetings is becoming a tradition and I hope it turns into a lasting one. It is much appreciated by secretaries general. Another valuable link between the IPU and the ASGP is the formal presentation by Mr Martin Chungong, Director of the Democracy Division of the IPU secretariat, to ASGP meetings. This contact allows secretaries general to gain an understanding of the projects currently supported by the IPU. The Secretary-General of the IPU, Mr Anders Johnsson played a vital role in the New York meeting, and made a major contribution to it.

## ***International cooperation***

### *First Conference of Secretaries-General of West African Parliaments*

In April this year I had the privilege of attending the first meeting of secretaries-general/clerks of West African Parliaments of attending this meeting, representing the IPU secretary-general in my capacity as ASGP President. The meeting was held in Abuja, in the Federal Republic of Nigeria and was an initiative of the Economic Community of West African States with the support of the German Friedrich Ebert Stiftung. I delivered a paper *Towards the Evolution of an Effective Parliamentary Administration in West Africa* (copy attached). The paper was prepared in close consultation with the IPU secretariat, particularly Mr Martin Chungong.

I saw my attendance at the meeting as very important from the point of view of the way that the IPU is viewed in the region. The secretariats of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association had been invited, and that of the European Parliament. However, the only external element was the representation of the IPU secretariat. This did not go unnoticed, and the distance travelled by me as the IPU secretariat representative was mentioned on many occasions. There were also some very practical and positive outcomes from the meeting. A list of decisions and resolutions are included in the website report.

### *Afghanistan*

Also as a result of IPU secretariat/ASGP co-operation, attachments were sought for staff of the provisional secretariat on the National Assembly of Afghanistan. For example, the first visit by a group from the provisional secretariat was planned to the Australian Parliament this month, and the Secretary-General of the National Assembly and a group of staff from the provisional secretariat plan to visit the forthcoming ASGP meetings in Geneva.

### *Capacity-building projects*

I understand that the IPU has a large number of capacity-building projects in parliaments in various parts of the world where past (and sometimes continuing) conflicts have created a particular need for the rapid development of parliamentary expertise. These include projects or plans for projects in Afghanistan, Iraq, Nigeria, Uruguay, Equatorial Guinea, Albania, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. Even this is not an all-inclusive list. Secretaries general have an important role to play in such projects and nurturing the relationship between the IPU and ASGP is essential to successful outcomes of these projects.

### **Administrative issues**

#### *Electronic information*

The ASGP website has been further developed and there has been very positive feedback on new electronic bulletin - Parlezine. This is a less formal on-line presentation of items of interest to parliamentary staff.

Plans are proceeding to have the last twenty years of the Association's journal *Constitutional and Parliamentary Information* back-captured and placed in electronic form on the ASGP website. This will be done in both official languages. When complete, information from the journal will be available in searchable, electronic form.

#### *ASGP staff person working at IPU Headquarters*

The IPU secretariat has continued to provide resources for a parliamentary staff member working as a liaison person between the ASGP and the IPU, at the headquarters here in Geneva. I have reported to you before on this endeavour and there have now been three parliamentary staff members working in this capacity. The future of the position will depend on the needs of the new ASGP President and the willingness of the IPU secretariat to continue providing physical support, but I consider the results have proved the value of the position. The most recent outcome for the IPU is the compilation of a parliamentary 'frequently asked questions' area for the IPU website. Of course there are many excellent glossaries of parliamentary terms which apply to a specific legislature (or group of legislatures in relation to that produced by the national and state legislatures of the United States). When the IPU product is completed, people will be able to go to a common source for a brief explanation of parliamentary and procedural terms which are in use in many parliaments.

### *Financial approach*

There have been a number of changes in the time of my presidency, and I hope that these will continue. Many of the benefits that attached to the office of president have been discontinued. For example, we have eliminated the provision of a vehicle for the president's use and are seeking to minimise secretariat expenses, thus reducing the impact on the host nation.

### **Resignation as President**

I have said I would be resigning as ASGP President at the forthcoming meeting in Geneva. My reasons for this are as follows. Under the rules of the Association I am due to retire as President next April, at the same time as the two Vice Presidents. By resigning in Geneva I will enable the ASGP to avoid a lack of continuity in its leadership. Further, I have actually served the usual three year term because I had a period as acting President before I was elected to the position. Finally, in my view it is desirable to have the election for President in Geneva where there is no host parliament, on "neutral ground" and so that the ASGP Executive Committee's desire that a member not stand for election to the Executive Committee when he or she is the host secretary-general at a conference. Having the election in the "neutral" territory of Geneva also brings the ASGP into line with the practices of the IPU, which is a desirable state of affairs.

### ***Significant contribution of ASGP Executive Committee***

I believe that much has been achieved in the past year, and much of this has been due to the efforts and energy of the ASGP Executive Committee. I extend my personal gratitude, and that of the ASGP, to the hard work invested by the Vice Presidents and members of the Executive Committee in the work of the Association, and to the advancement of parliamentary democracy in their own countries and around the world. Further initiatives will emerge during the forthcoming year, and I look forward to reporting to the IPU Executive Committee on these next year.

### ***Efforts of ASGP Secretariat staff***

The ASGP has been well served over the years by staff from the British and French legislatures performing secretariat duties. These staff performed magnificently again during the past year, handling ASGP secretariat functions in addition to their normal parliamentary duties. I extend my thanks, and the thanks of the ASGP membership, to the Joint Secretaries and their Assistants, for the great contribution they have made again to the functioning of the Association.

***Efforts of IPU secretariat staff***

The IPU secretariat has made great efforts to cooperate with and assist the ASGP. I believe that both groups have achieved benefit in achieving our aims as a result of this cooperation.

***Final comments***

All in all, I believe that the ASGP has had a successful year in promoting its specific aims and ideals, and in co-operating with the IPU wherever this was possible to assist in its endeavours and initiatives. I feel confident that, with a new president, the cooperation that has prevailed will continue in the forthcoming year. I thank you for your interest and support for the ASGP over the three years of my presidency and I wish you success in all your endeavours.

I will be happy to discuss any matter in this report, or any other issue of interest to the IPU Executive Committee, at the time of the oral presentation of this report, or subsequently.